



Editorial Letter for the Sault Area Arts Council Annual Report

Client: Agatha (Dashie) Colbert, SAAC Board Chair

Editor: Laura Skorczeski

Title: SAAC Narrative Annual Report v.1

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Dear Dashie,

It has been such a pleasure reading and working with SAAC's first annual report in 36 years! In this letter you will find my suggestions for moving forward, which correspond to the marginal comments you will find in the document itself. Consider these elements two pieces of the same puzzle—together they will guide you in your revisions.

Introduction

You have provided so much important material in this draft—it is clear that SAAC is made up of a vibrant community of caring, motivated people. The history of SAAC and the plans for its future make for a very compelling story, and I think that telling that story here in your first annual report is appropriate and timely.

You have expressed that your goal for the annual report is to summarize the accomplishments of SAAC and make the organization appealing to the people in the Sault Ste. Marie area—you want people to like SAAC and get excited about what's happening. To achieve that goal, I am suggesting moving from the current format, where sections contain categories of information in bulleted lists, to a more organic narrative, where you tell the story of SAAC's growth in a series of themes that have emerged from your writing and our conversations. I discuss these themes below and in my marginal comments.

In addition to these themes and suggestions for how to restructure the report around them, this letter will touch upon a few additional ways to engage your audience and ensure that the rich history—and exciting future—of SAAC is communicated clearly and effectively. These include adding an early section on the history of SAAC; adding a few quotes or anecdotes from volunteers, artists, or event participants; and making your

report easier to read for a wider audience by considering word, sentence, and paragraph length.

Narrative Themes

While it is important to start the report with a discussion of SAAC's purpose, mission, vision, and values, I think that these can all be rolled into one cohesive narrative section that you could title "Who We Are." So instead of listing these things as separate elements, you could write one paragraph that encompasses the gist of them all. I would encourage you to use simple language here—the wording on the SAAC website is very effective: "The Sault Area Arts Council (SAAC) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote and make the Visual Arts readily accessible to locals and tourists of the Sault Ste. Marie area and the Eastern Upper Peninsula." This combines the mission and vision statements succinctly. Using a similar approach to describe SAAC's values would be effective.

Once you have established "Who We Are," parallels in the story of SAAC can be used to frame the rest of this report—from "Where We Come From" to "Where We Are Going." I suggest adding a second section titled "Where We Come From" that describes how the organization was started in the 1960s by a group of young artists who were looking for an art community; they created a space that included art studios and developed SAAC. This could be where you include information about your volunteers and highlight how essential volunteer power has been to the success of SAAC—volunteers have kept it afloat from the beginning and, more recently, brought it to new heights.

"Where We Are Going" could explain how, at a time when many of those original volunteers began to retire, the interest of younger art-minded folks once again breathed new life into SAAC—once again, people were asking, "Where is the art community in this area?" These people, like the founders, proceeded to develop that community through SAAC. The vision of and desire for an arts community grounded in an art space has spanned generations and is now guiding SAAC into a new building with a reinvigorated mission. I think it's important to introduce that new building—and its role in the wider community through the Cultural Circle—here, early in the report. It is such exciting, important news, and it deserves to be front-page material. I also suggest including the information about your rebranding here as that's a big change.

Structure

Following the three themed sections I have proposed above, I am suggesting several new headings for reorganizing the remaining information in the report. Hopefully this working outline (see below) will allow you to flesh out the report in a natural way. My marginal comments in the report contain specific suggestions as to how to rearrange and break up the existing material under these new thematic headings. Of course, these proposed sections and titles are just suggestions—if you think it makes more sense to include certain information in a different section or title a section something more

specific to or descriptive of your organization, please feel free to make any changes that you see fit.

Existing Sections	Proposed Sections
Purpose, Mission, Vision & Values	Who We Are
Website Development	Where We Come From
Cooperative Planning	Where We Are Going
Gallery Exhibits	Showcasing Local Talent
Special Events	Connecting Artists
Educational Programs	Celebrating the Arts
Membership	Fostering Artists and Teaching Skills
Property Administration	Growing and Changing
Staff & Volunteers	Collaborations
Financials	Managing and Raising Funds
Future Plans	

You may find sub-themes within these new sections. For example, the “Showcasing Local Talent” section, which was previously “Gallery Exhibits,” could further be divided by theme or type of exhibit—such as “Children’s Talent” or “Indigenous Art.” This might be more compelling to the reader than listing the exhibits in chronological order: while listing them by date initially makes sense, your reader is more likely to skim such a list, whereas labeling the various exhibits by type makes it easier for your reader to pinpoint those they may be most interested in.

For each of these sections, I recommend trying to give your reader a sense of what’s going on—so instead of a bulleted list, think of providing summary paragraphs that flow from one to the next. Some details may get left out, but this will create a more pleasant reading experience. To provide the nitty gritty details that some readers may be interested in, such as the number of attendees at events or money raised by specific fundraisers, you could provide a link to a separate document that lists this information. Alternatively, you could create a few basic tables or charts to convey this information at a glance rather than having it bog down the reader in the main text. If you are comfortable with this idea of adding links to the report, you could also consider linking to coverage of SAAC events in local newspapers or to press releases or other documents that SAAC has produced giving more detail about specific events—this would show the impact that SAAC is having on the local community.

Adding Voices

One way to effectively and succinctly express the value of SAAC would be to include the voices of some of your volunteers or program participants. Having an artist describe what it means to them to have their work exhibited or a volunteer explain what working with SAAC means to them would add a compelling example that would keep the audience engaged with the material. These quotes could be short and included as sidebars to the main narrative, which would break up the text and be a quick way for your reader to get the gist of what you are trying to convey in the report. To this end, the quotes should echo the main themes—such as volunteer power, a community of artists, or new growth—and be included near the relevant sections.

Writing Style

One more thing to consider is that your target audience is a wide one with various levels of education. It is a good idea to analyze how readable your report is. One measurement of readability is the Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level, which rates your document at a US school grade level. This means that a score of 10.0 indicates that the average high school sophomore could understand what you have written. When writing for a general audience, you might consider aiming for a Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level around 7.0, considering that over 50% of the US population reads at a sixth-grade level. Your report has a relatively high Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level, with most sections coming in at 10.0 or higher, so some members of your target audience may find portions hard to understand. Using shorter sentences and shorter paragraphs with more headings will help lower the Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level, and explaining things as simply as possible will help your readers understand the points you are making.

Summary

The work that SAAC does is so important, and you want people to know about it—and get involved. Creating an annual report that people want to read is an essential part of introducing SAAC—and its growth and future role in the Cultural Circle of Sault Ste. Marie—to those who may be unaware of its vital role in the community.

By weaving a narrative that follows clearly labeled themes, you will be guiding your reader through the journey SAAC has had over the past 36 years—and showing them a glimpse into the future, where SAAC is established in its custom building surrounded by other community institutions it collaborates with. Making sure your story is written in plain language and including poignant anecdotes will further ensure that the reader understands and is engaged with your story.

It has been a pleasure working with you on this report. We can discuss these recommendations, your next steps, and any questions you may have in our follow-up Zoom conversation. Please let me know if you have any concerns before then.

Warmly,

Laura Skorczeski