



# **CMS Brand Strategy & Graphic Standards Guide**

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) strives to provide our audiences with a consistent communication and brand experience. This document provides guidelines concerning messaging themes and visual identity marks (“logos”) to achieve this goal.

Consistent branding makes CMS initiatives more effective by helping CMS’ audiences understand how to take advantage of CMS programs and how CMS works to improve health care. In doing so, it strengthens each audience’s understanding of CMS’ purpose and, therefore, strengthens the CMS brand.

CMS interacts with different audiences in different ways—providers and other non-consumers who participate in our programs know and recognize CMS as an Agency, while consumers know and trust us through our health care programs. Consumers are grateful for the health care access and security our programs provide. We communicate consistent, accurate, and usable information when, how, and where people need it to take advantage of CMS program benefits and comply with CMS rules.

Both sets of audiences experience CMS and its programs through our messages, information, customer service and visual identity. These guidelines aid in making that experience positive and consistent.

## 2. CMS BRAND ARCHITECTURE

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CMS is part of the larger family of Agencies in the Department of Health and Human Services. Our branding strategy, messages and visual identity are organized in a way that acknowledges our place in the Department and works collaboratively with the DHHS Identity Program.

CMS must be strategic around the positioning and creation of its unique programmatic, organizational, and project-based brands:

- ***Programmatic brands*** are tied to strong independent programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and the Health Insurance Marketplace®. They have a strong direct relationship with customers who directly benefit from the programs. These brands are often used independently of CMS because they are easily recognized and understood by our customers.
- ***Organizational units*** serve CMS and must be tied closely to CMS to strengthen and reinforce the CMS brand. See page 17 for more information on organizational branding guidelines.

- **Temporary brands** mostly represent time-limited initiatives tied to one or more independent programs. An example would be a 4-month paid media campaign with a specific tagline.

This Guide explains the standards for two main parts of the CMS brand—messaging themes and visual identity—as well as providing additional resources to guide other communications activities.

## 3. CMS TONE OF VOICE

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CMS communications should always sound the same. Our language can change to reflect an audience-appropriate level of content (partner, provider, beneficiary, etc.), but our tone of voice (TOV) should be consistent across all media and products and across CMS programs. Users should have the same CMS experience whether they visit our websites, call a toll-free line, get a notice in the mail, see a television commercial, talk to a caseworker or read a CMS publication. The tone of voice should be consistent whether it is CMS speaking, or one of CMS' programs (e.g., Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP, the Health Insurance Marketplace®).

We know that people want CMS to be friendly, helpful, consistent, and sympathetic. We know they value the idea of fairness and accuracy. Our goal is to create a consistent, rewarding experience that encourages commitment to CMS as the official, primary source for program information. More specific guidance is available on the [Office of Communications intranet page](#).

## 4. CMS VISUAL BRANDING

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While some people think of a logo as a brand, it's really just one small part of the overall visual brand. A visual brand takes the experiences and expectation associated with our organization, and expresses them in a nonverbal way through layout, color, typography, and graphic elements.

### ***CMS Identity Guidelines***

These guidelines provide standards related to the CMS identity mark ("logo") and the development and use of organizational unit identity marks. These include Centers, Offices, Regions, groups and divisions.

New brand and visual identity determinations for Agency programs and initiatives are made by the CMS Office of Communication (OC), at the request of CMS business owners. If you believe your program or initiative needs its own distinctive brand, send a request to [Logos@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:Logos@cms.hhs.gov).

### ***About the CMS Identity Mark***

The mark was designed to indicate forward movement and growth. As the Agency expands, the health care programs we oversee become more varied and diverse, and the people impacted or covered by these programs grow with us.

All materials that are newly developed, as well as updated, reprinted, reproduced, or otherwise modified, should use the CMS identity mark, in accordance with the guidelines described in this document. The Office of Communications will not provide files or approve the use of any prior identity mark used in materials produced for CMS.

*CMS Identity Mark:*



*Example of CMS Identity Mark with Office/Center Name:*



## *How to Use the Identity Mark*

These guidelines provide information and instructions on the appropriate use of the CMS identity components. You should never recreate the CMS identity marks; e-mail [Logos@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:Logos@cms.hhs.gov) and ask for an electronic version.

**The CMS mark is composed of at least two components:**

1. The letters CMS
2. A two-color graphic image

The preferred use in most cases also includes a third element:

3. The words Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

An official Center or Office name may be added to become part of the mark, if necessary. Do not try to recreate the identity mark on your own. E-mail [Logos@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:Logos@cms.hhs.gov) for an electronic version in any of the formats described below.

- ***2-Color Identity Mark (preferred)***  
Use CMS Gold (or gold foil) and CMS Blue.
- ***1-Color Identity Mark***  
If you are only using one CMS color, use CMS Blue.

If you are not using color, use black. You can also use a negative mark, which is reversed out in white. The negative mark must not be placed on a background that is tonally lighter than 100% of the color. Make sure you use a background color that contrasts sufficiently with the mark.

## *Size, Placement and Color*

- ***Minimum Size***  
Make sure the CMS mark is at least 2 inches wide so that it is legible. This measurement is equal to the horizontal length of the entire mark.
- ***Bleed-Edge Indicator***  
The identity mark may not bleed off any edge of an item. The mark should sit at least 1/8 inch inside any item's edges.



- **Clear Space Allocation**

The clear space around the CMS mark prevents any nearby text, image, or illustration from interfering with the mark. Any type of graphic components must be at least “x” distance from the mark, where “x” is the height of the “M” in the identity mark.



## **Using the CMS Name without the Identity Mark**

CMS encourages the use of the CMS identity mark on all communications products. If you are only using the Agency name, follow these criteria:

- Make all words the same size and font (at least an 8 point sans serif font such as Frutiger Bold or Arial Bold).
- Put all letters in uppercase except for the word “for.”
- Use an ampersand (&) instead of “and.”
- Use black, blue, or a dark color if the background is light.
- Use yellow, white, or a lighter shade if the background is dark.

### **Example (12 point Arial Bold):**

**CENTERS for MEDICARE & MEDICAID SERVICES**

For a product that is entirely in Spanish, use the words “**Centros de Servicios de Medicare y Medicaid**” in place of the CMS name.

## ***Use of CMS Mark with DHHS Logo***

If the CMS mark and DHHS logo are used on the same page, the DHHS logo must be more prominent and dominant than the CMS mark. Prominence and dominance are not necessarily measured in size; they also depend on factors such as contrast and placement. For example, the DHHS logo should never be smaller than 0.5 inches wide. For more specific guidance, consult the Department's [guidelines](#) for logo use.

### ***Incorrect Use***

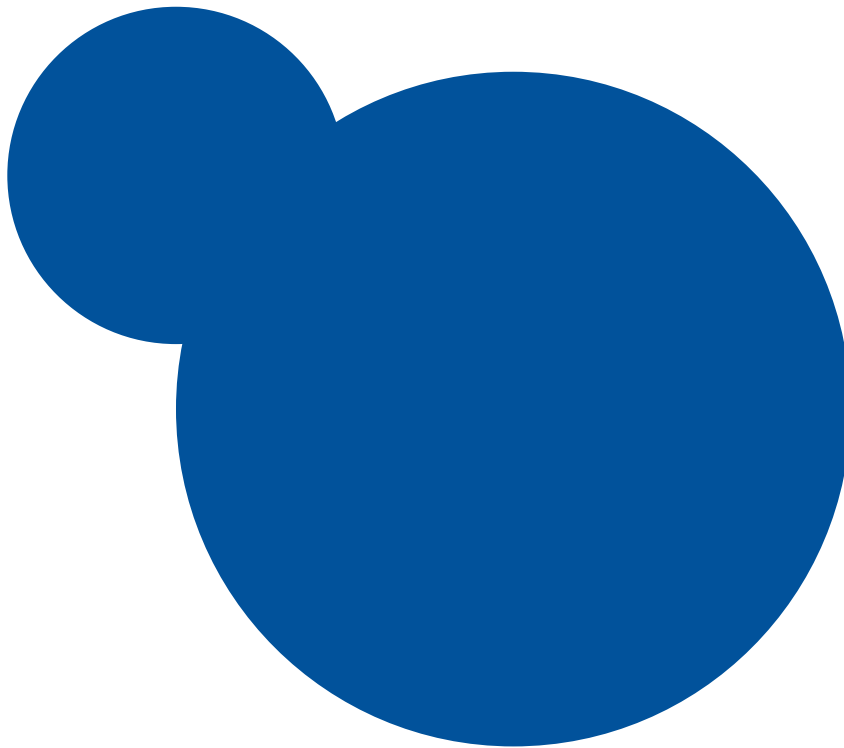
To maintain the integrity of the mark, it is essential that the CMS identity mark be used correctly. Deviation from the guidelines can weaken the impact of the Agency's identity and program branding efforts.

### ***Follow these Guidelines:***

- Do not alter the position of the identity mark elements.
- Do not alter or change the typeface.
- Do not rotate any of the identity mark elements.
- Do not combine the mark with other elements to create a new mark, symbol, etc.
- Do not stretch, distort, or otherwise alter the aspect ratio of the identity mark.
- Do not position the identity mark too close to other items or images.
- Do not alter the color of any of the identity mark elements.
- Do not position the identity mark on colors that do not compliment the mark's colors.
- Do not position the identity mark on a photographic background where there is insufficient contrast between the photographic image and the identity mark and typography.

**Example of Acceptable Use:**

This is a **good** example of logo placement. The DHHS logo is more prominently placed and dominant to the CMS logo.



**Example of Unacceptable Use:**

This is a **bad** example of logo placement. The CMS logo should be less prominent and less dominant than the DHHS logo. Since they are very directional images, the eye is led away from the page. Logos fight each other by facing away.



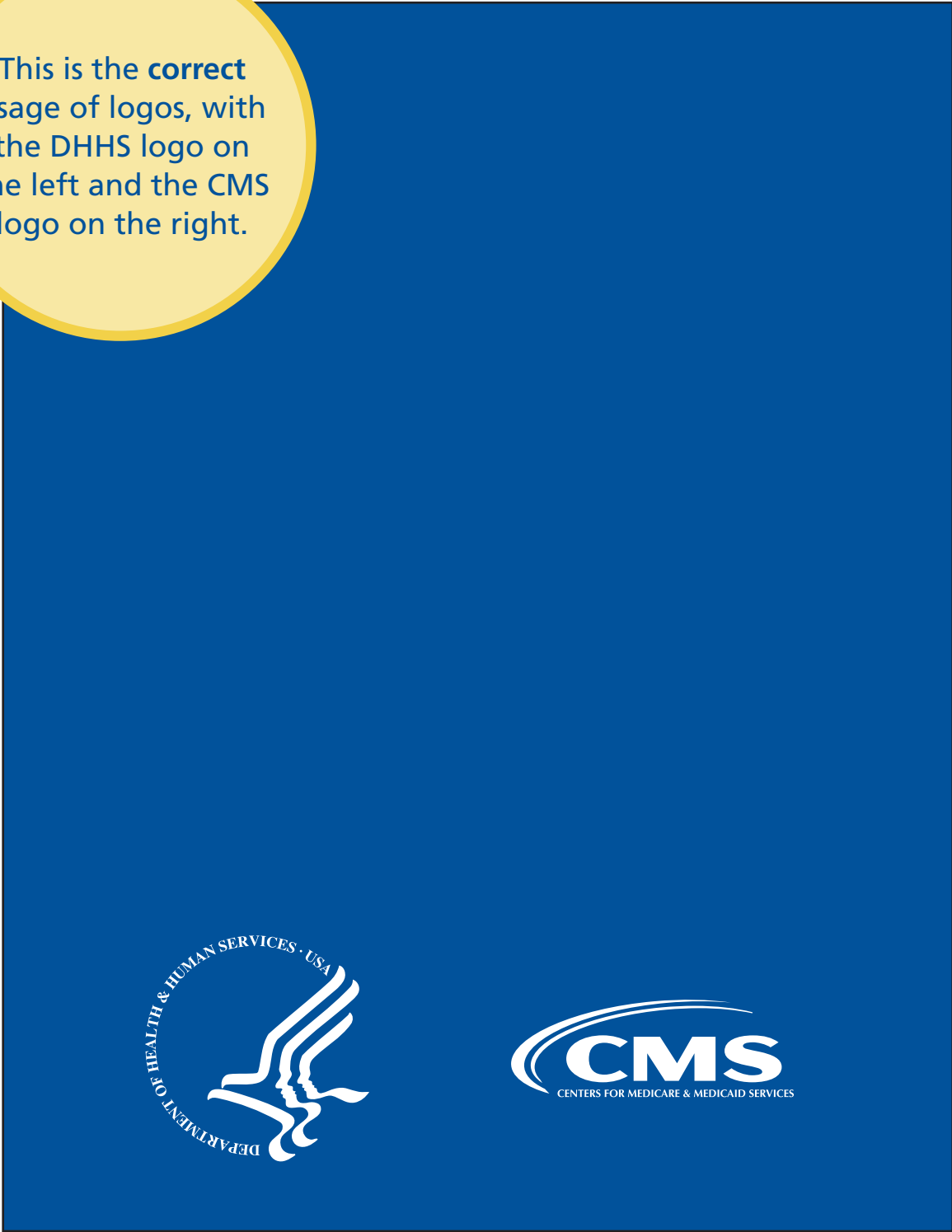
*Example of Unacceptable Use:*

Avoid the **improper** placement of logos. Here the CMS logo is on the left and DHHS logo is on the right. These logos are placed too close together.



*Example of Acceptable Use:*

This is the correct usage of logos, with the DHHS logo on the left and the CMS logo on the right.



## ***Branding Centers, Offices, and other Organizational Units***

The CMS identity mark is the Agency's primary and dominant organizational brand. All Centers, Offices, Consortiums or other organizational units within CMS should use their respective CMS organizational branded identity mark developed for their unit (see example on page 7, CMS Mark with Office/Center name). To brand the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services most effectively, we limit creation of new brand marks.

Individual Offices/Centers/Regions that had developed and may currently be using a consistent and recognized individual mark should only use the CMS identity mark. The Office of Communications/Division of Multimedia Services will use only the DHHS logo and CMS mark in the materials it develops for CMS components. Organizational levels below the component level (e.g., groups or divisions) should discontinue use of any subordinate organization logos.

## ***Branding Items within CMS or HHS Initiatives***

There are times when CMS develops products or other items as part of a long-term Department level initiative or project, where the initiative has its own specific set of branding guidelines. Examples of this are the Partnership for Patients program and the Million Hearts campaign. When this is the case, the initiative's branding guidelines may supersede the rules and procedures contained in this guide. If this is the case with your product, the CMS Office of Communications can provide you with assistance in determining the guidelines to follow.

For new CMS-level external-facing initiatives, the necessity to develop a new identity mark ("logo") for the project or initiative will be determined on a case-by-case basis. The Office of Communications won't approve the development or use of a unique logo for initiatives that are expected to be short-term or of limited scope. For other projects, send a request to [MultimediaServices@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:MultimediaServices@cms.hhs.gov) if you believe the development of a special identity mark is warranted, and the Office of Communications will make this determination.

## ***Branding Internal CMS Initiatives***

There are occasions when components have a need to market and share information to all CMS employees. These occasions are usually office, consortium, or center-level sponsored programs or initiatives that have a short shelf life and impact the vast majority of CMS employees. The need to develop a logo for these kinds of programs is reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Factors taken into consideration include the number of employees impacted by the program and the length (in days) of the initiative. If OC determines that the request does not meet the criteria, the Division of Multimedia Services will not accept the request to create a new logo for the initiative.

## ***Branding Items Produced by CMS Contractors***

Presentation slides, publications, videos and other external-facing deliverables produced by third-party organizations under contract to CMS should be branded only as CMS and/or DHHS products, using the CMS identity mark according to the rules listed above. Third-party contractor logos should NOT be included on these products, although the contractor may be acknowledged by name for their input or support at the appropriate point, e.g, a closing slide, appendix, or notes page. Acknowledgement should not be included in a title slide or page.

## ***Co-branding Items with Partner Organizations***

Sometimes it is appropriate for CMS to co-brand a product or initiative with another government or private organization. There are rules and procedures that the Agency follows to determine whether a specific opportunity is appropriate for CMS. Co-branding should not be considered unless a formal agreement is in place. This determination takes time and is reviewed by multiple levels in the Agency. If you want to pursue an agreement, the first step is to contact the Office of Communications/Partner Relations Group at [Partnership@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:Partnership@cms.hhs.gov). After an agreement is reached, the CMS Office of Communications/[Logos@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:Logos@cms.hhs.gov) can provide guidance on the proper usage and placement of the CMS brand mark to ensure that the Agency's visual identity is evident when co-branding specific products.

## ***Permission: License Agreement Policy and Procedures***

If you want to use any of the identity or brand marks, you need to get approval to use them.

Once you have a sample of your product, e-mail [Logos@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:Logos@cms.hhs.gov) at least two weeks before production for approval. Approval requests are effective for the initial production period (for tangible products) or six (6) months (for advertising.)

If you have a contractor, partner, or other stakeholder who wants to use any element of our identity program, they must have a licensing agreement with CMS. Some contractors like Medicare Administrative Contractors (MACs) and Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs) have license agreements incorporated into their CMS contracts.



To get a licensing agreement, send a request with the following information to [Logos@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:Logos@cms.hhs.gov):

- Name and address of requestor
- CMS contact name and number
- Project name
- Which identity program element(s) you want to use
- Why you want to use it
- How long you want to use it

You may not use Agency marks to promote private for-profit entities or to promote one service over another within CMS programs. Products with CMS identity marks on them generally should not be sold for profit. Only CMS and partners authorized to do so may use the CMS identity materials on products they distribute. In addition, these products must follow the National Gifts provision, which states that the gifts may be offered to the public as long as the gifts are of nominal value and are provided whether or not the individual is enrolled in a CMS program.

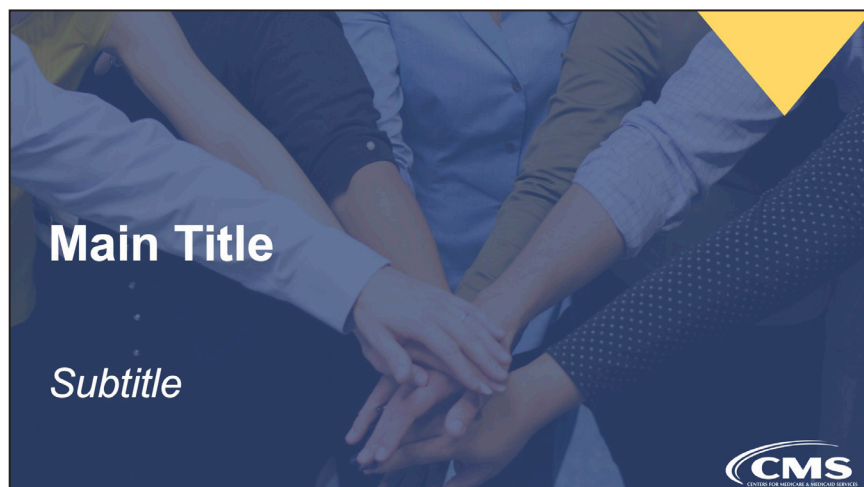
Be aware that our identity marks are protected by law. For example, Section 1140 of the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. §1320b–10, prohibits the use of the Department and Agency names, acronyms, stationery, cards, logos/marks and other identity materials in a manner which would convey the false impression that such item is approved, endorsed, or authorized by CMS or DHHS, or that such person has some connection with, or authorization from CMS or DHHS.

For more information on prohibition of misuse, visit [http://www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/ssact/title11/1140.htm](http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/ssact/title11/1140.htm). If you notice unauthorized use of the CMS mark, e-mail [Logos@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:Logos@cms.hhs.gov).

# 5. STANDARD BUSINESS TEMPLATES

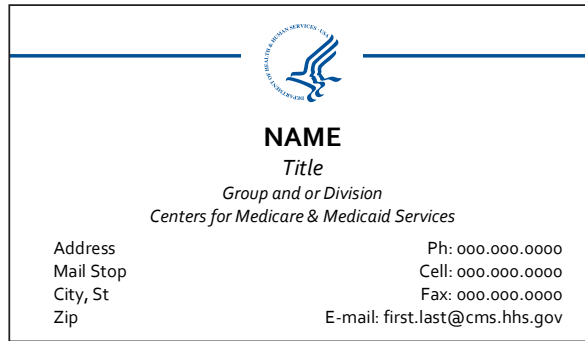
Building audience recognition and confidence in our brand and visual identity is another important element of our brand architecture. To ensure that CMS presents a consistent “face” to our external audiences, we strongly encourage the use of approved templates for standard communications, including Microsoft PowerPoint® presentation slides, business cards, and listserv e-mail messages. You can find the **current templates** on the CMS Intranet or send a request to [MultimediaServices@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:MultimediaServices@cms.hhs.gov).

**Examples of standard PowerPoint® title slide** (multiple standard options are available):

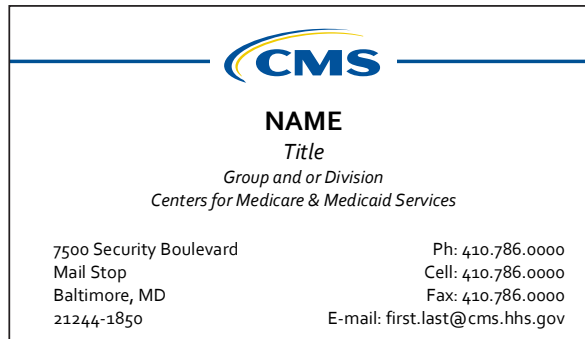


**Example of standard business card:**


**DHHS Logo**



**CMS Logo**



**Example of standard listserv e-mail template:**

	<p>Standard Header</p>
<p><b>Center for Program Integrity</b>   Data Sharing &amp; Partnership Group</p> <p>Headline</p> <p>[content]</p> <p>Line 1</p> <p>[content]</p> <p>Line 2</p> <p>[content]</p>	<p>Subhead Office/Group/ Program or Initiative</p>
<p><b>Center for Program Integrity</b> Division of Policy &amp; External Partnership</p>	<p>Footer Group Division or Tagline</p>

## 6. FOR MORE INFORMATION

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The Office of Communications, Creative Services Group oversees the CMS brand architecture and visual identity guidelines. Please direct questions to [Logos@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:Logos@cms.hhs.gov) and requests for logo development and other design services to [MultimediaServices@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:MultimediaServices@cms.hhs.gov).

Other resource documents on communications are available and address topics that may not be covered here. These include:

- **Toolkit for Making Written Materials Clear and Effective**  
<http://www.cms.gov/WrittenMaterialsToolkit/>
- **Web Writing Style Guide**  
<http://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Reach-out/Find-tools-to-help-you-help-others/writing-for-the-web.zip>
- **Twitter and YouTube User Guides**  
Available upon request from [newmedia@cms.hhs.gov](mailto:newmedia@cms.hhs.gov)

# NOTES

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