

# Plain Language Unit Reports

## Chief Records Officer

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
NARA Bulletins on Records Management	Heads of Federal agencies, Federal records officers, General counsel staff, interested stakeholders	Targeted distribution to over 200 records officers and agencies. Content is also posted on the NARA website.	<p>Bulletins are developed with a focus on clarity and readability for the end user.</p> <p>All draft Bulletins are sent for review by NARA officials before final approval and distribution.</p>

### Customer feedback

Our 2014 Customer Satisfaction Survey included two questions specifically about communications from the Office of the Chief Records Officer. Eighty-nine percent of respondents agree with the statement that our communications are “clear.” The report can be downloaded here: <http://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/policy/survey-2014.pdf>. Comments from respondents on this question include removing jargon from notices and limiting notices to one topic. These, and other comments, are things we will be taking forward as we continue to figure out how best to communicate with our various stakeholders.

Chief Records Officer Numbered Memos	Federal records officers and interested stakeholders	Over 200 records officers. Also posted on the NARA website.	They are reviewed by a member of the administration team for clarity.
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### Customer feedback See Above

Blog postings on <i>Records Express</i>	General public	40 postings in 2014. We have over 800 subscribers to the blog.	Posts are developed or reviewed by staff trained in plain language.
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### Customer feedback See Above

<i>Federal Register</i> postings containing Records Control Schedules with records proposed for disposal.	General public	Unknown	The staff member tasked with editing and preparing the postings has completed plain language training.
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### Customer feedback Not Measured

## Federal Register

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
7600B Interagency agreement document that is distributed to all agency customers contracting services.	Federal agencies		Eliminated bureaucratic language; clarified explanations; and ensured consistency in terminology and format.
Web pages for each of the 17 Federal Records Centers in the Federal Records Centers Program (FRCP) that are posted on Archives.gov.	Federal agencies & public		Removed unnecessary words, eliminated redundancy, and ensured consistency in terminology and format.
Memos and letters providing updates on FRCP programs, activities and services or explaining new policies and procedures that are distributed primarily via email.	Federal agencies		Organized information according to users' concerns and needs; used headings, used pronouns and active voice; and avoided bureaucratic language.
Flyers and brochures providing marketing and program information.	Federal agencies & public		Communications are developed by subject experts. Before distribution, they are reviewed by a member of the administration team for clarity.

## Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO)

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
ISOO created its Plain Language Survey, which is a subcomponent of the Agency Services Plain Language Survey.	U.S. public Executive branch agencies State and local governments/ organizations	Over 140 senior agency officials and points of contact from executive branch agencies receive formal communications from ISOO. Over 35 formal members of State and Local governments/organizations receive formal communications from ISOO. Over 85 officials receive CUI formal communications from ISOO.	When ISOO disseminates reports, notices, taskers, or any formal electronic communication, the communication includes a web link in the email for readers to rate the readability of the specific ISOO communication. ISOO is now able to derive quantifiable aggregate data and expects to use this data in future Plain Language reporting.

### Customer feedback

Although we are still collecting survey data, the feedback thus far has been positive about the clarity of our written communications.

## Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) continued.

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
<p><i>ISOO Annual Report to the President</i> and Cost Report.</p> <p>Available to the public through the ISOO website and in print.</p>	<p>The President</p> <p>U.S. public</p> <p>Public Interest Groups</p> <p>Senior leaders of the executive branch and executive branch agencies</p>	<p>Over 140 senior agency officials and points of contact from executive branch agencies.</p> <p>Over 35 formal members of state and local governments/ organizations.</p> <p>Over 85 officials for CUI.</p>	<p>On the ISOO website, ISOO updated the design of the pages dedicated to the Annual Report and Cost Report, using a chart format and archiving older reports for easier access and a cleaner look.</p> <p>In its Annual Report, ISOO continued to improve its use of active voice, succinct words, avoided legal and technical jargon, ceased redundancy, minimized acronyms, and prepared distinct sections with headlines for specific readers.</p> <p>ISOO further simplified charts and eliminated analytical content of past reports; focused readers on data and results rather than ISOO's interpretation of its findings.</p>

### Customer feedback

We have noticed interested parties are able to analyze the data in the Report, indicating the plain language components are effective. One example of this is the latest report from the Public Interest Declassification Board (PIDB), *Setting Priorities: An Essential Step in Transforming Declassification*.

<p>ISOO Revised its Marking Booklet.</p> <p>Available to specified agencies through email and to the public via the website.</p>	<p>Executive branch agencies</p> <p>Classification and declassification community</p> <p>Public interest groups</p>	<p>Over 140 senior agency officials and points of contact from executive branch agencies.</p> <p>Six public interest groups concerned with transparency regularly follow and comment on any communication or training ISOO provides on classification and over-classification.</p>	<p>ISOO included a separate listing that summarizes the changes to the Marking Booklet. The changes to the Marking Booklet include two updated examples of markings (one of which is an example of email as a transmittal document) and a "Quick Reference" section for clarity.</p>
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### Customer feedback

Feedback from the Classification Markings Implementation Working Group (CMIWG) run by the Office of the Director for National Intelligence indicates the changes are understood and assist the agencies in training their classifiers.

Feedback from the External Referrals Working Group (ERWG) indicates the changes to the Marking Booklet are understood and helpful at the "front end" of the system (ultimately aiding the "back end" process of declassification).

## Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) continued.

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
<p>ISOO Taskers and Notices – ISOO issued four notices this year. Three were new. The fourth consolidated four older notices for better clarity for readers.</p> <p>Available to specified agencies through email and to the public via the website.</p>	<p>Executive branch agencies</p> <p>Declassification community</p> <p>Public interest groups</p>	<p>Over 140 senior agency officials and points of contact from executive branch agencies.</p> <p>Six public interest groups concerned with transparency regularly follow and comment on ISOO Taskers and Notices, especially those relating to agency equity and the referral of records.</p>	<p>The notices used bulleted lists, distinct sections, and examples of scenarios describing the content of the notices.</p>

### Customer feedback

Feedback from CMIWG indicates the ISOO Taskers and Notices are understood and assist the agencies in training their classifiers.

Feedback from the ERWG indicates the ISOO Taskers and Notices are understood. This is especially true regarding taskers associated with ISOO's declassification assessment program, which receives positive feedback from agencies each assessment cycle, particularly concerning the new scoring methodology ISOO adopted in FY14.

<p>Public Interest Declassification Board's Supplemental Report to the President, <i>Setting Priorities: An Essential Step in Transforming Declassification</i></p>	The President	Over 140 senior agency officials and points of contact from executive branch agencies.	<p>The report and accompanying Letter to the President use active voice, explain subject matter and technical jargon, and use succinct paragraphs tailored to readers.</p>
	Senior leaders of the executive branch and executive branch Agencies	Over 90 congressional contacts receive communications from the PIDB.	
	Members of Congress	Six public interest groups concerned with transparency regularly follow the activities of the PIDB.	<p>Available to the public through the Board's website in a web-enhanced file for greater accessibility and use on mobile devices.</p>
	Public interest groups		
	U.S. public	Over 800 individuals and organizations receive communications from the PIDB.	

### Customer feedback

All of the feedback about the *Setting Priorities* report concerns the actual recommendations made by the PIDB, not the format or style of the writing, indicating the reader understands the contents.

## Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) continued.

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
Public Interest Declassification Board blog posts and communications with the public (email, handouts, etc.). ISOO added new posts to its blog, Transforming Classification. Available to the public through the Board's website and in print.	Declassification community Public interest groups U.S. public	Over 800 individuals and organizations receive communications from the PIDB.	ISOO updated the PIDB's website, instituting a chart design to archive and display the past agendas made available to the public. ISOO continued to use active voice, avoid legal and technical jargon, and write in succinct paragraphs tailored to readers.

### Customer feedback

The PIDB regularly communicates with its stakeholders through the blog, website, and email. Interest in the PIDB's activities continues to increase, indicating the reader understands the PIDB's message.

Committee reports (i.e. Summary Minutes) for the National Industrial Security Program Policy (NISPPAC) Advisory Committee.	U.S. Public Industry	15 government members 14 industry officials	ISOO continued to incorporate short paragraphs and use headings to break up text and guide readers.
ISOO added two new NISPPAC committee reports to its website.			
Available to the public through the ISOO website.			

### Customer feedback

Calls for comments on the minutes for NISPPAC meetings produce little to no changes that affect the main message of the reporting, indicating the readers understand the content.

Committee reports (i.e. Summary Minutes) of the State, Local, Tribal, and Private Sector Program Policy Advisory Committee (SLTPS-PAC). ISOO added two new SLTPS committee reports to its website. Available to the public through the ISOO website.	U.S. public Executive branch departments and agencies State and local governments/organizations	Over 35 members of state and local governments/organizations.	ISOO continued to use appropriate headings, subheadings and punctuation in its report. It also reduced its use of government terminology not easily understood outside the bureaucratic environment.
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### Customer feedback

Calls for comments on the minutes for SLTPS meetings produce little to no changes that affect the main message of the reporting, indicating the readers understand the content.

## Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) continued.

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
ISOO published comprehensive updates to the Controlled Unclassified Information Office (CUI) registry.  Available through the CUI website.	CUI Advisory Council members	45 CUI Advisory Council Members	For ease of use and better understanding, the updates to the registry included (1) reorganized access, (2) additional category-subcategory detail information to identify authorities with specific handling requirements based in law/regulation or Government-wide policies, (3) a glossary, and (4) search functionality.
	Executive branch departments and agencies	Over 85 officials for CUI	
	U.S. public		
	U.S. commercial corporations		
	State and local governments/organizations		
	Foreign governments and/or corporations		

### Customer feedback

The CUI registry receives positive feedback regularly from stakeholders and continues to grow with their support, indicating the messages are understood.

ISOO, in collaboration with the Department of Justice Office of Information Policy, issued Revised Guidance regarding CUI and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).  Available through the CUI website.	CUI Advisory Council members	45 CUI Advisory Council members.	Guidance responds to agency requests for clarification regarding FOIA and CUI and supersedes previous guidance from 2011. It clarifies the applicability of statutory exemptions contained in the FOIA and the use of prior markings or designations. For ease of understanding, the guidance uses a bulleted list format and has a simple summary of the information for readers.
	Executive branch departments and agencies	Over 85 officials for CUI.	
	U.S. public	Over 140 executive branch senior agency officials and points of contact.	
	U.S. commercial corporations		
	State and local governments/organizations		
	Foreign governments and/or corporations		

### Customer feedback

Positive feedback from stakeholders indicate this guidance is already aiding in understanding and distinguishing authorities and responsibilities for CUI and FOIA.

## National Declassification Center (NDC)

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Mandatory Declassification Review (MDR) Final Response letters	Individual requesters	Approximately 1,250 final response letters	Uses peer-review “buddy” system to proofread responses. Uses shorter, declarative sentences.
FOIA/MDR initial, interim, and final response letters, beginning in June 2014	Individual requesters	Approximately 600 initial responses, 250 interim responses, and 625 final responses	We added this footer to all researcher response letters: “Did you understand our response to your inquiry? If not, please tell us why so we can improve our responses.”

### Customer feedback

One researcher with over 200 requests complained that he was confused. We advised him that the key to solving the confusion was to use the assigned NW case number to track all correspondence regarding each case. We further explained that each case number is unique and is the key to linking each request to all communications provided by us.

NDC blog posts	General public	13 posts	New release posts use bulleted lists to highlight possible high-interest series. Subject oriented posts use a conversational tone and match visuals (copies of records that help tell the story) to the narrative.
NDC reports posted on the NDC website.	General public	Four release reports and one Director’s report	Use headings, bulleted lists, active voice and fewer words.

## Office of Government Information Services (OGIS)

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
Entries N-Z in the “OGIS Library” section of OGIS’s website	General public and FOIA staff members from agencies across the Government	19,854 visits	Reducing/explaining acronyms, writing short sentences.

### Customer feedback

OGIS added a question about the clarity of its written communications to its customer satisfaction survey in FY 2014. 86.67% of respondents answered that OGIS’s materials are “clear and easy to understand.”

The “FOIA Advisory Committee” section of OGIS’s website	General public (of particular interest to those in the open government/NGO community) and FOIA staff members from agencies across the government.	19,854 visits	Avoiding jargon, explaining acronyms, clearly explaining how members of the public can participate/provide feedback.
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### Customer feedback

OGIS added a question about the clarity of its written communications to its customer satisfaction survey in FY 2014. 86.67% of respondents answered that OGIS’s materials are “clear and easy to understand.”

The “OGIS Final Response letters to Customers” section of OGIS’s website	General public (of particular interest to those in the open government/NGO community) and FOIA staff members from agencies across the government	19,854 visits	Explaining acronyms, reducing jargon.
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### Customer feedback

OGIS added a question about the clarity of its written communications to its customer satisfaction survey in FY 2014. 86.67% of respondents answered that OGIS’s materials are “clear and easy to understand.”



## Legislative Archives, Presidential Libraries, and Museum Services

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
Exhibit script updates for rotating original exhibit items	General public	Around 1 million annually	Improved exhibit text by using short and brief titles, created to pique interest in topic; separated title of display object from body of explanatory exhibit text for visual clarity; used simplified language to explain in a very few words the significance of item on display and its vital identification; kept exhibit text from becoming wordy by limiting number of words for each part of the display text.

### Customer feedback

No statistical evaluation currently available, only written feedback, e.g.: "I thought our children might be too young, but they seemed to understand and really enjoy the vaults exhibit and videos."

Contract or task orders for exhibit fabrication	Exhibit fabrication firms and design professionals; approximately 25 for each task order.		Improved contract and task orders by: organizing format of documents; using bulleted lists and clear language; providing explicit explanation of work required and appropriate terminology; only using defined technical language when necessary for specifications.
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### Customer feedback

No statistical evaluation available, but firms were able to successfully submit proposals due to the clear instructions.

Public Program event mailers	Mailers advertising some 70 public events this year were either mailed or handed out to 2,000 of the general public.		Used clear but strong keywords to appeal to readers, succinct wording for event title and descriptive information, explicit directions, and accompanying illustration, if available, to attract interest.
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### Customer feedback

Mainly positive feedback on most of the events themselves, indicating that attendees were well informed by written copy about what to expect.

## Center for Legislative Archives

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
Website	Researchers, staff of House and Senate history offices, general public who are interested in history	372,250 a year	<p>Home page was completely redesigned to more easily direct visitors to the information they seek and to plainly state who we are and what we do.</p> <p>Left side navigation was cleaned up to more clearly communicate the information located on each page.</p> <p>All pages were reviewed for accuracy and conciseness of information.</p>
Tumblr blog posts	General public who are interested in history.	100,000 followers	<p>We use everyday words and avoid jargon.</p> <p>Each post has a topic sentence that concisely describes the main idea.</p> <p>Posts are proofread by at least three people before publication.</p>

### Customer feedback

We completely overhauled the design and layout of our office's website to make it more clear and easier to navigate. The home page was redone to more simply direct visitors to the most frequently used pages. The Research page now includes a portal for online searching of descriptions of congressional records directly from our site. Pages that had a very low number of hits were removed or consolidated. All text was reviewed for clarity. Overall, the whole site is now cleaner, clearer, and more usable.

We know that our audience for our blog posts may know nothing at all about the technical side of archival work, congressional records, or Congress. We proofread our blog posts to ensure that they do not contain jargon that may not be understood by the average person. If we are featuring a document that itself is little understood (for example, a congressional committee discharge petition), we include a simple, one sentence definition of what it is.

We use Google Analytics to track the number of page views for blog posts. This can help us determine which posts are most and least popular. We review these numbers strategically to emulate success and seek improvement. Part of this process includes plain language review for clarity, active voice, and concise topic sentences. These principles can directly impact how widely viewed a post is, because a poorly written post will not attract as much attention as a clear, plain one.

## John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
FAQ document on declassification on website	Researchers	approx. 600	Explains various categories of restriction of documents within declassification system; provides details on how to request a review of individual classified documents (mandatory review requests).
“Demystifying Declassification” blog post	Researchers	approx. 600	We further refined this post, which provides an introduction to the declassification system.

### Customer feedback

Feedback from researchers indicates the revised post “Demystifying Declassification” has been very helpful around clarifying what can be a confusing process. Staff are spending less time explaining the basic principles of declassification and researchers are enjoying a more streamlined research experience, while freeing up more time for reviewing archival material.

## Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library and Museum

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
Mandatory declassification review letter to researchers	Researchers requesting mandatory review	40 print or email	Notification of action taken on a mandatory declassification review request.
Printed bookmark	Museum visitors (While many more visitors toured the museum, 500 of the free bookmarks were printed and distributed)	500. Distributed at the docent desk in the museum lobby.	Distributed at the docent desk in the museum lobby

### Customer feedback

We have received positive feedback on the new mandatory declassification review letter. One of our researchers wrote in response: “Your procedures and readiness to help have made this process absolutely painless (compared to other aspects of government, which I am well acquainted with after years of government service.)” By using plain language and clear communications, less staff time is needed to explain declassification review procedures to our researchers.

The use of free giveaways, such as the bookmark, at the front desk makes visitors happy, as well as drives traffic to our website. It also decreases the time staff at the front desk need to spend in telling people about new web exhibits and moves visitors into the museum more quickly.

## Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library and Museum (continued)

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
Social media - Tumblr	International web audience	93,000, online	Posts use familiar words, short sentence, lists.

### Customer feedback

Our Tumblr audience is generally young, often female, web-savvy, and may not speak English as a native language. Our awareness of our Tumblr demographics enables us to tailor the writing and subject matter of our posts to our audience. And our Tumblr followers are skyrocketing: we currently have 93,000 followers. The sample post we reference received 33 responses.

## Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
“World War II Remembered” exhibit labels.	Museum visitors	186,000	Archives staff assisted in the proofreading of exhibit labels, which eliminated errors and made the material easier to read.
“Men of Valour” exhibit labels.			
Reference request replies	Researchers	2,800	Supervisory archivist edits for clarity and plain language; staff then amends text and replies to researcher.

### Customer feedback

Increasing the number of proofreaders eliminated errors from exhibit labels and enhanced the museum experience.

## National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC)

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
Annual Report	Public, grantees	1,000 people	Reviewed for correct grammar and clarity.
Facebook	Public, grantees	14,000 per week	Stories written in plain language. Audience doubled in CY 2014.
Annotation – NHPRC blog	Public, grantees	100 per week	Posts checked for correct grammar and clarity. Blog posts on grant announcements underwent a two-month public comment opportunity. Grant announcements were revised in response to public comments.
Website ( <i>www.archives.gov/nbprc</i> )	Public, grantees	10,000 annual	Reviewed for correct grammar and clarity. Restructured several sections to better explain grant review processes.
NHPRC News (online)	Public, grantees, applicants.	3,000 annual	Revised bi-monthly to share NHPRC success stories and provide grant information
Founders Online ( <i>founders.archives.gov</i> )	Public	815,000 visitors since June 2013	Reviewed with partners for clarity.
Grant announcements	Applicants		Revised for clarity.

### Customer feedback

Founders Online regularly receives high marks for clarity: “Founders Online search engine is easy to use, and where I had to go to multiple sites in the past to find a particular letter, now I can go to just one. It’s a true contribution not just to scholars and teachers, but to our country,” A high school history teacher writes, “This resource is breathtaking in its scope and value. I already have students accessing it for their class projects. It defies description. Powerful, powerful, resource.”

## Strategy and Communication Office

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
Press releases that are posted on NARA's public website (Archives.gov) and released to media	Press and the public		Releases highlight the main point at the top, use familiar words and avoid redundant words, and minimize the use of acronyms and abbreviations.
Archives.gov news (short sentences on main web page that capture the essence of the announcement and encourage readers to link to more information)	General public (all visitors to Archives.gov main page)		Key words are at the beginning. Sentences are short enough to contain the main message in one screen view.
Archives.gov: Archivist's biography	General public		Updated online biography of the Archivist of the United States. Used everyday words and logical transitions between paragraphs.
Blog posts (Pieces of History)	General public	6,000 a week	Posts use familiar words, pronouns (I, you, and we), short sentences, and active verbs.
Facebook (US National Archives)	General public	100,000 followers	Posts use familiar words, pronouns (I, you, and we), short sentences, and active verbs.
Blog posts (Declarations) on intranet (NARA@work)	All NARA staff, volunteers, and contractors		Posts use a conversational tone, familiar words, pronouns (I, you, and we), short sentences, and active verbs.
Plain Language Tips (Declarations blog on NARA@work)	All NARA staff, volunteers, and contractors		Biweekly "tips" on writing style, grammar, punctuation explain and promote plain writing. Posts use a conversational tone, active verbs, concise sentences, and formatting such as tables, bullet points to clearly present the material.  Sample tips are available on the public website.
Weekly slides on video monitors in some NARA locations	Staff and visitors		Using just a few words, each slide announces news or events in clear, direct, and engaging terms.

## Strategy and Communication Office (continued)

Types of communication	Audience for each type	Number of user for each type	Plain Language techniques used
<p>Monthly Calendar of Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Printed and mailed to subscribers</li> <li>• Posted on Archives.gov (NARA's public website)</li> </ul>	General public	Approximately 6,700 print subscribers plus online audience	Event descriptions are short. Key words are at the beginning. Dates and times are in larger, bolder type than the rest of the text.
<p><i>Prologue</i> magazine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• printed and mailed to subscribers and members of the National Archives Foundation;</li> <li>• sold in Archives Shop and Presidential library shops</li> <li>• Posted at Archives.gov and at Zinio.com</li> </ul>	General public, researchers, Foundation supporters	Approximately 3,000 for print circulation	Articles are academic but have short paragraphs. Headings now break up text and guide reader. We edit for wordiness, jargon, and the overuse of acronyms and abbreviations.