

PLAIN WRITING ACTION PLAN

1. **Purpose:** In October 2010, President Obama signed into law the Plain Writing Act of 2010. This Act calls for each federal Agency to use writing that is clear, concise, and well-organized so that the public can better understand what their government is doing.
2. **Objectives:** the Act contains the following specific requirements and deadlines:
 - a. By **July 13, 2011**, each agency must:
 - Identify one or more senior officials responsible for making sure the Act is followed;
 - Create a plain writing section of the agency website;
 - Train employees how to write plainly;
 - Create a way of measuring how well the agency is using plain writing; and
 - Publish an initial report that describes the agency's plan for following plain writing requirements (this Action Plan).
 - b. By **October 13, 2011**, agencies must write all new (or substantially revised) documents in plain writing.
3. **Responsibility:** Our plain writing program is managed by:
 - a. **Senior Official for Plain Writing:** The Strategy and Communications Officer is responsible for overseeing NARA's implementation of the Plain Writing Act of 2010 and this action plan.
 - b. **Executives and Division Directors** are responsible for supporting efforts to identify and improve plain writing on documents for the general public.
 - c. **The Strategy and Communications Office** is responsible for ensuring our public messages and forms follow plain writing standards, and that we train our staff how to write plainly.
 - d. **Individual Employees** are responsible for applying plain writing standards to the documents we give our customers to read and instructions we ask them to follow.
4. **Execution:** This plan describes the steps we are taking to fulfill NARA's plain writing objectives:

- a. We are establishing NARA's Plain Writing Program by:
- Preparing and posting a NARA-wide notice to describing our plain writing program and goals.
 - Designating (in writing) the Senior Official for Plain Writing.
 - Creating a Plain Writing Working Group (PWWG) to complete the principal objectives of the Plain Writing Act.
- b. The PWWG is assigned to complete the following:
- (1) Review Public Documents for Plain Writing**
- Review publicly-available materials (documents, forms, web pages) and identify documents that require extensive changes. These include any documents that:
 - Are necessary for obtaining any Federal Government benefit or service, or filing taxes (e.g., tax forms or benefits applications);
 - Provide information about any Federal Government benefit or service (e.g., handbooks for Medicare or Social Security recipients); or
 - Explain to the public how to comply with a requirement that the Federal Government administers or enforces (e.g., guidance on how to prepare required reports or comply with safety requirements).
 - Work with offices to revise their documents.
- (2) Update NARA Style Guide**
- Review existing NARA Style Guide, comparing plain writing elements with guidance from the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN) and OMB, and then identify elements to improve.
 - Seek staff suggestions on new plain writing elements to add to the Style Guide. Consolidate input and evaluate each proposed element for clarity, conciseness, and relevance.
 - Develop a checklist of critical plain writing elements for staff to use to check their own work before publishing.

(3) Prepare Plain Writing Training for NARA Employees

- Work with the Human Capital Office to prepare new employee training, annual training for all staff, and periodic refresher materials as needed.
- Develop a marketing plan to promote Plain Writing awareness NARA-wide, including the revised Style Guide, and plain writing checklist.

(4) Prepare an Inaugural Report on Compliance with the Plain Writing Act

- Describe NARA's initial Plain Writing review, including which areas were targeted for immediate revision.
- Describe NARA's accomplishments in fixing identified weak areas and any staff activities that received special recognition.
- Describe NARA's training efforts, including new employee instruction and annual refresher training for all staff. Identify any specific materials or incentives that staff especially found useful.
- Describe NARA's goals for improving plain writing compliance during the next fiscal year.

(5) Work with Performance and Accountability to develop metrics to measure compliance with plain writing.

c. We will maintain Plain Writing Program Operations by:

(1) Conducting Regular Compliance Checks

- Working with Performance and Accountability, the Strategy and Communications Office will measure compliance with the plain writing checklist.
- As needed, the PWWG is called to analyze and resolve complex plain writing challenges revealed by management reviews, poor metrics performance, or audits.

(2) Conducting Refresher Training

- Solicit staff feedback on existing plain writing activities to develop periodic refresher materials.
- Conduct promotional activities to maintain Plain Writing awareness NARA-wide, such as writing contests, staff recognition

for excellent work, and humorous cartoon inserts on internal bulletins.

(3) Preparing and Posting Annual Plain Writing Compliance Reports

- The Strategy and Communications Office will prepare and submit an annual report describing efforts to improve the agency's overall plain writing, quantity and subject of public feedback, and results of internal compliance testing.
- Annual reports will be posted on NARA's public site as part of our transparency efforts.

5. **Expected Outcomes:** The PWWG will revise the NARA Style Guide and a standardized checklist of plain writing elements for our staff to use when preparing publicly available documents, forms, and correspondence. The Strategy and Communications Office will establish plain writing policies that incorporate public and employee comments, identify areas where training might improve overall compliance, and submit an annual report on the status of NARA's efforts to improve plain writing.

6. **Challenges:** We've issued the NARA Style Guide to address previous Executive Orders on plain writing, but we recognize that we need to do more. We can do better by:

- Establishing clear standards for plain writing,
- Conducting regular staff training (reinforced by a variety of interesting plain writing media) across NARA, and
- Having our executives and division directors recognize staff for outstanding efforts to promote plain writing.

7. This Action Plan was reviewed and approved by:



THOMAS E. MILLS
Chief Operating Officer

7-13-11

Date



DAVID S. FERRIERO
Archivist of the United States

20 July 2011

Date