



Introduction to Plain Language Awards Planning

A plain language awards program can reward and encourage clear communication in your organization. Planning such a program is a multi-step process. The NIH Office of Communications and Public Liaison offers a number of helpful materials to assist in building your own plain language program.

Initial Steps:

1. Determine if you going to hold a recognition ceremony. The focus should be on supporting the importance of plain language/clear communication. You may want to invite a speaker. If you plan to invite a keynote speaker, start early with identifying and contacting a good speaker.
2. Identify eligibility requirements. Which products are eligible and what is the eligibility timeline? What are the issues that may be more complicated regarding eligibility, e.g. can contractors receive awards? Under what circumstances? What are the criteria for being considered an "author" of the product?
3. Establish a timeline. This will allow you to set deadlines for all subsequent tasks. For example, if you would like to have a spring recognition ceremony, you might plan to have all submissions due in December.

Handling Submissions:

1. Establish firm categories for submissions, such as Health Promotion, News Writing, and Administrative.
2. Determine how the judging will be conducted. Who is eligible to be a judge? How do you determine the judging criteria and rating systems? What about foreign language products and reviewers?

3. Draft and carefully review your submissions form. ****[hyperlink to submissions form](#)**** Work with your IT department if you want the form to be available online. Consider issues such as privacy, form timeout, printed submissions, and other items related to what will be considered significant for planning and archiving your program.
4. Send out a call for submissions to your staff.

Review Process:

Provide reviewer guidance, rating sheets, and a list of submissions to your judges. (***[hyperlink "reviewer guidance"](#)***) & (***[hyperlink "rating sheets"](#)***)

If the judges are working in teams, you might ask for a volunteer leader to gather final scores and act as your liaison.

Once the final rating sheets have been collected, determine a judging scale. What score level is required to be a winner? Will you have different levels of winners? How many awards at each level?

Recognition Ceremony:

Consider promoting your event through posters and newsletters. Sending out invitations to your organization can broaden awareness and help ensure wider participation.

Decide who will be presenting the awards at the ceremony and determine if awardees will receive certificates or another form of recognition.

Determine the scope of your ceremony. Will you print a program book, or have a keynote speaker? Who will emcee the awards program? Will you have a photographer or reception? All of these considerations require advance planning, so it is best to decide as early as possible.

Final Steps:

Send thank you notes to all the volunteers who helped make your program a success. Schedule a meeting to discuss what you have learned and how to improve for next year. Create a checklist. ****[hyperlink to generic check list](#)****

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