



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

Plain Writing Act Compliance Report

July 13, 2011

I. Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing:

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) officially designated the Chief Operating Officer as the Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing in an Action Memorandum signed on July 12, 2011 by USAID Administrator Dr. Rajiv Shah. USAID Plain Language Coordinators from the Bureau for Management and the Office of the Executive Secretariat were also assigned to be responsible for implementing the requirements outlined in the Plain Writing Act of 2010.

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II. Explain what specific types of agency communications have you released by making them available in a format that is consistent with the Plain Writing guidelines.

Agencies must use plain language in any document that:

- is necessary for obtaining any federal government benefit or service or filing taxes;
- provides information about any federal government benefit or service; or
- explains to the public how to comply with a requirement that the federal government administers or enforces.

Type of communications document or posting. List how this is made available to the public	Who is the intended user and approximate number of potential users	What has changed by using Plain Writing
USAID Policy Directives and Required Procedures http://www.usaid.gov/policy/ads/	Approximately 11,500 USAID staff based in Washington, DC and in posts around the world, as well as the general public	Promotes clarity and consistency in USAID policy, procedures, and guidance
Administrator Shah’s 2011 Annual Letter http://50.usaid.gov/2011-annual-letter/introduction/	The millions of Americans who want to know more about USAID’s work	Builds on the Agency’s strong commitment to transparency by describing USAID’s work to the American public and how our work benefits the American people
USAID <i>FrontLines</i> http://www.usaid.gov/press/frontlines/fl_apr11/FL_apr11_ABOUT.html	A USAID news publication produced monthly and distributed electronically and in print to over 32,000 subscribers	<i>FrontLines</i> features articles about USAID, international development and humanitarian assistance efforts around the world, promoting transparency by describing USAID’s work to the American people
USAID Executive Secretariat (ES) Style Guide (available to all staff on the USAID intranet)	The style guide is posted on the USAID intranet and is accessible to approximately 11,500 USAID staff in the United States and overseas.	Plain Language guidelines are incorporated throughout the ES Style Guide. USAID staff drafting documents for Agency principals are required to do so in accordance with the Guide.

III. Inform agency staff of Plain Writing Act's requirements

USAID has informed Agency staff of the Plain Writing Act's requirements. In November 2010, a USAID General Notice was sent to all employees via the Agency's Notices System (an internal communications and announcement tool, which is distributed daily via email to all Agency employees and is similar to an electronic "bulletin board"). The Notice included a link for staff to view the full text of the Act as published by the Government Printing Office on October 13, 2010. The General Notice also included a link to the very useful Federal Plain Language Guidelines website (Plainlanguage.gov) for further information and guidance.

USAID has also posted information about the Plain Writing Act on the Agency's Open Government webpage (www.usaid.gov/open). Information posted on USAID's Internet site includes: the USAID contacts responsible for implementing the Act; an overview of the most important documents and public information that should be written in plain language; and a link to the Federal Plain Language Guidelines (plainlanguage.gov).

The Agency's policy directives and required procedures also follow the Federal Plain Language Guidelines. Staff drafting the documents to be published in the Agency's Automated Directives System (ADS) (<http://www.usaid.gov/policy/ads/>) are instructed to follow an "ADS Style and Format Guide" in ADS Chapter 501 (<http://www.usaid.gov/policy/ads/500/501mac.pdf>). Section I of Chapter 501 provides guidance to promote clarity and consistency when drafting policy and procedures. The chapter also references the Federal Plain Language Guidelines as an additional reference.

IV. Training

USAID has updated materials to be used in both computer-based and in-person trainings to ensure that agency staff is knowledgeable about Plain Writing Act requirements.

Automated Directives System (ADS) training materials have been updated to highlight the plain language guidance outlined in ADS Chapter 501. The training is available as a computer-based training (CBT) to all USAID staff online at <http://inside.usaid.gov/ADS/>. The plain language training materials also will be used for in-person training of new USAID employees attending "New Employee Orientation" training, including all new policy professionals in the agency. The materials will also be used to guide new hires joining the agency under the Foreign Service Development Leadership Initiative (DLI). The DLI Orientation course is mandatory for all new DLI hires. The training materials will be shared with USAID's Office of Human Resources to be included in additional training classes as

appropriate.

Since November 2009, classroom-based writing courses have been offered to USAID Washington and overseas staff. The purpose of the courses is to hone the writing skills of USAID staff. Plain language guidelines are an integral part of the curriculum of each course.

V. Ongoing compliance/sustaining change

USAID intends to maintain compliance with the Plain Writing Act through the USAID Plain Language Coordinators, who will implement the Act's requirements, and the Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing who will oversee the Agency's plain language efforts. The Coordinators will be responsible for compliance. The plain language guidance provided in ADS Chapter 501, and included in the ADS online and in person trainings also help to ensure that changes in Agency writing style are sustained.

VI. Agency's plain writing website

Information about the Plain Writing Act is available on USAID's public website. The USAID Open Government webpage (www.usaid.gov/open) includes: USAID points of contact responsible for implementing the Act and their email addresses; an overview of the most important documents and public information that should be written in plain language; and, a link to the Federal Plain Language Guidelines (plainlanguage.gov).

VII. Customer Satisfaction Evaluation after Experiencing Plain Writing Communications

USAID will measure the effectiveness of our use of Plain Writing in official Agency communication with the public, both by hard copy and through posting information on the Agency's website. Posted on the USAID Internet, is a request to the public to let us know if our documents or the pages on our Internet site are difficult to understand, or if we have not written a document in plain language. Agency Plain Language Coordinators will track any public inquiries and comments. In the next Compliance Report, due October 13, 2011, we will provide feedback as to the user experience in identifying any noticeable change in comprehension and improved level of service.