



Plain Writing Act Initial Implementation Report

July 2011

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Background

In October 2010, President Obama signed the Plain Writing Act, which requires federal government to take steps to ensure that all written communication is easy for the public to understand and use. The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) is committed to improving its communications with the public, and has begun work to ensure that it can fulfill this important new mandate. This report serves to outline the agency's initial plan to comply with the Act's requirements.

Senior Agency Official for Plain Writing

NCPC has designated the following senior agency official to oversee the agency's implementation of the Plain Writing Act and any related guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

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Chief Operating Officer

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Agency Documents Covered by the Act

The Plain Writing Act applies to any documents published by federal agencies that:

- are necessary to obtain a benefit or service from the federal government;
- provide information about a benefit or service from the federal government;
- explain how to comply with requirements that the federal government administers or enforces.

Given the broad definition, NCPC believes that the Plain Writing Act covers the majority of its documents, and intends to apply its requirements to all of its written communications with the public. These include:

- Staff recommendation reports to the Commission
- Submission guidelines for project applicants
- Any agency-produced plans, studies or reports
- Official letters to the public and or other government agencies
- Data-collection instruments (such as surveys, comment and feedback forms)
- Web and electronic publications (including the agency's website and e-newsletter)
- All other communications relating to agency activities and events, as appropriate

Implementation Strategy

NCPC's plan for successfully implementing the Plain Writing Act involves the following actions:

1. Communicate the Plain Writing Act, its requirements, and its importance in helping the agency provide better service to its customers to all employees.

2. Provide adequate training in plain writing techniques to all agency employees engaged in creating written communications intended for the public.
3. Direct supervisors to include an evaluation of plain writing in their standard review of written communications.
4. Designate and support an agency point person to provide plain writing assistance to staff when requested or required.
5. Conduct periodic reviews of agency documents to ensure compliance with the Plain Writing Act.
6. Create a plain writing section of the agency website, and encourage the public to provide feedback on the agency's performance in regards to plain writing.
7. Provide regular and ongoing opportunities for plain writing training.

Informing Staff of the Act's Requirements

All staff members were informed of the Plain Writing Act and its requirements during a briefing on June 7, 2011. An internal memorandum outlining the Act's requirements as they pertain to NCPC staff was also distributed to all employees on July 12, 2011. A plain writing section was also created on the agency's intranet with links to related materials.

Staff Training

As the majority of NCPC staff members develop documents intended for the public as a part of their responsibilities, the agency is providing training for all employees. To accomplish this, NCPC has scheduled two half-day on-site training sessions in July and August 2011 through the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN). These sessions will be recorded, and provided to existing and new employees for review and reference. In addition, the agency plans to provide supplemental plain writing training in its future training budgeting plans for staff members who write as a critical part of their job. For example, NCPC's designated staff point person attended a plain writing training boot camp in May 2011.

Ensuring Ongoing Compliance

To ensure that the agency's compliance with the Plain Writing Act is sustainable, NCPC plans to institute the following processes:

1. The Office of Public Affairs will conduct an in-depth review of selected agency publications each year. The results will be shared with agency staff, and help NCPC ensure that plain writing guidelines are being followed.
2. At least one plain writing related training will be offered each year for staff.

3. Supervisors will be encouraged to provide staff recognition for excellence and/or improvement in plain writing techniques.
4. Measure complaints received regarding the agency's written communications.

Plain Writing Webpage

NCPC has created a plain writing section on its open government webpage at www.ncpc.gov/open. This webpage allows the public to review the agency's plain writing implementation plans and compliance reports – including this report – and also provide comments to the agency on its plain writing implementation or specific documents.