

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

PLAIN WRITING IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Background

On October 13, 2010, President Obama signed the Plain Writing Act into law. OMB issued final guidance to implement the law on April 13, 2011.

The purpose of the Act is “*to improve the effectiveness and accountability of Federal agencies to the public by promoting clear Government communication that the public can understand and use.*” This law changes how the Federal Government will communicate with the public. DHS and its components promise to adhere to Plain Writing Act guidance and write information that is stakeholders can easily understand and use.

DHS Plain Writing Implementation Plan

A small group of Component representatives prepared this plan and submitted it to departmental leadership as a proposal for DHS-wide action. Each DHS Component then identified designated Plain Writing points of contact and that group provided feedback on the overarching program. Details concerning the plan’s implementation may be found in annual compliance reports.

A. Official Designations

1. The DHS Executive Secretary is the DHS senior designated official for Plain Writing and Gail Kaufman, deputy chief of staff for the Office of Policy, is the designated deputy senior official. Donald R. Swain is the Acting Executive Secretary, and in that capacity will oversee DHS Plain Writing initiatives and compliance until a new Executive Secretary is in place. Patrice Allen-Gifford, DHS associate executive secretary, assists the Executive Secretary and Ms. Kaufman as the departmental Plain Writing coordinator.
2. According to OMB guidance, the designated senior official should:
 - a. Be sufficiently senior with cross-cutting agency responsibilities
 - b. Oversee agency programs, personnel, technology, regulations or policy
 - c. Be involved in agency communications.

B. Roles and Responsibilities

1. Senior Designated Official
 - a. Periodically brief OMB and White House officials on DHS efforts
 - b. Distributes a kick-off memo communicating the requirements of the Act
 - c. Recruits DHS Component plain writing coordinators, who manage a cadre of their own trainers and engage in various plain writing training programs
 - d. Ensures Components participate in train-the-trainers session(s)
 - e. Chairs meetings of Component POCs that are used, in part, to select the best of before-and-after documents to be included in an annual compliance report
 - f. Prepares an annual compliance report

- g. Identifies mechanism(s) to obtain customer/user feedback on various public-facing written products and the Department's annual compliance report
 - h. Provides direction for Plain Language information on the Department's public website, www.dhs.gov and on the Open Government Initiative page, www.whitehouse.org/open
 - i. Provides official recognition for unique achievements related to plain writing
 - j. Manages public inquiries, which may include comments on agency implementation efforts and/or nominations of specific documents for revision
 - k. Oversees the work of an assigned departmental coordinator
2. Designated Deputy Senior Official
- a. Represents DHS with OMB and White House officials should the designated senior official be unavailable
 - b. Participates in and provides additional direction for the activities of the program
 - c. Performs other duties as requested by the designated senior official
3. Plain Language Coordinators (from all DHS Components)
- a. Recruit trainers from within their respective Component
 - b. Identify personnel to receive Plain Writing training and prioritize within their Component
 - c. Set goals for number of trainers and benchmarks for number of people to be trained
 - d. Report appropriate metrics to the designated senior official at quarterly intervals
 - e. Promote training course availability within their Component
 - f. Stay current on information on training opportunities and materials and share lessons learned with other coordinators'
 - g. Identify information for inclusion in the Department's annual compliance report
 - h. Attend meetings with other plain writing coordinators to discuss program challenges, progress, and help develop and improve documents
4. Trainers
- a. Conduct training courses
 - b. Keep records about how many people are trained and the frequency of classes; report numbers to their plain language coordinator
 - c. Participate in recurrent training
 - d. Provide evaluation forms to class so coordinators can monitor trainer performance and assess course effectiveness
- 5. Departmental Training Tasks**
- a. Identify Train the Trainer session availability and encourage attendance by component coordinators and trainers
 - b. Identify lead trainers – a baseline of three per Operating Component, one per HQ Component (this number may vary depending on number of employees/locations)
 - c. Confirm webinar capability for remote training

6. **Training Resources – Currently Available:**
 - a. PLAIN: free, half-day training
 - b. USCIS Plain Language Training
 - c. Science and Technology Plain Language training
 - d. Skill Soft Online Writing Courses (through CHCO)
 - e. GSA HowTo.Gov Plain Language Webinars

7. **Compliance Reporting**
 - a. Annual Compliance Reports will be published on the DHS and Open Government Websites.
 - b. Among other topics, the reports will highlight:
 - i. Number of Component POCs
 - ii. Meetings held and results
 - iii. Documents identified for revision and revisions accomplished
 - iv. Description of Plain Writing training courses available
 - v. Number of people who have taken plain writing training
 - vi. Training Resources available and planned
 - vii. Public website updates and summary of public feedback received

RESOURCES

Plain Writing Act of 2010

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ274/html/PLAW-111publ274.htm>

OMB Guidelines for Implementing the Plain Writing Act

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2011/m11-15.pdf>