

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUANCE SYSTEM

Mayor's Memorandum 2005-1
January 14, 2005

TO: All Agency and Department Heads and
Boards and Commissions

ORIGINATOR: 
Anthony A. Williams, Mayor

SUBJECT: Use of Plain Language in District Government Communications

In our efforts to improve customer service, we must also focus on our written communications. We must make certain that all documents produced by our agencies are written in plain language. Using plain language sends a clear message that we are serving the citizens of the District and are responsive to their needs. It also saves us time, effort, and money.

Each document that your agency produces must:

- Be written in clear, understandable language and avoid jargon or bureaucratese;
- Be logically organized so that material important to the reader comes first;
- Be written in the active voice;
- Use "you" and other pronouns;
- Use short sentences and sections;
- Use informative headings; and
- Use lists, charts, and tables where possible.

As we move forward with this initiative, I ask that all agencies do the following:

- By Tuesday, February 1, 2005 appoint a liaison to lead the plain language efforts for your agency. Send the name and contact information to Linda Ivey at the Center for Innovation and Reform (Linda.Ivey@dc.gov) and indicate the date the liaison will attend Plain Language Training. *Training sessions are scheduled from 9:00 a.m. - 12 noon on Friday, February 4, 2005, and on Friday, February 11, 2005, at 441 4th Street NW in room 1114. All agency liaisons must attend.*
- By Monday, May 2, 2005, use plain language in all new documents intended for the public that explain how to obtain a benefit or service or how to comply with a requirement that you administer or enforce. These documents may include letters, forms, notices, and instructions.

- By Tuesday, November 1, 2005, all non-rulemaking documents issued should, if feasible, incorporate plain language standards.

The Center for Innovation and Reform will serve as a resource to help you comply with this directive. You should also use customer feedback to guide your plain language efforts.

A Plain Language Clinic will also be offered in the afternoons following each training (February 4, 2005 and February 11, 2005 from 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.) Agency Plain Language Liaisons may bring actual documents to the clinic for CIR Team review and assistance.

For additional information or assistance needed, please contact Linda Ivey at 202/727-9070.