



Administrative Policy No. 2.11

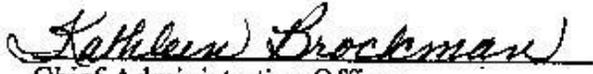
Subject: Plain Talk: Clear Written Communications

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Authorizing Sources: [Executive Order 05-03](#) "Plain Talk"
Gregoire [Management Framework](#)

Effective Date: May 15, 2008

Revised:

Approved By: 
Chief Administrative Officer

Sunset Review Date: May 15, 2010

Purpose

This policy requires Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) internal and external written communications be clear and easy to understand. It requires DSHS employees to continually improve the clarity of written communications by using Plain Talk principles and other best practices. The purpose of this policy is to help achieve better services and results for customers.

Background

Governor Chris Gregoire issued Executive Order 05-03 "Plain Talk" in 2005. It recognizes that clear and easy-to-understand communications are essential to good customer service. Clear written communications improves a customer's ability to understand how to access services and comply with requirements.

Scope

This policy applies to all DSHS employees who produce internal or external written communications.

More Guidance

- [DSHS Plain Talk Web Site](#)
- [Plain Talk Guidelines: Governor's Plain Talk Web Site](#)
- [The DSHS Style Guide for Clear Rule Writing](#)
- [Usability Resources](#)
- [DSHS Administrative Policy 2.07, Publications Policy](#)
- [DSHS Administrative Policy 7.21, Access to Services for Clients Who Are Limited English Proficient \(LEP\)](#)
- [DSHS Administrative Policy 11.02, Forms Management](#)
- [DSHS Administrative Policy 11.08, DSHS Administrative Policies](#)

Definitions

Additional Guidelines: Guidelines developed for specific types of writing, such as letters, instructions, manuals, forms, rules, policies, contracts, news releases, and Web pages.

Intended Audience: Targeted users of the information, such as the public, DSHS clients, vendors, stakeholders, service providers, partnering agencies, Tribal organizations, and DSHS employees.

Peer Reviews: Activities enabling an author to ask for feedback from other employees on draft documents.

Plain Talk Activities: Activities promoting use of Plain Talk principles, including meetings, training, workshops, writing projects, reports, Web site development, and inquiry response.

Plain Talk Principles: General guidelines for writing documents under Executive Order 05-03:

- [Understand customer needs](#)
- [Include only relevant information](#)
- [Use words your customers use](#)
- [Use "active voice"](#)
- [Use personal pronouns](#)
- [Keep sentences and paragraphs short](#)
- [Design clear pages](#)

Usability Tests: Activities enabling employees to ask for feedback about the clarity and usability of the document or Web site from a sample group of the targeted audience before it's final.

Written Communications: Documents including letters, forms, instructions, public notices, fact sheets, media releases, Web pages, brochures, flyers, booklets, manuals, rules, policies, reports, contracts, agreements, newsletters, and specific legal documents created by DSHS.

Policy Requirements

DSHS must provide clear and easy-to-understand written communications to:

1. Achieve better services and results for customers.
2. Improve access to DSHS services and information for intended audiences.
3. Increase compliance with DSHS requirements.
4. Increase DSHS efficiency by reducing the time spent answering questions.

A. Employees and Supervisors Responsibilities

1. DSHS employees must write and organize internal and external communications considering:
 - a. Their customers' needs.
 - b. Plain Talk principles under Executive Order 05-03.
 - c. Additional guidelines for specific types of documents and Web pages.
2. Supervisors must support their employees in writing clear, concise, and easy-to-understand information. This includes enabling employees, as needed, to:
 - a. Attend essential training related to clear [written communication](#).
 - b. Involve internal and external stakeholders in writing projects.
 - c. Conduct peer reviews.
 - d. Conduct usability tests.

B. Responsibilities of Plain Talk Lead and Coordinators

1. The Secretary of DSHS must appoint a Plain Talk Lead for the agency.

2. The DSHS Plain Talk Lead must:
 - a. Represent DSHS in statewide Plain Talk activities and provide input as the agency liaison.
 - b. Serve as the DSHS central contact for Plain Talk and provide expertise and technical assistance when requested.
 - c. Support and assist administrations' Plain Talk Coordinators and work with additional resource persons as needed.
 - d. Share resources and learning opportunities to develop employees' ability to improve written communications.
 - e. Make resources available and keep them current on the DSHS [Plain Talk](#) Web site.
 - f. Provide and distribute [Plain Talk Tips](#).
3. Each Assistant Secretary must appoint a Plain Talk Coordinator for his or her administration or major program(s) within the administration.
4. Each Plain Talk Coordinator must:
 - a. Represent the administration or program and provide input in agency-wide Plain Talk activities.
 - b. Serve as the administration or program's central contact for Plain Talk, and provide expertise and technical assistance to employees or project teams when requested.
 - c. Share resources and learning opportunities to develop employees' ability to improve written communications.
 - d. Review DSHS administrative policies initiated by their administration during the initial review process. This is required by [DSHS Administrative Policy 11.08](#).