

From: Mamie Bittner
Sent: Monday, June 20, 2011 11:29 AM
To: IMLS Staff
Subject: Directive on Plain Language

To All IMLS Staff:

On April 13, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued its final guidance on how agencies should implement the Plain Writing Act of 2010, which was signed into law October 13, 2010. Both the law and the OMB guidance are attached.

The law requires the federal government to write all new publications, forms, and publicly distributed documents in "plain writing," that is, in a "clear, concise, well-organized" manner. There are a number of requirements each agency must fulfill:

- Establish a process for complying with the law and designate one or more senior officials to oversee it.
- Communicate the requirements of the law to all staff.
- Train the staff to write in a clear, concise, well-organized manner.
- Create and maintain a plain writing section of the agency's website, which informs the public of the agency's compliance with the law, and provides a mechanism for feedback. One or more staff members must be designated to receive public input and respond to it.

The law sets the following deadlines for compliance with it and for reporting on progress:

- By July 13, 2011, the agency must designate the senior officials who will oversee the plan, establish the plain writing page of the website, and publish its plan for compliance with the law on that page.
- By October 13, 2011, all "covered documents"—essentially anything we put out for use by the public—must be in plain writing.
- By April 13, 2012, the agency must begin to publish annual reports on its compliance with the law. Again, this will go on the plain writing section of the website.

In addition to affirming these requirements of the law, OMB's guidance to agencies states that the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN) (www.plainlanguage.gov) is the official interagency working group designated to guide agencies on plain writing. OMB also instructs agencies to use the Federal Plain Language Guidelines provided at www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/bigdoc/TOC.cfm or create its own guidelines based on these. Beginning now, all IMLS staff who draft documents should consult these guidelines and other resources provided by PLAIN on its website.

The plain writing initiative is not just the law; it's a good idea. Having our documents written in a clear, concise, and well-organized manner will have benefits for all of our constituencies and the agency itself. I encourage all staff to read over the attached documents and to visit the PLAIN website. I will provide more information as our plan begins to come together.

Thank you.
Mamie