**Plain Language Report Card for: Social Security Administration (SSA)**

**Agency Home Page: http://www.ssa.gov/  
Grade: Basic requirement: C (65)   
 Other activities: C (118)**

**Part 1: How well does the agency comply with the basic requirements of the Act**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Criteria | Notes | Score |
| Agency plain language page URL | [www.ssa.gov/plain-language/](javascript:openWin('http://www.ssa.gov/plain-language/');) | **10** |
| Linked from the homepage? | They say it’s there, but you have to know where to look in a drop -down menu. | **0** |
| Do they name a senior official? | Robin Kaplan, Executive Secretary is listed on the PLAIN site; Tiffany Flick, Acting Exec Sec, is listed in the Compliance report | **10** |
| Do they list other contacts? | No | **0** |
| Is there contact info for the other contacts? |  | **0** |
| Do they have an implementation plan? | www.socialsecurity.gov/plain-language/PlainWritingActImplementationPlan.pdf | **10** |
| Do they have a 2012 compliance report? | www.socialsecurity.gov/plain-language/PlainWritingActComplianceReport2011.pdf | **10** |
| Does the website provide feedback mechanism? | Yes – e-mail of the contact office OPI.Net.Post@SSA.GOV | **10** |
| Are they using plain language in all new or substantially revised covered documents? | We encourage the use of plain language principles when developing all external communications. Annually, we require a senior manager in each Deputy Commissioner-level office to review a selection of its external communications and certify that the communications reviewed comply with the requirements of the Act. | **5** |
| How did they inform employees of requirement | A variety of ways spelled out in the SSA  Compliance report | **10** |

**Total score for basic compliance with Act: 65 (out of 100)**

**Part 2: Agency compliance with the Plain Writing Act – Supporting activities**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Criteria | Notes | Score |
| Implementation Plan |  | **23** |
| Does the plan list objectives | More a description of actions they are taking than an actual list of objectives – but it will achieve similar results. For example, they discuss using their almost 400 million notices and other correspondence to the public each year as an opportunity to effectively communicate and deliver clear understandable information about their programs and services. | **12** |
| Do they identify specific actions to implement objectives | For example they created a:   * Office of Notice Improvement to assess…improve and manage agency correspondence. * QUICC intranet website to help staff write plainly | **11** |
| Do they identify time frames | They list the time frames called for in the Act – nothing agency specific |  |
| Compliance Report |  | **25** |
| Does agency list types of covered docs? | Notices, publications, manuals and regs | **8** |
| Does plan discuss sustaining change? | Continue training, continue to improve policy instructions to avoid unnecessary complexity and redundancy | **7** |
| What docs are focus of plain language work? | Program operations manual, notices, publications, regulation preambles | **10** |
| Tracking documents created in or revised into pl? |  | **0** |
| Measurements |  | **5** |
| Testing pl quality of documents | Not exactly. They conducted a “Notice Probe” to determine if notices comply with our writing guidelines. And a “Special Notice Option Survey” to measure satisfaction of special notice format | **5** |
| Testing effectiveness of documents? |  | **0** |
| Is agency measuring effectiveness of program? |  | **0** |
| What else, if anything does agency measure |  | **0** |
| Other Supporting Info |  | **65** |
| Do they list contact info for the lead official on the pl page? | No | **0** |
| What categories of employees must take training? | Attorneys, staff in the office of legislation and congressional affairs, Office of Disability staff | **9** |
| How long is the training | mandatory plain language training. The training is a two-part video that is approximately 50 minutes long and also includes exercises that employees complete at their own pace. Part 1 of our training Principles of Plain Language defines plains language, provides the learner with plain language techniques, and provides examples of plain language writing and part 2 covers the use of pronouns, active voice, jargon, and acronyms and encourages learners to use simple words when writing. | **3** |
| How is training delivered? | training videos and training courses Electronic through internal video-on-demand library and Learning Management System. | **5** |
| Who have they gotten trained so far? | Says “all employees competed plain language training in July 2011”  giving them only 5 because 50 minutes is hardly sufficient. | **5** |
| Did they respond to our email? | Yes | **10** |
| Did they provide all requested info? | Yes | **10** |
| Did they provide sample docs? | Yes | **10** |
| How well did docs score | 1. POM Bog index 89 poor  Ave sentence 19 good  Passive 0 excellent  2. preamble  79 poor  15 excellent  4 excellent  3. how to apply online  34 good  15 excellent  6 excellent | **13** |

**Total score for supporting activities 118 (out of 200)**

**Sent June 18 to Dana.Pritchett@ssa.gov**

Greetings

The Center for Plain Language is doing a survey of agencies' compliance with the Plain Writing Act. Based on your website and your two reports, SSA seems to be doing a better job than many other agencies. I've gotten most of the information I need from the materials available on-line, but I'm hoping you can answer a few questions for me.

Your 2011 Implementation Report mentions writing contests to encourage staff to write better letters. Can you send me a sample of one of the winners?

This report also includes your plain language e-mail address. Have you received any comments from the public? If yes, can you send me a sample?

The 2012 Compliance Report, starting on page 2, states that all employees completed plain language training in July 2011. Can you describe this training to me? Is it all on-line? How long is it? Can you tell me how you verified that all employees took it?

This report also mentions that you apply plain language guidelines when writing the preambles to regulations. Can you send me a sample?

General questions

One question we are using to evaluate all federal departments is: “Are you using plain language in all new or substantially revised covered documents?” How would you answer that question?

Finally, would you send me 1 or 2 other documents that you consider to be in plain language? Maybe one "easy" one (a notice or brochure, for example) and another one that’s harder – maybe a section of the POMS.

Or you could just point me to them on the web.