

Personal Statements from Nominees to the Center for Plain Language Board of Directors 2020 Election

Paul Aterman

Chairperson, Social Security Tribunal of Canada (the Tribunal)

I am the chief adjudicator of a federal administrative tribunal. We adjudicate appeals that arise when the Government of Canada denies someone entitlement to a disability pension, employment insurance or old age security benefits. Canada is a bilingual country, so we provide our services in English and French. Our work is like that of U.S. administrative law judges.

While our appellants reflect the cultural and socio-economic diversity of Canada, many are among the most vulnerable in our society. They include people with disabilities, seniors and the unemployed. Some do not have secondary or post-secondary education. Some speak neither English nor French as their first language. Most appellants represent themselves at our hearings.

As part of the Tribunal's broader commitment to access to justice, I am leading a transformation in how we communicate with appellants. The Tribunal is shifting to plain language in our forms and letters. We are also trying to write simple and clear decisions when we adjudicate cases.

These are the steps I have taken to change how we communicate:

- Hiring a plain language expert to conduct a [readability assessment](#) for the Tribunal.
- Adopting a 'point-first' writing structure and shortening the length of decisions.
- Developing a plain-language training program for decision-makers. It includes training delivered by former Supreme Court of Canada judges.

I am also overseeing the development of an evaluation framework for our plain language initiatives. Our goal is to assess and report publicly on our progress in moving toward simpler communication.

The Tribunal's efforts to date are outlined in our [2019 Progress Report](#).

Other adjudicative tribunals in Canada share our interest in plain language, whether they work in English or French, or both languages. If elected to the Board, I would work to expand the base of organisations in the Canadian justice sector that are committed to simple communication.

Rosa Margarita Galan Velez (“RoMa”)

Head, Academic Language Department

Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM)

I am Dr. Rosa Margarita Galán Vélez, RoMa. My doctorate is in Education with a specialty in Evaluation. Since 1998, I have been a full time professor and Head of the Language Department at ITAM, one of Mexico’s best universities. We have pursued innovative strategies to develop specifically tailored language-skill training for our 14 undergraduate programs, in which plain language is embedded.

I am member of the *International Plain Language Federation*, rep of *Clarity* in Mexico and member of *Plain*.

I co-founded and presided over the Plain Language Network Group at the beginning of the plain language initiative in Mexico (*lenguaje ciudadano*) in 2004. We organized the Clarity 2008 conference at ITAM and the Lenguaje Ciudadano Awards.

Although Lenguaje Ciudadano, as such, came to an end, it is still a reference point in Spanish-speaking countries. Therefore, I am still in constant contact with people fostering plain language in Mexico, Spain and other Latin American countries.

What could I provide to the Center for Plain Language?

- 16 years of experience promoting plain language in challenging institutional and educational environments.
- A comprehensive intercultural and interdisciplinary perspective of plain language.
- First-hand knowledge of the diversity of needs and challenges that a variety of communities face.
- Awareness of the difficult task of unifying, while also respecting, the particularities of different disciplines and cultures.
- Experience in the evaluation and teaching of academic and professional communication in Spanish.
- A wide network of contacts in Mexico and abroad.
- The support of a reliable high education institution such as ITAM.
- Commitment to reinforce the participation of Mexico in the Clear Mark Awards.
- A way to strengthen the influence of the Center for Plain Language in Spanish Speaking countries.
- Enthusiasm, support, strategy.

Casey Mank

Co-founder & Principal, Bold Type LLC

I'm Casey Mank, the Co-Founder of Bold Type LLC, a women-owned consulting firm based in Washington, DC. After working in university writing centers and traditional classrooms, I co-founded Bold Type LLC with fellow Georgetown Alum, English major, and Center member Grace Aldridge Foster. At Bold Type, we design training programs for professionals from communications firms, corporations, and nonprofits, and a Plain Language approach to writing informs all that we do. In addition to helping professionals with their workplace writing, I currently teach research writing at Georgetown's School of Nursing and Health Studies. As an educator and a consultant, I'm proud to have helped thousands of writers get to the point and reach their audiences with greater impact.

Working with the Center for Plain Language is a big part of my mission to demystify the writing process and declutter the written content my students and clients produce. I've been a member of the Center for 3 years and have served as a team lead during judging for the Federal Report Card and ClearMark Awards. This year, I'm helping to lead judging activities for the ClearMarks (you may have recently received an email from me requesting your help!).

I see the need for Plain Language nearly everywhere in daily life—but especially in the distress with which people face their most important healthcare, legal, and financial documents. Since becoming involved with the Center, I've found many opportunities to recommend a Plain Language approach on client projects and educate professionals about the Plain Language Guidelines. I have also brought Plain Language into my writing classrooms, and I'm interested in further exploring the many applications of Plain Language to Higher Ed. I'm running for the board this year because I hope to take my volunteer involvement with the Center further. If elected, I'll look forward to supporting the efforts of our working board and learning from the current board members.

Stacy Martin

Content Strategist, Enterprise Content Strategy, Blue Cross

When I started my career as a young scientist, I wanted to help sick people in Africa. I took a job working with Emory University and the Centers for Disease Control processing tissue samples from people suffering from a terrible skin ulcer disease in Ghana. I saw the cost of mortality vs the cost of morbidity. I came to understand that it was a chronic condition that was costing the community, not epidemic loss of life.

Today I work at Blue Cross NC. I am a content strategist and have adopted our language simplification program. I spend my time consulting with communicators across the company on ways to remove the medical jargon, increase the white space, and shorten their sentences. This year I am a Blue Cross NC Foundation Fellow and will spend time in communities fighting to improve their health. While I might not be administering vaccinations, I strongly believe that the more we understand about our health and health care, the healthier we can be.

I want to help. As a member of the Center for Plain Language Board, I will have the chance to support a very important initiative, network with like-minded professionals, and connect my learnings to the company I work for and overall professional network. Simple is necessary, but not always easy.

