



STATE OF WASHINGTON
— OFFICE OF GOVERNOR JAY INSLEE —

EXECUTIVE ORDER 23-02

PLAIN LANGUAGE

(Superseding Executive Order 05-03)

WHEREAS, Washington state government provides Washingtonians with crucial information they need to make decisions about their lives, businesses, and communities; and

WHEREAS, Washington’s population is becoming increasingly diverse based on 2020 U.S. Census metrics, and there’s an increase in multilingual English learners in Washington public schools who represent more than 230 languages; and

WHEREAS, Washington is a pro-equity, anti-racist state dedicated to ensuring equitable access to information and fostering systems of inclusion and belonging. These principles help people and businesses access services, participate in procurement opportunities, and learn about and participate in state government; and

WHEREAS, it is the responsibility of state employees – not individual Washingtonians – to ensure public information is accessible and easy to understand; and

WHEREAS, plain language writing and design ensures information is easy to translate and supports accessibility efforts for people who use screen readers, captioning tools, or other accessibility and language access tools; and

WHEREAS, plain language supports an efficient and positive customer experience that minimizes confusion and errors, improves compliance with agency regulations, lowers the number of client complaints or disputes, and demonstrates respect for the person and their time; and

WHEREAS, plain languages make information easier for everyone to understand, and research shows this is especially true for people who come from a vulnerable or marginalized community; and

WHEREAS, Washington strives to meet and exceed all state and federal laws regarding accessibility and language access;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Jay Inslee, governor of the state of Washington, order that all executive cabinet and small cabinet agencies create and adopt a plain language policy that identifies how the agency will incorporate or strengthen plain language writing and design principles and practices.

Because the responsibility to use plain language falls to people within every agency, the Department of Enterprise Services will offer an expanded plain language curriculum for state employees. This will be available no later than June 30, 2024.

At a minimum, plain language policies should include the following:

- The types of documents or content subject to the policy. Plain language writing and design principles should apply to most public-facing documents. Each program or agency division should prioritize, at a minimum, the 10 documents or forms most viewed online or used in interactions with the public. These could include but are not limited to legislative reports, website content, letter and correspondence templates, forms and applications, publications, news releases, social media, public information materials, and employment recruitment notices.
- A plan for taking inventory of existing public information and documents that need to be reworked, with a priority on forms or public information that directly affect a person's ability to access services or programs.
- A description or list of which employees must take DES plain language training.
- A process or procedure for reviewing or auditing content on a biannual basis to ensure required documents and content follow plain language writing and design principles.
- A process or procedure for incorporating plain language into documents that are technical or legal in nature.

Agencies should adopt their plain language policies no later than June 30, 2024.

I invite other statewide elected officials, institutions of higher education, agencies of the judiciary, agencies of the Legislature, and other boards and commissions to follow the provisions of this Executive Order.

This executive order rescinds and supersedes Executive Order 05-03, and it takes effect immediately.

