



Text File

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Committee: Committee on Finance and Law

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Resolution calling on the City of Pittsburgh to adopt the Principles of Plain Language, and a Graphic Standard
WHEREAS, government documents are often written in a way that is confusing and unclear, and

WHEREAS, clearly written documents aid transparency, public participation, and collaboration by enabling the public to fully understand the law, announcements, and procedures; and

WHEREAS, newspapers typically write at an 8th grade level to increase readability and understanding of complex issues; and

WHEREAS, the federal government enacted the Plain Writing Act of 2010 which requires all Federal agencies to use "Plain Language" in their written communications with the public; and

WHEREAS, Plain Language legislation will increase the public's participation in the democratic process by opening the doors to a better understanding of the laws, announcements, and procedures being made by City government; and

WHEREAS, a uniform organizational identity will make City documents more easily recognizable and readable.

DEFINITIONS.

"Plain Language" means writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience. Best practices include:

- 1) being clear and concise, including only important and directly relevant information
- 2) using simple language, written for an 8th grade audience
- 3) defining the purpose of the document and the application or submission process
- 4) understanding and writing for the audience, taking into consideration their needs and presumed knowledge about the topic
- 5) using the active voice
- 6) keeping sentences and paragraphs short
- 7) organizing material in a logical order

- 8) designing the document with headings, space, and bulleted lists, and other features to make information easy to find
- 9) making any submission process clear, intuitive, and as easy as possible, with the option to submit documents through online forms

“**The Public**” refers to any individual or organization that has an interest in the affairs of the City of Pittsburgh.

“**Department**” means any City of Pittsburgh department, office, administrative unit, commission, board, advisory committee, or division, including City Council.

“**Documents**” refers to any paper or electronic materials, web pages, business cards, letterhead, e-mail signatures and others that:

- 1) are necessary for obtaining any Department benefit or service
- 2) are necessary for paying any Department fees, fines, or taxes
- 3) explain to the public how to comply with a law or regulation enforced by the the City
- 4) provide notice to the public about public meetings
- 5) provide instruction to City employees regarding workplace policies, employment agreements, wages, or benefits
- 6) identify City employees and programs
- 7) describe the contents of a resolution or ordinance

“**Employee**” refers to any person hired on a full or part-time basis to work for the City of Pittsburgh.

“**Graphic Standard**” refers to a set of guidelines outlining an organizational identity system, and its acceptable uses. The graphic standard should include official:

1. Logos and Seals
2. Font families
3. Color codes and palettes
4. Graphic elements
5. Design templates for all document types

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Council of the City of Pittsburgh as follows:

1. A Plain Language Team made up of the City’s Chief Administration Officer, Policy Director, Director of the Department of Innovation and Performance, **Director of Operations, the City**

Communications manager, City Solicitor and the City Council bill sponsor shall oversee the creation of a graphic standard manual **and the implementation of plain language principles** for all City documents.

2. In consultation with the Plain Language Team, the Department of Personnel and Civil Service shall develop informational plain language learning materials **and curriculum** to be provided to all new and ~~existing~~ **current** City employees.
3. The Department of Innovation and Performance shall post the completed graphic standard manual to the website, to be available for all City employees.
4. All City employees shall follow the graphic standard manual **and plain language principles** when writing or revising documents.