Why should elections officials use plain language?

Plain language increases access

Most elections notices are written at or above the college level. But do voters understand them? Research tells us that the majority of them do not. To get more voters to read and understand your election materials, follow these basic guidelines:

- Match the reading grade level to the average voter's reading proficiency (5th-6th grade),

- Use familiar words and phrasings (if specialized terms must be used, they are explained),

- Avoid archaic and noun-heavy phrasings (for example: Pollworker Recruitment Information), and

- Use active voice and direct address.

Plain language saves money

There are collateral benefits to adapting to plain language, too: Printing, paper, and translation costs are lowered because you will have fewer words and fewer pages. Have a look at this before and after sample:

Text from the Current NVRA

If You Were Given this Application in a State Agency or Public Office

If you have been given this application in a State agency or public office, it is your choice to use the application. If you decide to use this application to register to vote, you can fill it out and leave it with the State agency or public office. The application will be submitted for you. Or, you can take it with you to mail to the address listed under your State in the State Instructions. You also may take it with you to deliver in person to your local voter registration office. Note: The name and location of the State agency or public office where you received the application will remain confidential. It will not appear on your application. Also, if you decide not to use this application to register to vote, that decision will remain confidential. It will not affect the service you receive from the agency or office.

163 words, 8.8 grade level

After Plain Language (DRAFT)

Do I have to register to vote?

No. Registering to vote is a personal decision. And your decision will not affect the services you get from any agency.

If you want to register, fill out the application and:

- Give it back to the office that gave it to you, or

- Mail it to the address listed for your state in the State Instructions, or

- Take it to your local voter registration office.

The name and location of the office where you got the application will not be on your application.

102 words, 5.6 grade level

Plain language saves time

Using plain language templates is easy! They are already at the right grade level, and have most of the information you need. Just use Adobe Acrobat to localize the information for your county. For sample templates, visit our library at
www.transcend.net/library/elections.html

Because Words Matter
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