

presenting on our webinar today, CCD entered into an agreement with Reid in the summer and their contract with CCD has a scope of work that starts some of the action items outlined in CCD's policy.

Starting with today. Obviously, Reid is hosting a training for all of CCD about plain language which is great and a good start to the work. Reid will be helping CCD develop a plain language version of some CCD materials, including our mission statement.

The task force mission statements, major testimony or letters and statements, and sample action orders. Basically, with Reid's work and support, we will be able to have...

Intellectual disabilities or people who otherwise benefit from plain language which is a really important factor for us in hiring Reid. We thought that was very important to making sure the work was right.

And also, developing plain language glossary of terms that are often used in the work that CCD does. So, those things will start rolling out but we are starting with the training today to make sure CCD knows what plain language is and why it is important.

One technical note before introduce Reid Caplan and turn it over to them, today's training is being recorded. If people are late or cannot make any of it, we will circulate the recording link and CCD-wide so people can listen to it and benefit from it after the fact.

Sorry, before I introduce Reid, I have not looked at the participant list but I do not know if Bob, Liz, or anyone who is on that wants to quickly say anything because I want to give huge credit to anyone in this place. Looking through to see if anybody is on.

SPEAKER:

I am. This is Liz. I would just challenge you that this isn't a project, this is a way of – a new way of CCD doing things or right things, a project to me sounds like more like a project that you're working on for work, so, that's my only comment. Great job.

LAURA WEIDNER:

Really great point, Liz. I will shift my wording choice there. Thank you very much for that.

With that I will introduce Reid Caplan. A few things – they are the founder of Accessible Academia which make sure that the voices of people with disabilities get heard in research that impacts their lives.

The organization does a few things, writing plain language, teaching others how to write research and policy in plain language and easy read, and showing others how to centre the voices of disabled people and their research through workshops, trainings, and writings.

Reid is also a PhD student in social policy. They previously served as the associate Director of advocacy and development at the Autistic Self Advocacy Network which is a CCD number, nice connection there. I will turn it over to you.

Thanks so much for doing this today.

REID CAPLAN:

Of course, thank you so much for having me and the introduction. I'm excited to be here and to share the things I picked up with you all.

A little bit more about me as will set. I briefly worked for the Autistic Self Advocacy Network where I helped, but the protocol used for us to write in plain language and easy read and I have taken that with me into Accessible Academia.

So, for the agenda, I have a little bit in the chat and I will go into the nuts and bolts of what plain language is and how to do it and we will have a little bit of a break, and go into a workshop session.

I have a passage from CCD for us to try to make a little bit more plain language and likely there will be time, if there is time we can workshop if you have mission statements or other passages or things you are thinking about, or questions that you have.

So, to start, so, yeah, starting with a definition of what is plain language. I'm sure many of you have heard of plain language. To define it plainly – it is a way of writing and it uses smaller words and shorter sentences to help people understand the main ideas more clearly.

So, plain language was originally and gained traction in Australia and the UK among self advocates with intellectual and developmental disabilities and within the US, ASAN has been a big pioneer in getting used more in disability policy and hoping now to expand that.

When we think about plain language, the first thing people think of is reading level and I like to say six to eighth grade is what people should aim for. If you can get – much lower it's a great exercise and relates to easy read because easy read, you need to do to that third or fifth grade reading level.

I saw that somebody had asked what the difference is between plain language and easy read. That is the one primary difference is that you are going for a slightly lower reading level.

Also, there is generally an image next to each sentence in order to give a little bit more of an illustration to what is going on that can help understanding for people who may not be able to understand all of the words.

Easy read, we generally have less sentences per page and a lot more space per page versus plain language.

The main thing to know with plain language is the really is not a right way to do it. We can give you a lot of guidelines, but I know my process is different from other people's processes and depending on your audience, there are certain things that will work better than others.

It is always a work in progress and if you find something was working for me and it was not working for you, or the people you are writing for by all means...

So, why should you write in plain language? Really thinking about accessibility. And the method when we think about is generally that we write for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. That is not the only population that plain language is helpful for.

Plain language helps everyone. It can help people who are learning English and it really helps most adults in the United States because studies have found that more than half of US adults do not have a reading level of above eighth-grade and since plain language is aiming for that sixth to eighth grade reading level, it is right to make resources that everyone can understand.

And for what we are doing, a lot of us in disability advocacy research, policy, and law, if more people understand what you are doing, that's a larger impact you are going to have for your advocacy.

The last point that I have here is there was something passed in 2010 called the Plain Writing Act and mandated federal executive agencies to write public facing documents in plain language.

Whether or not this happens depends on the actual office. There are some offices that are trying to do work on this. I really think that all disability organizations should really be leading by example.

So, the most important things to know about plain language. Plain language can be done. I've seen a lot of resistance from people who think that the subject matter they are talking about is just too complex, that there isn't a way to break it down.

But I can say that myself and folks at ASAN and folks in the UK and Australia have talked about all kinds of topics, and topics that I think even people in high school and college might not necessarily think they can learn about, like things like how our healthcare system works in Medicaid and community-based services, and employment first and housing.

So really, just challenging that assertion I think is the first thing you should be doing, both for yourself, if it's something you've thought, and for other people if they think it can't be done.

The second thing is that plain language resources should have the same information as non-plain language resources. So obviously, things are going to be worded differently, things might be in a different order, but you shouldn't be trying to cut content that you would include in other versions.

So, you might have to get creative figuring out ways to maybe visualize or reword statistics. But, for equitable access, it should always be the same information. And lastly, think about writing from your readers point of view.

So, for a lot of people who don't have any background in policy going into housing for disabled people there might be more background that they need, just to know about what the public housing system is like, things of that nature. So, you might need to move backwards to give background information in

places where, if you were writing for an audience that was very familiar with policy, you might just think, we don't even need to write that because of one would know it.

So as your writing you can ask yourself reach sentence or paragraph. I think about "why" and "so what", being similar trying to get down to where the main idea is. And then going down to "how does this affect me?". If you're communicating all this information you need to do it in a way that people are going to be able to understand and use.

So again, that might be different for your target audience versus the people in your office, or the people you are interacting with everyday. And also, if anyone has questions at any time feel free to stop me or put them in the chat.

So, to start, with any good project I think having an outline is a good first step. So, I've put some questions here to think about as your starting. So, number one most important, what's the main idea of the piece you are trying to communicate? And what questions do you want your reader to have answered by the time you're finished reading? Who's your audience? As I mentioned that will affect what background information is important to share, and when you have a lot of background information, you have to think also about how you will split up your ideas.

Something that also comes up a lot in plain language is that things can get very long, so when you are adding background information in order to give that context, sometimes it can turn into a length where it could be another document or two in itself.

Maybe you need to think about, do you need to have multiple documents? Where's the best place to have page breaks, because that's also a tool for accessibility is giving people space, physically, on the page you're on your webpage to digest their ideas and move on.

And then lastly, what terms need to be defined? Really important part of plain language and easy read work is having a glossary, or definitions of some kind. Because again, there's a lot of words that we assume that everyone knows, and not everyone might know.

And also, having the most common and important terms that you are using in a very clear place and very set aside from everything else is a good way for people to be able to refer back to them and to understand what's going on.

So, this is an example of a very quick outline that I made. And so, something I find helpful is having different headings for the outline being phrased as questions. So, for example, if your topic is affordable housing, your thinking about what your main idea is? It's probably going to be what is affordable housing, if it's a general document.

If it's more specific document might be how someone can get into a formal housing or exactly what that system is like, but if you're just looking generally, some ideas and subheadings, if someone had never encountered the term before, they might ask, what does affordable mean? Because that is a term that maybe not everyone has seen. Who makes affordable housing? Who can get affordable

housing?

So moving on to some things to avoid when you're writing in plain language and easy read, this gets too long because it's almost easier to make a list of things you shouldn't do, and whatever's leftists what you can write, but I can give you tips for what you can do after the slide.

So the main thing to avoid with plain language and easy read is length. Things get the most inaccessible when they get very long. So I like to say to try not to take more than one to one and 1/2 lines in a standard word document.

Again, for easy read you probably want to keep it to about one line, and so you can be little more flexible with plain language. Also, long words and jargon. So, there's a lot of that in the disability policy field, and you sort of have to find that balance between choosing words you are going to define, so that you don't have a glossary that's so long that people just get confused, or coming up with words that mean basically the same thing.

And again, this is a very individual choice, because within the disability community there are some words that are long, but are really important, and some people might think it's more important to keep those words, versus coming up with a different way to say them.

For example, in my work some people prefer to have the word "independence" defined as a glossary term, and other people prefer to substitute independence for something similar like the freedom to make choices, if that's what's meant by independence, or living in your own place, because sometimes that's what people mean by independence, so that's also something important to note for words that can have multiple meanings, making sure that everyone is on the same page about what that definition is, and sometimes making it explicit within your text.

You can even say sometimes people might use the word independence to be living on your own, but of the people use the word independence to mean having the freedom to make your own decisions.

Another thing to avoid is metaphors or other figures of speech. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities can have a difficult time understanding sarcasm, so that doesn't mean you can't use it if you want to take the time to explain what the figure of speech means, because there are times where that imagery is helpful or important to the description. But if you find that adding that makes it too complicated, then it's better to just take it out.

For numbered lists, the reason that I try to avoid these is because if the list is too long, it can make people confused about what was number one again? What was the point? So, I only use numbered lists if the order is important, otherwise I like to use bullet points.

But again, bullet points can be helpful for things like differentiating the list, but if the list is very long I would think about ways to shorten it or otherwise split it up. Let's see...

Someone asked a question about "would I use long words that are commonly used in the world for the subject? The reader could then match what they read other readings or information." Yes, this is another thing where it is sort of up to the person and up to the community what they find makes it the most clear, but yes I do tend to air on the side of, if a word comes up very often in a setting, defining that word and letting people know that they will see it pretty often if they are doing, let's say research or policy work around that topic.

But, yeah, these are all very individual decisions, and I appreciate the questions. And someone else asked, should all government papers and content be available in easy read? I think all government papers aim for 12th grade or ninth grade, I think that's true, I think the governmental plain language standards may not be my own standards, I do personally think that everyone should be trying to have things like landing pages, major documents in plain language as a default, then having more technical versions and easy read versions available because having technical versions of things is also needed for some people.

So when I say to write things in plain language, I'm not saying just get rid of those entirely either, so I hope that answers the question. Moving on to other things to avoid. I try to avoid words like "this", "they", or "it" if it's not clear exactly what you're talking about, it may be better to just restate the subject. Liz says "do you ever have people say that plain language takes a lot of time, and we don't have time because there are deadlines?"

Yes, there are a lot of excuses people will make to not use plain language and say it's not something we know how to do, they'll say it'll take a lot more time, will say it'll take a lot more money, and I think it's up to us to really push back against that, because we need to be challenging people's values about this and saying that if you're writing this information and you want people to read and understand it, it needs to be in plain language, and writing information about people with disabilities the need to write it in a way that people with disabilities can understand. So thank you for bringing that up, Liz.

Lastly, on things to avoid, want to try to avoid passive voice. It's still hard for me to sum up in one sentence exactly what passive voice means, because I'm not great at grammar, but it's the idea of like, if something is being done to a subject, because of how it is worded that can be a little unclear.

So if you can make things more direct by using active voice and you should try to. I have an example there, an active force example would be "you want to avoid using passive voice in your writing" the passive version of that would be "when writing, passive voice should be avoided".

If you see the word "was", "is" or "be" before the verb, that means it's usually passive.

One second. I see a couple of more questions. Someone asks: what would you say to people who say that you do not have the expertise to do this? Is plain language a skill or something that needs to be sent out to experts?

A little bit of both, I would say. I would say making an effort is better than nothing. There might be times where you put out something in plain language and people call you out and say, "This is not

plain language," or, "You could have done better for them."

That means they are engaging with what you are writing and they care. You should take that as a challenge that you should keep trying and should not give up on that.

At the same time, I do very much believe in "Nothing about us without us" and the idea that people with disabilities that impact their ability to read and process things and need plain language and easy read for access, should be centred in this work and be involved.

Whether that is helping to write or review it. And I will talk more about that. I will challenge the idea that you need to be some plain language expert to start writing this.

I do not think there is many plain language experts because this is still relatively new of a field and people are starting to learn the importance of it.

If you are waiting around to get experts you might be waiting for a while. (Laughs) I think everyone has the opportunity to learn and everyone should take that and run with it if they can.

LAURA WEIDNER:

I'm so sorry to interject, this is Laura. The chat function, while it's helpful for some can be complicated for others using screen readers.

Folks putting questions in the chat, if he could start privately messaging them to me, Laura, or Charles would be happy to take some to one of the other cohosts. We can probably get them and read them aloud and hopefully not continue interrupting people who are trying to pay attention. Thanks!

REID CAPLAN:

Thank you for finding that and taking care of that. One of the questions in the chat was using a (Indiscernible) to highlight a point in a narrative.

It depends on the context and there are times where that can be helpful. For example, sometimes we will use a text box to remind people of a definition that we have already defined. It has been a while since we have used the term.

We do not necessarily want that in the main body of the text but we want people to look at and be reminded. It can also become intrusive if the visual formatting is in the way that it interferes with the text too much.

So, I guess what I'm saying is use them pretty sparingly. And try and keep what you can and the bulk of the text, if possible.

OK. We have talked quite a bit about things not to do. Let's talk a little about things you can do.

So, as I mentioned, defining your key terms. For formatting, the way I tend to do this is by bolding the

terms depending on if for whatever formatting reasons if you are on a website and bolding is already used somewhere else, you can use underlining or some other way of emphasis as long as it is standardized.

The one thing I would not do is make it a different colour because some people cannot see certain colours or have problems with contrast.

I would also recommend if you have longer sentences, looking at how you can split them into shorter sentences. (Laughs) And again, using bulleted lists if you have a list of things and only using numbering if the order is important.

And once you are done with your first draft, you should check the reading level of your document. I have put a few websites that I have used before for checking readability.

It can be a little bit complicated because there are all sorts of different scores that people have come up with to grade reading level.

And so, you can put your work into one of the checkers and it can give you a very different score from one versus the other.

So, Readable is a paid service. It does compare many different reading checkers at once. So, I find averaging those out is more accurate than trying to look at just one.

The other thing that is important when you are looking at the reading level of your document is taking out those terms that have been defined in the text. If they are very long and complicated terms, when you put them in the reading level checker they are going to say it is a very high reading level, even though anyone reading that document would understand what it means.

So, the same thing with certain words that are long but are well known to your audience and you know they are well-known to your audience.

For example, the word disability in itself can flag very long sometimes or the word self-advocate. If you are working with self advocates and know that word is easily recognizable, switching it out for an easier word in the reading checker is fine.

You can sort of do defined function within your document and find and replace every instance of one word, with another word.

I like to choose fruits, or animals. Any short word is fine.

And again, for plain language, you are aiming for closer to sixth grade. For easy read, you are aiming closer to third grade.

Something else to do that makes things a bit clearer is to use examples instead of having ideas being

more abstract. I will give an example here to kind of illustrate what I mean.

So, hypothetical scenario can be a little bit difficult for people to grasp and apply to their own life.

So, we have found that having an example person can be helpful to be able to apply that information.

In this example, the original text might be: if you needed to get a COVID vaccination, you can call your local pharmacy, but they may not have appointments available that day.

I've had people read examples like that and be like, "Am I you?" (Laughs) "Do you mean my actual pharmacy?" In order to change that, you change it to John, the imaginary person needs the vaccine and calls the pharmacy to make the appointment.

The pharmacy did not have any appointments left that day. That way, the person reading it knows it is not an actual person this has happened to. But this is an example of something that could happen in everyday life.

So, it depends on the situation. But I would imagine that many of you might be... when thinking about plain language, thinking more about translating documents that you already have. Or that you have already written in the language that you currently use.

And now are thinking about putting into plain language. It is a little bit different of a process with work that has already been written versus writing something from scratch.

Again, remember that any plain language translation has to have the same content as the original document. If you are comparing the two, you should not be noticing large parts that have been left out.

But that doesn't mean that things need to stay in the exact same order that they were. It may be that, for example, sometimes technical writing starts with a lot of, like, statistics to very quickly illustrate a problem.

Maybe that is not accessible to the audience that you are trying to write for. Having an intro that says what the issue is, and going into a more accessible way of explaining those statistics might be a better solution to that.

On the topic of statistics, we have found that it is easier to say, like, "X number of people". Half of the people in this situation, or 4/5 instead of percentages.

Some people can have difficulty understanding what percentages are. And airing on the side of smaller numbers, for example, versus bigger numbers with the idea of length.

Defining versus replacing words. I started talking about this earlier and depending on the context there will be words important for you to keep but might still be long words.

And there are some times where if you do replace a word, you will end up with a longer sentence. For example, like I said earlier, replacing the word independence with living on your own.

That does make the sentence longer. To someone reading, "Living on your own" would be clearer than the word independence.

I would recommend a starting with a new outline to find the gaps, again, feedback around information that people might be missing if they did not come in with that policy background.

And then as I say summarize as a last resort. Again, I do not think it is an excuse to say that you do not have the time or the funding.

In the case where you absolutely cannot do anything else, doing a – what is the theme of this? It is not something I recommend.

It's a better than nothing kind of deal. But, yeah.

This slide is about involving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in your plain language work. The main way I have done that in the past is focus groups. That is not the only way you can do it.

But because language is very complicated, and people can have different understandings, I do find it helpful to have more than one person reviewing every document and taking multiple passes, taking a break and coming back.

The best way that we have found to get as much information as possible in a short amount of time that is really fruitful, is doing this focus group. So, I will talk a little bit about what that entails.

But first, again, we have these focus groups of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are interested in reviewing any plain language or easy read work for accessibility.

You can look at people first chapters, affiliates of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, protection and advocacy organizations, developmental and Disability Council's, Centers for Independent Living. You can find people who might be interested.

I recommend if you are having a large group, that you do not have more than 10 participants. It can be a little bit chaotic at that point and it might take too much time.

And I find six to be a pretty good number because sometimes if you have less than that, it can be easy for one person to dominate the conversation and others to hang back.

I find six is a good number for balancing people talking. Having two facilitators, including one that knows the participants already, if you can, it is really important.

It is a little strange to have someone you do not know come in and be asking you to review this document and a lot of people with disabilities are told they cannot really give criticism, or feedback on things.

Having someone familiar to let them sort of feel comfortable with that process I think is really important. And having one setpoint person when you send out information about the focus groups, or the actual document themselves they are reviewing. Managing names and faces in emails can be really difficult so trying to streamline that as much as possible is an accessibility measure.

Sending materials in advance so that people get a chance to review them if they want to, not everyone will get the chance to, so you should go into a focus group assuming that nobody has looked at it. But, if people do want to look at it, for the sake of access we would like to send it early.

Setting a clear agenda with breaks is an important part of any group or meeting. We like to give about a 10 minute break for every hour, at least, if you're working for more than a few hours, having a longer break. Paying people fairly for their work, again a lot of people with disabilities are used to sort of being told their voice is important, but only as volunteers and only to a certain extent. And that's not fair.

Plain language review work is very difficult. I will come again, talk about how the process is very long and takes a lot of effort on the part of everyone involved. So paying people-- I say that the lower limit of what people should be paid is about \$25 an hour, but if you can do more than that, please do.

And then, giving people credit for their participation. That can be-- you can ask people if they would like to be listed as an author or in some sort of acknowledgment page on your documents, but again, people should get credit for what they are doing and very often, again, people are expected to do this work without having any name attached to it or funding attached to it so we are trying to make things more equitable.

So, one second. So for the focus groups, the way have tended to do them in the past with two facilitators having one person guiding the discussion, and someone else going to the documents and taking notes.

A good way that you can do this is if you have access to, if it's through zoom you can do screen sharing, if it's in person you can project it so that the participants can see you changing the document in real time thanks to their feedback.

But generally, we would go line by line, paragraph by paragraph, and ask "Does this make sense to you? What do you think the main idea is for this section? Are we saying these ideas in the right order? Is there too much information or not enough information? Would you change anything to make this better? How would you summarize this in your own words?"

That last one is really a good way to check for comprehension, getting people to rephrase things. So, yeah. And to close out, some of the tips that I have. These are all kind of general visual and web

accessibility tips, so for plain language, writing in 14 point font, sans serif font, like comic sans, I don't know too many font names off the top of my head, but those tend to be a bit more readable.

Having a table of contents for long documents so like I mentioned earlier - OK, the light just turned off on me, but no worries - yeah, the table of contents for longer documents, the outline I mentioned earlier with the questions, sort of like with housing, what is affordable housing? How can people get affordable housing? You can very easily repurpose that into a table of contents if that is a helpful way of doing so for you.

But, on websites, having ways to click back to different sections within that table of contents, whether that be a sidebar or some other method that is screen reader accessible so people can easily find their place. Having a glossary as a standalone page, again, so that people can look back to those definitions and not lose where they are reading.

This is difficult, obviously to do. You can't have a physical page when someone is reading a website, so you can have it is a page that someone opens is another tab, or you can have the list at the bottom of the page. It can depend on the needs of your website, but just having that in an easily accessible location as well, and if you need to include definitions within the text.

On webpage, there are some tools that you can have, like hover over definitions, but definitely check with screen readers for anything you're trying to do. Having page breaks is very important, like I said, to split up that information on a website having the arrows at the bottom of the page saying what came previously and what comes next can be very helpful, so it's like people are reading a book and can go page to page.

Having enough space between your ideas, and thinking about that ratio of, OK, if you're on a webpage, make each of the webpages not too long before going to the next page. You should also think about color and contrast options, knowing that some people can't see certain colors.

And then, adding images. This is, again, much more in the forefront of easy read, but I still think that it's important for plain language when you can use images to make things more clear.

So for example, using a chart or graph that might explain a statistic in a clearer way can be a useful way of substituting that in. Remember for any images that you should have captions and alt text. The alt text is what embedded in the image for screen readers, and captions going to the image, they have different uses but you should consider that as well.

Final thoughts, as I mentioned earlier, plain language is a skill and no document is perfect - no document I've written is perfect - I look back at things I've written a few months ago and see ways I could rephrase things and been more clear. So, definitely keep trying.

And give yourself more time than you think you'll need. As Liz said, some people give the excuse they don't have enough time, but then I've seen the opposite issue where people think, "Oh, I'm writing at 1/6 grade reading level this will be really easy!" But it really is using a different language skill the

people are rarely used to see you might just need thinking time.

Sometimes I will just look at a document or research about something that I want to write about, then table it and think for a little bit, then get back to it later. And then last but not least, as I've been saying, if you have the time and money to write for a general audience, you should be writing in plain language. So part of that is thinking about, how will you ask for funding for plain language? Or easy read work? In your grant proposals when you are budgeting.

Whether that is something you want to have just as a line item for everything you are writing or if you do want to hire an expert, I'm not saying you shouldn't hire an expert if you have the means to, just that that should not hinder you from starting doing this work.

So, does anyone have any other questions before we take a break?

SPEAKER:

Hi is Carlean Ponder, I would like to ask a question? I was going to go, maybe I can go on video, so what would you say, best practice for doing plain language? I like what you just said about asking for grant money in your budgeting, should it be that each person when they are putting together a document could be a policy document, could be something I'm doing for CCD on housing, maybe a letter that I'm writing to HUD, do you think that should be plain language when it's written, or should be something we ask somebody to do for us alongside our writing?

REID CAPLAN:

yeah, so the most important thing when you're ready to a government agency for the sake of the government agency you are going to want to write more technically, but if you are then putting that on your website, and say this is something we did and we want to show the community our advocacy, having another version of that letter in plain language, I think would be great, or having-- this is one of those examples where summarizing the letter might be OK, if you have the means to completely translated I would recommend you doing so.

But this is one of those things where having a landing page for the letter with the plain language explanation of "We wrote this letter to HUD, here are the basics of what the letter says. If you want to read the whole letter it's been technically here." Is also I think a reasonable way of going about that.

LAURA WEIDNER:

Yeah, this is Laura, I will add a little more to Reid's response and thank you Carlean for the question it was great when. It comes to, if you're producing materials for your own organization, that's kind of under your organization's purview.

But if it is a CCD document, like if it's a force generated letter or statement, we do now have the ability, we have Reid, again contracted with CCD to translate some materials into plain language for CCD. We haven't necessarily come up with criteria for what types of documents should be translated, we probably should think through that a little bit more, to give particularly coach errors a little more guidance on when to think about translating their materials into plain language.

But in terms of that is from policy to everyday language that we use in the policy community. I will put that in the chat.

So, we thought it might be helpful for others before we spin the wheel and we can share links, OK?

LAURA WEIDNER:

Looks great, Liz. Thank you. We can also circulate it if you are OK with the recording link and everything. So if one gets it over the email, too.

SPEAKER:

Yeah, I think it is copyrighted for AUCD. But you can check with Cindy about that.

LAURA WEIDNER:

OK, great. I will do that. I will check with Cindy first. Your hand it back to you, Reid had a question coming from Silvia and I will read it out loud. "If a plain translation or summary of more technical letters on the website, is it better to consider it finished one final or could we go into improve the translation summary as we notice new things?"

REID CAPLAN:

I would not go back and change it unless you were being very explicit on your page that there is a new revision of it, and here it is! It would be like coming back and changing a book that has been written. (Laughs)

Yeah. It is the same kind of standard as other writing, generally if you publish it, you cannot make significant changes without letting people know.

LAURA WEIDNER:

Great. I will turn it back to you.

REID CAPLAN:

Was a great question, thank you. Welcome back from the break. For our next part I have a exercise. I will give every participant 10 minutes and I put here the CCD mission statement and I will read it out if I can.

The mission of the Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities is to engage in concerted advocacy for national public-policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration, and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society, free from racism, ableism, sexism, and xenophobia, as well as LGBTQ2+ based discrimination and religious intolerance.

That enhances the civil rights and quality-of-life of all people with disabilities and their families, and affects the values of the Americans with disabilities act and all civil rights law.

So, I think this should work. I have copied a Google doc, too, if anyone wants to copy and paste that passage. You can also go to the CCD website, it is also there.

Is actually a little hard for me to follow all them in the chat, and like people were saying with a screen reader it's a little difficult for it to move. If you want to paste-- if anyone wants to paste there's writing that larger document, like under all the other ones if you have access to that Google Doc I could read some of them there.

Otherwise, I can sort of start going to the themes. I apologize, it's a little difficult to do this large of a workshop with this many people over resume. It's a little new for me.

But, so some of those-- does anyone else want to share either reading there's allowed or just their thoughts about the exercise? Michelle says consortium and constituents themselves are words needing explanation, definitely.

SPEAKER:

This is Tony Alexander, like Carlean I also found it really difficult, and I found myself just trying to find synonyms for each of the words that were difficult-- that I would think would be difficult for certain people to understand. But I also kinda felt guilty for not shortening it, even though I know in your presentation you said shorter is not always better.

But, yeah, I just kind of was-- the way I went about it was just trying to, like, look for different alternatives to different words.

REID CAPLAN:

Yeah, and that is a lot of what you need to be doing at first, a thesaurus is going to be very good help when you're first starting to do this kind of work. I probably should've mentioned that earlier. And also, repetition. It may feel a little strange to be doing so, but for accessibility, repeating things can actually be a good thing to sort of reinforce those ideas.

So, I don't worry too much about repeating. I think Liz had her hand raised?

SPEAKER:

Yes, thanks, Reid. We at AUCD had a training soon after the pandemic, and I think from a member, they were saying-- this person was saying that less is better. And less words are definitely better, and using words that are complicated, so I found in the definition of CCD there were words that might've been more nice, but not necessary.

REID CAPLAN:

Definitely, Liz. It's sort of like going through the fluff that, and this is kind of technical and policy writing it can be great to others extra words, but for example let me go back to the slides because that will help illustrate the idea a little bit better. Let me read you a couple reasonable go back.

This is a good example here someone made CCD is a large group of people who work in Disability Rights organizations located in Washington, DC, we work together make sure Congress and other federal agencies consider important laws for people with disabilities, these laws can help people with disabilities live on the Rhône, make your decisions, live in the community, and need to be considered

all the time and always that involve children and adults with disabilities. CCD will do this by writing letters, telling stories, and studying issues, getting solutions to problems for people with disabilities to members of Congress.

CCD also helps people with disabilities talk to members of Congress about problems such as not enough housing or long waits for someone to help out. So let me stop sharing here for a second. OK, we have a few hands, so let me get to some of those.

I guess I will start with Erin?

SPEAKER:

-One, sorry I have an echo. It's Erin from NACDD, first thing is, great exercise, did you guys use the online tools to check your grade? Because mine-- I couldn't get my grade down below 12 years because of I think our title, consortium and all that constituents, and the other thing is I love Liz, she always hits the right tone, but how when drafting a mission statement you are almost told to do the exact opposite of what we're doing here, which is you want to be concise.

So the word language you choose, you know, you have to try to make those words have big punch and whatever to make it concise. So I like the longer statements that read as reading, in terms of it probably scores better on the grade level reading. But I think it also is way too long for mission statements.

So I accept this challenge and I want to keep working on it, but I think mission statement is a harder thing to plain language. But if you look at it the way that I think we should, it should be more along the lines of what Liz is saying, which is try to let our work speak for ourselves, and keep the mission statement more broad.

REID CAPLAN:

Now, and I chose the mission statement specifically because I knew it was very challenging and very much written in a style that is hard to get the plain language from. And I agree that we should be considering why are all of these forward facing stuff has all this content when we really just want people to understand what we are doing. Laura?

LAURA WEIDNER:

There, there was a question in chat about whether people should be putting their work in the chat. A few people did that already, which is fine, I copied and pasted those out, and I can aggregate those and send them to you, Reid, if they are helpful, or you can put them in the Google document if you have access to that. Or, even email them to me, Laura, if you want to just it would be kind of interesting to see what people put together, it might be helpful to Reid.

Again, just try to minimize chat for various people in the committee, but thank you for those who share them.

REID CAPLAN:

Yeah, definitely, if you want them all those or put them in the dock, more just I want to see everyone sharing their ideas and see what we all came up with. But now going to share a little bit of the process that I would go when I was looking at this, how I did that. And Liz, you want to add something?

SPEAKER:

Yeah, I just wanted to give you an example of a staffer and a real situation when there was a staffer who, during the (Unknown Name) case, hope everyone knows what I'm talking about, we at AUCD made a plain language document about that case.

And there were several staffers who were a formal draft public policy to get that. And that shows to me that staffers really do want plain language, because it takes less time for them to read what is going on.

REID CAPLAN:

Yeah, definitely. We should just do this presentation together because you have so many good points. (Laughs)

Plain language is for everyone. The sooner you can get to the point, the better it is for everyone. So, let me share my screen again.

Everyone, I very much appreciate you trying this process and again I can acknowledge it's really difficult, especially for this kind of mission statement. These sorts of materials.

So, the way that I went through this starting with words that needed to be defined, I sort of went through here and did bold for what I thought were things that might need definitions.

Some of these things are things people might not think of as needing definitions because we see them pretty often like discrimination, and when I think of discrimination I am thinking about things like criticism, and ableism.

Perhaps defining discrimination and having a list of different kinds of discrimination could make things more accessible. The same thing with the list of self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration, and inclusion.

(Static) or are those terms things we should be defining? Again, this is sort of an individual exercise. Someone might think that self-determination is an important enough term to keep and define what other people might think there is a way of saying that for you do not need to use the word "self-determination".

Anything that has an acronym you should definitely specify what that acronym is and saying something along the lines of, "We call this CCD for short." If you will be using CCD throughout the document or whatever acronym you are using throughout your document.

And being sure to define laws, and even something as simple as policy can be helpful. As you were

saying, a lot of people – someone said they cannot think of another word for policy besides law.

The through! A lot of policies are laws. You could use the word "rules" if you are defining policy. Rules and laws the government makes.

(Reads) "Does LGBTQ+ need to be defined?" That is one where it would depend on the audience. I might write out the acronym.

I think for this sort of document, defining gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender is not necessary. Yes, intolerance. On the next slide I will be talking a little bit more about replacing words.

These are the words that I flagged that I would consider writing definitions for. The underlying notes that it might be helpful to put in some kind of list.

When I'm thinking about, OK, what is the CCD doing? They are advocating for policies that do X, Y, Z. Possibly having that in the list may be more accessible than it just saying self-determination, independence, and empowerment.

Liz asks, "What is xenophobia?" It is fear or discrimination against immigrants or strangers or people that people think of as very different than them. We mostly use the word to talk about discrimination against immigrants in the US.

Going onto the next slide, this time I have italicized the words that could be replaced with different words to be a little more simple.

So, intolerance, we could also use the word discrimination again. We could say, "Discrimination based on one's religion," because we have defined the word discrimination.

Somebody said goal, somebody said purpose, mission is one of those words were somebody might think of a space mission first. (Laughs) So... it may not necessarily be that the word is long but has double meanings, or there is another word you can sub in clearer.

Advocacy might've been put in for the length. No offense, I'm sorry. (Laughs) That is the process I do is the first pass being, OK, what are the words we think are absolutely important to communicate that understanding and what are the words that could be swapped or edited out and you are left from there with scaffolding out whether things need to be lists.

Sometimes if you have too many definitions in one, like this particular one is very challenging because you have to put a lot of definitions into it. Again, like someone said, finding out how to shorten this mission statement for everyone – not just the plain language version is something that might be necessary.

I hope doing this exercise was helpful and gave you a little better idea of how you might apply that to your own work.

So, doesn't seem like we have time for people to share any of their own organizations stuff. (Laughs)

I am really glad. Just want to leave a couple of minutes for questions, comments, concerns. Jennifer?

SPEAKER:

Hi, thank you so much for this. This was great. I was wondering since some of these words are words we are using all the time in policy things, is there any repository where good, plain language definitions of this exist so we can sort of use it as a cheat sheet?

So we don't have to explain xenophobia every time.

REID CAPLAN:

I think Liz was saying it is not something meant to be taken Word for Word. AUCD is working on something like that.

I guess the tough thing – this is something I am exploring myself as someone in this field. It is not really plagiarism to have those sorts of standard definitions.

If you are using them in enough places, people might say, "I came up with this and you are stealing it." When the point is to have accessible standards for some of these words.

I think that has maybe been why that does not exist yet in a public forum. But I would very much like that to happen. It is something I have been thinking about. So, yeah. Thank you for bringing that up. (Laughs)

Liz said again there is a list that will be shared.

Alright! If no one has any other questions or comments, thank you again for listening. If you have any other questions or want more information about plain language or easy read, my email address is right here.

I will also type it in the chat right now. Yeah, thank you so much again for your time. And for caring about the subject.

LAURA WEIDNER:

This is Laura. Huge thank you to you, Reid, for educating CCD on this and working with us moving forward. We are so excited to do more CCD materials and plain language and this is the perfect first step for doing that.

Thank you so much, everyone with CCD, we have recorded the training and will circulate that in case you want to share that with and your colleagues.

Our CCD colleagues who have not made it today. Liz, I will check with Cindy about your glossary so

thank you for raising that. Thank you so much to everyone. Huge thank you to Reid.

Have a great rest of your day. Bye.

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