Creating Accessible Print Materials

Organizations use a variety of print materials, including brochures and newsletters, to inform the public about their work. These public-awareness materials become a window into the group's identity; what it stands for, and what role it plays in the community. Organizations also create print materials specifically for service users, such as fact sheets, consent forms, and intake forms. These materials offer service users information they need to participate in your programs. Because the goal of print materials is to convey critical information to all potential and actual service recipients, agencies should ensure that they are accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities.

Plain language: Making information easier for everyone

Writing in plain language means writing clearly. Material in plain language takes the reader less time to read and understand because it tells them exactly what they need to know without unnecessary words or expressions. The following are tips for writing in plain language.

› Know the audience. Know the expertise and interest of the average targeted reader and write for that person. Don't write for subject-area experts, lawyers, or your management, unless they are the intended audience.

› To meet the needs of the reader, keep the messages short and simple. Organize content by putting the most important information first.

› Use headings. Headings help readers find their way through the material. They should capture the essence of all the material that follows.

› Pull the reader into the document by using pronouns. Pronouns help make the information more meaningful. Use

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"you" for the reader ("I" when writing question headings from the reader's viewpoint) and "we" for your agency).

› Use the active voice to clarify who is doing what. Sentences written in the passive voice tend to obscure the point. Active voice is generally shorter, as well as clearer. Active sentences contain the actor first (as the subject), then the verb, then the object of the action.

Examples:
Active: "Advocates answer phones 24 hours a day."
Passive: "Phones are answered by advocates 24 hours a day."

› Use short sentences, paragraphs, and sections. Readers can get lost in long, dense text with few headings. When you divide material into digestible sections, it is both easier to follow and adds white space, opening your document visually and making it more appealing.

› Avoid using complex words, confusing jargon, legal terms, and acronyms. Eliminate any excess words and use the simple present tense whenever possible, for example: "We manage a shelter program" instead of "We are responsible for management of a shelter program."

› Lists and tables can help you shorten and clarify complex material. They also add white space, which makes the document more appealing to readers.

For additional information on writing in plain language:

PlainLanguage.gov
www.plainlanguage.gov

Center for Plain Language
www.centerforplainlanguage.org

Plain Language Medical Dictionary
https://perma.cc/HL7L-G7UZ

Visually accessible and welcoming material

A variety of design choices, from the font to the colors and use of white space, affect the visual accessibility of printed materials.

Font
The font you use can have an impact on the readability of your document. Sans serif fonts, such as Arial, Helvetica, and Verdana are the easiest for people to read. The fonts listed below are more difficult to read, and should be avoided:

› Serif fonts use a combination of thick and thin strokes. They also have flared

extensions or strokes on the tips of letters. This makes them difficult to read.

› Cursive fonts are also difficult to read. They look like hand-written pen or brush strokes and letters often are connected to one another.

› Extra thin, extra black, and italicized fonts tend to be difficult to read in smaller sizes.

› Avoid capitalizing all letters in a sentence.

A good font size to use for printed publications is 14 points, because it eases eye strain and makes the text easier to read.

Text alignment
How you align text on the paper determines how easy the flow is for readers. Text that is centered on the page has uneven left and right margins. Each line of text will start in a different spot, causing disruption in the text flow. Text that is aligned to the right margin (right-justified) creates an uneven left margin, making it difficult to find the next line of text. Justified alignment creates perfectly aligned margins on both sides. To line up the margins, variable spaces are inserted between words, making it difficult to read. The easiest alignment to read is left-justified; the left margin is fixed and the right margin is ragged, making the beginning of each line consistent and easy to find.

Leading
The space between lines of text is called leading. As readers move their eyes across text, ensuring that the lines of text are spaced at one-and-a-half or two times helps readers move their eyes onto the next line.

Hyphenation
Avoid hyphenating words. Hyphenation disrupts the reading flow.

White space
People with low vision and those with cognitive disabilities benefit from the use of white space. White space is the area of the document without text, images, tables, etc. It is useful in separating chunks of content and unrelated elements in a design and helps to improve the visual layout. Margins are elements of white space.

Colors
When you are picking the colors to use in your written material you will want to think about making the information accessible to people in a variety of contexts and with various types of disabilities, for example:

Design elements for visually accessible materials

Sans serif fonts —————

Left alignment —————

————— Color contrast

————— Use of white space

Features of an accessible website

While it is essential to select a developer who knows how to build accessibility features into your website, it is also important for you to know what those features should be. Accessibility features allow all users, with and without disabilities, to experience the website fully. To make this possible, the site should provide a variety of ways for users to interact with the content—including visuals and audible/video files. The site should also provide ways for users to move through the pages, and understand the information, including:

Interaction

› Add alternative text (Alt text) to all images on your website. Alt text is a description of the image or object that allows people using screen readers to understand the content of the graphic.

› Ensure that you caption videos on your website. Captioning is the process of converting the audio content of a video into text and displaying the text on a screen.

› Any audible and video files on your site should have transcripts available (printed version of the audio content).

› Avoid using CAPTCHAs to block spam. CAPTCHA stands for Completely Automated Public Turing Test to Tell Computers and Humans Apart. These are often used to weed out spambot comments from human comments. CAPTCHAs are typically images of distorted characters that are not accessible to screen readers; even if there is an audio option, the distorted audio prevents people with some types of disabilities from posting comments.

Operation

› Define the purpose behind each link on your website to help visitors decide whether they want to follow the link. Hyperlink text should provide a clear description of the link destination, rather than only providing the URL or "click here."

› Use headings correctly to provide content and structure to your website and to communicate the content's organization on the page. Assistive technologies use them to provide in-page navigation. The most important heading has the rank 1 (<h1>), the least important heading rank 6 (<h6>). Headings with an equal or higher rank start a new section; headings with a lower rank start new subsections that are part of the higher ranked section.

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› people with low vision;

› people with age-related vision issues such as macular degeneration; and

› people who experience color blindness (deuteranope is insensitivity to green; protanopia is insensitivity to red; and tritanopia, very rare, is insensitivity to blue).

There should be sufficient contrast between the color elements you choose. Select opposing colors on the color wheel. Avoid using color as the sole means of conveying information. For example, on forms you may see something like, "All fields in red are required." A better way to make these distinctions would be to say,

"Required fields are red and marked with an asterisk." The color makes the fields easy to identify for users who access color, and the asterisk allows all users to recognize it.

Paper

Choosing the best paper for the document also increases readability. People who have low vision may use a magnifying glass, a video magnifier, digital reading aids, or reading pens. Common white paper often produces a significant glare, which can make reading more difficult. An off-white paper with a matte finish is the most readable. Glossy paper, typically used in magazines, creates a glare and can make text and

images difficult to recognize. When you are printing on both sides of a sheet, you will want to use at least 24-lb. paper—heavy enough so that the print does not show through on the other side.

Graphics and images

Graphics and images are a great way to break up blocks of text, enliven materials, and support your messages. Avoid putting images or graphics behind text because it makes the text difficult to read.

Your printed material can promote and publicize the accessibility of your agency, programs, and services. Most people are familiar with the universal symbol of accessibility to follow, which indicates access for people with limited mobility including wheelchair users.

This symbol and others connoting disability access are available free of charge from the **Graphic Artists Guild-Downloadable Disability Access Symbols** at https://perma.cc/TFZ7-BKFV.

Below are additional resources for creating visually accessible materials:

Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines
https://perma.cc/HS6Q-LUM7

Accessibility Guidelines for Print Materials
https://perma.cc/JN75-2WDQ

General Guidelines on Printed Material
https://perma.cc/EHH7-XZFR

The Accessibility Color Wheel
https://perma.cc/59WQ-VPY6
is an online tool to check the accessibility of color combinations and to see how those color combinations look from the perspective of people with color blindness.

Accommodating individual needs: Creating alternate formats

While you will be creating materials that meet the needs of the widest array of users, you should also be prepared to create alternate versions of your print materials if you receive requests for them. Examples of alternate formats include:

› large print (at least an 18-point font) for people who have low vision;

› braille, a tactile writing system for people who are blind or have low vision; and

› an audio version of print materials, which people with low vision and

those who are blind often use to gather information. Audio can also be beneficial for people with learning disabilities who have difficulty with written text.

For additional information on creating alternate formats, see:

A Guide to Making Documents Accessible to People who are Blind or Visually Impaired
https://perma.cc/9W4Y-SAFK

Best Practices and Guidelines for Large Print Documents
https://perma.cc/MQ2K-5UAQ

Braille Transcription Services
https://perma.cc/DPU9-944D

Agencies can make their printed materials both visually appealing and disability-friendly by following the tips presented in this document. These tips benefit not only readers with a range of disabilities but also older people, those in trauma, and those for whom English is a second language.

For more information

The Center on Victimization and Safety (CVS) at the Vera Institute of Justice works with communities around the country to fashion services that reach, appeal to, and benefit all victims. CVS's work focuses on communities of people who are at elevated risk of harm but often marginalized from victim services and the criminal justice system. We combine research, technical assistance, and the training to equip policymakers and practitioners with the information, skills, and resources needed to effectively serve all victims. To learn more about CVS, contact cvs@vera.org.

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