

What's Happening in Clear Language?

A Review of Canadian Initiatives and Resources

Prepared for the

CAMA/ CUPE Clear Language Project

by

Ruth Baldwin

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FINAL REPORT

Prepared for the

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This report provides information about clear language¹ initiatives in Canada. It includes examples from the municipal sector as well as other sectors that have been successful in implementing clear language. It provides a selective list of online and print resources that may be helpful to support future efforts by the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA) and/ or the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) to promote clear language. Finally, it provides some suggestions for the next phase of the project.

1. Introduction

CAMA and CUPE undertook this 'environmental scan' to find out:

- where clear language has been put into practice in Canada
- what can be learned from these experiences, and
- what resources are available to promote the use of clear language in the municipal sector.

The sources of information for the research included CAMA municipal contacts, CUPE union contacts, clear language consultants, and organizations with a similar interest in clear language. Methods used for data collection included surveys, interviews, review of documents, review of online resources and municipal Web sites.

A report from the NWT Literacy Council, "Putting Plain Language into Practice"² was particularly helpful as it summarized a number of initiatives and the lessons learned from each.

2. Overview of Clear Language Initiatives

The following sections provide notable examples of clear language initiatives by government (federal, provincial, municipal), labour, literacy organizations, and organizations in other sectors.

2.1 Government

Government use of clear language is inconsistent across the country. Some governments have made commitments to using clear language but have not established formal policies. Some governments provide regular staff training in

¹ Clear language is the term preferred by CUPE and CAMA. However, it includes the concept of 'plain language' as used by other groups.

² Brockman, Angie, "Putting Plain Language into Practice", NWT Literacy Council, May 2004. Available online at: www.nwtliteracy.ca/plainlng/practice/pdf

clear language while others offered it at one time but no longer. Some very successful clear writing projects undertaken in the 1990s did not produce long-lasting commitment to this approach. Some governments have 'rediscovered' clear language as a tool for making communications effective.

a) **Federal Government**

The federal Government's Communications Policy has included a commitment to using clear language since 1988. The policy was last updated in 2004. Department heads are responsible for monitoring overall compliance with the policy, including the clear language provisions.

In 1991, the Government published *Plain Language, Clear and Simple*³ through the National Literacy Secretariat. This booklet was used extensively for staff training during the 1990s. An online tutorial based on the booklet is still available and is noted in the resource list (Appendix 1).

In 2003, the Government published the *Successful Communication Toolkit*, which includes a section on clear language and a list of successful communications projects. It has also published information about communicating with seniors, aboriginal people and less-literate Canadians.

The NWT paper indicates that nine one-day workshops to promote clear language were planned for the 2005/06 fiscal year. In addition, it reports that literacy organizations and clear language trainers participated in a 2002 conference for communicators which reached approximately 800 federal government employees across Canada.

The National Literacy Secretariat has helped to promote clear language for many years through its grants program. Organizations that have received funding for clear language projects include:

- professional associations such as CAMA and the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA)
- labour organizations such as CUPE and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)
- literacy organizations such as the Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) and the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF).

It could be argued that NLS funding, which now comes through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), represents the most sustained federal government support for clear language initiatives. It is difficult, however, to estimate the amount NLS has spent on clear language as it is often a component of a larger project.

³ Also available in French.

b) Provincial/ Territorial Governments

The NWT study indicates that no provincial or territorial government has a stand-alone clear language policy. A plain language policy was drafted by Communications Nova Scotia but it was not approved by the government.

- **Northwest Territories**

- Has a Literacy Strategy and Interdepartmental Literacy Committee;
- Commitment to clear language in Communications policy;
- Works with the NWT Literacy Council for staff training in clear language;
- Departments that have undertaken training or projects: Justice, Health and Social Services and Public Works. Public Works has made the most progress and now requires the use of clear language in all its documents.

- **Nova Scotia**

- Communications Nova Scotia developed a plain language policy to apply to all government communications but it was not approved;
- Communications NS offers plain language information and an "ask an editor" service on its Web site;
- Development of materials is still done on a project-by-project basis.

- **Saskatchewan**

- The Government of Saskatchewan went through a major clear language exercise ten years ago but the project appears to have had no lasting benefits.
- However, a clear language project in 2002 by the Government Social Services Department has had significant positive results.⁴ Promotional material for the Saskatchewan Employment Supplement, a program to help Saskatchewan residents move from social assistance to jobs, was revised using clear language. The new brochure was distributed through a variety of government and community programs. The result was that enrollment in the program went up by 42%. At the same time, advertising costs decreased by 50%. Bill Carney, who oversaw the program, says that, "the language of the brochure was the single most important factor of the campaign".

- **Prince Edward Island**

- The PEI Department of Education has committed itself to improving overall communications with its client groups.
- It is currently working with the PEI Literacy Alliance to review its forms for clear language.

⁴ See Appendix 3.

- The Student Financial Services section is revising student loan forms using clear language.⁵ They have done a client satisfaction survey on the new forms and will repeat the survey in one year. Over the summer, staff will monitor results, specifically whether applications are more complete and the processing time is reduced.

- **Manitoba**

- The provincial government works with a clear language consultant to offer nine different writing programs for staff, all based on a clear language approach.
- The consultant has also worked with the Manitoba Civil Service Commission on staff development. She reported that many departments follow up the general training with specific clear language projects.
- The consultant also developed guidelines for provincial government publications in November 2003.

- **Québec**

- In conjunction with Laval University, the government has created a centre of expertise to improve communication processes, build awareness about clear communication and develop tools.
- 250 people attended the first meeting - 400 attended the second.

c) Municipal Governments

Survey responses identified two municipalities that have undertaken some kind of clear language initiative (Kingston, Winnipeg). Interviews with clear language consultants identified two more (Red Deer, Toronto). The following section summarizes these initiatives. For details see Appendix 2.

- **Winnipeg, Manitoba**

- The City does not have a clear language policy but has been providing clear language training since 1996. The people interviewed indicated that the clear language approach is now incorporated in the City's communications. The funding for clear language training is stable and sustained.
- The 'champions' of clear language are the Corporate Education department and communications officers at the department level. There is no corporate office to coordinate communications.

⁵ See Appendix 3.

- Approximately 400 people have participated in clear language training. A follow-up survey after six months indicates that staff find the course very useful.
 - The same experienced consultant has provided training since the beginning. The courses are small (16 people) and tailored to the group. Each person gets feedback on his/her writing. The courses are highly rated and very popular.
 - Targeting the pilot training course to managers and supervisors was seen as an important strategy to 'sell' the idea and develop commitment.
 - The Water and Waste Department has hired a clear language consultant to review and revise material as needed. This department is currently revising a sewer bylaw, which will be the first bylaw in clear language.
- **Red Deer, Alberta**
 - A 1998 communications plan focused on making the City's communications with the public more effective. The first concern was to eliminate legal jargon in minutes and letters to the public. The City hoped to develop a more 'approachable' image by writing more clearly. It has never developed a clear language policy.
 - The City began offering clear language training for staff in 1999. Approximately 50 people have been trained including some City councillors. Courses are offered every two years, depending on need. New staff are encouraged to take part.
 - The City works with an experienced clear language consultant who tailors the course to the needs of the group. The courses are very popular and highly rated.
 - The original 'champion' for clear language was the Coordinator of Communications and Customer Service, who wrote the communications plan. She has since retired but the program has been sustained.
- **Kingston, Ontario**
 - As a result of an organizational review, which identified communications as a priority, a communications group was established.
 - The Corporate Training department offers a variety of training, including clear writing.
 - The City has worked with Kingston Literacy on specific projects.
- **Toronto, Ontario**
 - The City of Toronto has offered clear language training for staff for approximately 15 years (before and since amalgamation). Since amalgamation, communication functions have been decentralized. While

all communications staff try to implement clear language, they often face barriers from decision makers in their departments.

- The City does not have a corporate policy or standards for clear language. Neither is there an umbrella group for coordination of clear language initiatives. The City does publish a Style Guide for staff (being revised).
- The Human Resources Department provides two writing courses for staff: *Clear Language and Design* and *Writing for Busy People* (which focuses on report writing). Courses are offered 3-4 times per year; class size is 25-30 people. Even though more than 100 people may be trained each year, the classes still only reach a small percentage of the City of Toronto's total workforce. It also seems that managers are not taking part.
- Community and Social Services and Public Health have been successful in developing clear materials that reach a very diverse audience.
- Clear language training and tools are important components of a new 3-year initiative that City Council has recently introduced. The *Meeting Management Initiative* is designed to "make the decision making process of City Council as open, transparent and accountable as possible by changing the way the corporation presents and processes information." The City has established an inter-departmental working group for this initiative and intends to hire a clear language expert to provide training and support for a pilot project with the Public Health department
- The City of Toronto has had a Working Group on Language Equity and Literacy Issues since 2002. The Committee includes elected officials, City staff, representatives from CUPE, and representatives from community associations. Clear language has been acknowledged as a concern for this committee. Its last meeting (March 2005) included presentations and discussion about workplace literacy issues.

2.2 Labour

Organized labour's interest in clear language goes back to 1984 when the Canadian Association of Labour Media (CALM) hired an Ottawa-based literacy organization (ALSO) to carry out a clear language assessment of 15 union publications – 5 national and 10 local papers. CALM followed up this study with a half-day clear language workshop at its Annual General Meeting.

During the 1990s and until quite recently, the primary focus for unions has been on developing workplace literacy and learning programs. In the last few years, more unions have taken up clear language as an issue. The Canadian Labour Congress has taken a leadership role in:

- Promoting awareness of clear language as a tool to strengthen unions by making them more inclusive of all members;

- Developing training and resource materials (*Making It Clear* training manual and screen);
- Providing training in clear language at regional labour schools using a 'train the trainers' model that prepares participants to deliver training for their own unions or locals;
- Developing models for clear internal communications such as convention resolutions and the CLC constitution, which will be presented to its membership for ratification in June 2005.

Unions such as the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Steelworkers and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) have been working to improve their publications and communications with members. Many of their staff have participated in CLC clear language training. They have developed their own training materials (for members) and are beginning to offer clear language training as part of their union education programs. Most unions have not yet begun to look seriously at communications in the workplace or to negotiate the use of clear language with their employers. There are two notable exceptions – one CUPW local and the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

- With funding from the Manitoba Worker's Compensation Board, the CUPW local in Winnipeg has developed health and safety materials in clear language and has provided a 12-week training program for members.⁶
- CUPE began focusing on clear language as far back as 1997, when a clear language consultant was hired to provide training for National Office staff. In the past few years, CUPE has integrated clear language into its work through:
 - staff training (at the national and local levels);
 - revision of its publications;
 - member education (workshops ranging from 1/2 day to 1 week)
 - promotion of clear language resolutions (provincial and national conventions);
 - clear language instruction for recording secretaries and stewards;
 - revised workshop evaluation forms based on clear language and design principles;
 - promotion of clear language with its membership.

CUPE has also taken the issue a step farther by beginning to look at contract language and communications in the workplace.

- In 2003, CUPE worked with a clear language consultant to produce a guide to contract language (*Do your members know their contract? A clear language guide for CUPE locals*). Some CUPE locals are now trying to negotiate clear language contracts with support from the CUPE national literacy project.

⁶ Workers' Compensation Boards in several provinces have highlighted clear language. It was not possible to collect information on all WCB initiatives under this contract.

- CUPE has also worked with a local at the University of Saskatoon to clarify payroll information for food service members. Other locals have asked to use the materials developed through this demonstration project.

2.3 Literacy Organizations

National and provincial literacy organizations also play a leadership role in promoting clear language as a literacy issue. In some provinces, they provide consulting or training services for clear language (NWT, PEI, NB).

The Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF) currently has funding from the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) to organize professional development conferences across Canada.

Towards Clearer Communications conferences have already taken place in PEI, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba and British Columbia. Meetings are planned for St. John's NF in September, Toronto in October and Montreal in November. A national meeting in Ottawa on December 1/05 will pull together experience from all the conferences.

Although the FCAF conferences have been endorsed by the mayors of each of the cities where they have taken place, there has been very little participation by municipal representatives. Several CUPE staff have participated and reported back to the CUPE national literacy coordinator.

FCAF has posted summaries of each meeting on its Web site in the 'public' space. However, access to resource materials is being reserved for conference participants (who pay a fee) until after the final conference.

2.4 Sectoral Experiences

a) Private Sector Investing

- **British Columbia Securities Commission**

The BC Securities Commission is a Crown corporation. It regulates securities trading in the province and makes sure that investors have the information they need to make informed investment decisions.

Although it does not have a specific policy for clear language, the BC Securities Commission has been a leader in applying clear language in this field. Since 2000, it has worked with the same clear language consultant to:

- conduct a literacy audit of its written material;
- develop clear language guidelines for all written material;

- train all of its full-time staff (more than 200);
- rewrite the BC Securities Act in clear language.

The Commission believes that all people who deal with securities should be trained in clear language. As a result, in the past year, the Commission approached the Investment Dealers Association to encourage them to offer clear language training and agreed to pay for half the costs.

b) Health

• Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA)

- CPHA's National Literacy and Health Program was established in 1995 with funding from NLS. It promotes awareness among health professionals of the links between literacy and health. Its primary target groups are its 27 national health association partner organizations.
- CPHA established the Plain Language Service in 1997 to provide clear language and clear design assessment and revision services for the public, private and voluntary sectors.
- CPHA's Web site includes a variety of materials related to clear language, including a *Directory of Plain Language Health Information for North America*. All material is available in English and French.

• Centre for Literacy of Quebec

- The Centre has worked with McGill University on a study of clear language and health education. Reports from the research are available on the Web site (see Appendix 1 for list of resources).

c) Legal

The legal profession has a long history of promoting clear language, especially in other countries. Formal, coordinated activities in this sector peaked in Canada during the 1990s, then faded as organizations like the Canadian Legal Information Centre (CLIC) were not able to sustain their funding. A number of legal educators in the US have been leaders in clear language training for lawyers. Several of the experienced Canadian clear language consultants have focused on legal documents. The Canadian Bar Association offers some resource material on its Web site. *Clarity*, the 'Journal of the international movement to simplify legal language' is an excellent resource for this sector.

c) Private Sector

Several studies have been done about the cost savings and other benefits of clear language in the private sector. Some of this information is readily accessible but it is not all up-to-date. For example, the insurance company, Clarica, had been

successful in developing its 'brand' and image based on clear communication. However, the company was recently sold to Sun Life and most clear language initiatives have been cut back. It is not clear whether Sun Life will adopt clear language as a policy for its business.

d) Clear Language Consultants

A number of consultants across the country provide clear language training and support for revision of materials. Some have a great deal of experience working with municipalities, other levels of government and the private sector. Others have specialized in working with labour organizations or in specific sectors (e.g. law, health). Some have developed assessment tools or material that could be useful in the next phase of this joint CAMA and CUPE project (See Appendix 1).

3. Lessons from the Research

The NWT Literacy Council research identified a number of lessons related to clear language that mirror the experience that CAMA and CUPE have had in setting up workplace learning programs:

- the importance of having a 'champion' or 'champions' at the senior level;
- building support across the organization;
- demonstrating benefits at both the corporate and community levels;
- regular promotion of the program to ensure that it does not fall off the priority list.

Some lessons relate more specifically to clear language:

- Support from senior management must include willingness to fight for training money and include clear writing as part of performance reviews.
- Employees need to know that this is how the organization wants to be perceived and how they are expected to contribute. Being part of an organization that is trying not to be bureaucratic can improve job satisfaction.
- Need to demonstrate the cost of not using clear language (e.g. time required to respond to follow-up requests).
- Emphasize training and help people to “own” their writing. Avoid rewriting for others. This is only a short-term solution and doesn’t create permanent change.
- Promote pride in the self-improvement aspect of clear language training and use. Provide resources and on-going support to help build skills.
- Focus on all staff, not just professional communicators. If everyone does not understand the clear language approach, documents may be changed for the worse during the approval process.
- Make sure there are no penalties when people use clear language (for example when they explain issues clearly or make commitments in writing).

4. Observations and Suggestions

- From survey responses and interviews, it is clear that clear language has not been integrated with workplace learning initiatives supported by CAMA and CUPE. Raising the issue with project coordinating committees may be a good starting place for the next phase of the project. Some people indicated that a presentation by CAMA and/or CUPE would be helpful to start a discussion about using clear language.
- Many of the people contacted indicated that they would like to know about online resources because they are more easily accessible. Adding a section on

resources to the project Web sites would be a low-cost way of promoting clear language. It would also be interesting to track the number of times the list is accessed.

- There are lots of resources related to clear language available on the Web. However, there is not much that relates specifically to municipalities or labour. CAMA and CUPE may have an opportunity to develop a 'niche' by promoting municipal workplace initiatives in clear language and documenting their progress.
- It may be possible to build on what has already been accomplished in other areas by adapting assessment tools or training materials rather than starting from scratch. Similarly, working with consultants who are experienced in adapting training and materials to suit the audience may be an effective way to use resources.
- It may be easier to 'sell' clear language for workplace communications by starting with information that is important but less controversial than the collective agreement. Demonstrating the benefits of revising everyday communications into clear language can produce a positive environment for more difficult tasks.
- The Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français is creating public awareness related to clear language through its conferences. There may be opportunities to promote the issue by encouraging participation of CAMA or CUPE representatives in upcoming FCAF conferences. The national meeting in December is expected to have a broader policy focus and/or include presentations to government. CAMA and CUPE may want to be involved in some way with this conference.

Appendix One

Clear Language and Literacy Resources

Online Resources

Clear Language Consultants

Clear Language and Design

(<http://www.eastendliteracy.on.ca/ClearLanguageAndDesign>)

Site includes: A **Reading Effectiveness Tool** to assess the reading level of draft written materials, '**Ask an Expert**', **Online Thesaurus**, and information about the **CLAD Readability Mark**, recently introduced to recognize effective written materials.

Duncan Kent & Associates (<http://www.techcommunicators.com>)

Site includes: A **Writing Style Guide** and **Dictionary of Plain English**

Impact Information (<http://www.impact-information.com>)

Site includes good resource material and links plus an interesting newsletter – **Plain Language at Work**.

Wordsmith Associates (<http://www.wordsmithassociates.com>)

Site includes: **Self-test**, **Writing Tips**, Information on training and consulting services.

David Elliott (<http://www.davidelliott.ca>)

Site provides resource material on clear legal language.

Clear Language Group (<http://www.clearlanguagegroup.com>)

Site includes information on services and resources related to health literacy, clear language, and cross-cultural communication.

Clear Language Networks

The Plain Language Association International (PLAIN)

(<http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org>)

Site includes information on national and international events, news articles about clear language and resources including guides, tutorials, and articles by PLAIN members.

Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF)

(<http://www.fcaf.net>)

FCAF has been sponsoring workshops across Canada to promote awareness of clear language concepts. Information about the **Towards Clearer Communications** workshops can be found at (<http://www.clearercommunications.ca>).

Resource materials are currently available only to workshop participants but will become available to the public by mid-December 2005.

National Adult Literacy Database (<http://www.nald.ca>) (*French – <http://www.bdaa.ca>*)

The NALD site includes a wide variety of information about literacy issues and resources as well as links to other organizations' web sites and resource material.

Clear Language Resources

Garbl's Plain Language Resources

(<http://home.comcast.net/~garbl/writing/plaineng.htm>)

The site includes a wide variety of resources, including an annotated directory of Web sites, books, agencies and organizations related to plain language.

Improving Communication from the Federal Government to the Public

(<http://www.plainlanguage.gov>)

U.S. Government site which includes a wide variety of resources.

Plain Train (<http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/plaintrain>)

An Online plain language tutorial adapted from **Plain Language: Clear and Simple** and **Trainer's Guide**, published by Canada's National Literacy Secretariat. (*Aussi disponible en français*)

Writing Style Guide and Dictionary of Plain English

(<http://www.techcommunicators.com/pdfs/stule-diction.pdf>) (Adobe PDF file)

Successful Communication Tool Kit – Literacy and You (Communications Canada)

(http://www.communications.gc.ca/services/alpha_lit/2003/scr2003_toc.html)

(Aussi disponible en français)

Frequently Asked Questions Guide to Plain Language Use in the Government of Nova Scotia (Province of Nova Scotia)

(<http://www.gov.ns.ca/cmns/plainlanguage/frequent.htm>)

Hampshire County Council Corporate Style Guide – A guide for municipal communications from the United Kingdom.

(<http://www.hants.gov.uk/TC/cg/styleguide.html>)

Resources from the Plain Language Association International (PLAIN)

(<http://plainlanguagenetwork.org/Resources>)

Resources from the Labour Movement

Clear Language and Design for Union Communicators, United Food and Commercial Workers (http://www.ufcw.ca/edu_and_training_pubs.cgi)

Do your members know their contract? A clear language guide for CUPE locals, Canadian Union of Public Employees, 2003. Available online at: <http://www.cupe.ca/www/litresources> (OR order from the CUPE Literacy Project - literacy@cupe.ca 613-237-1590)

Making It Clear: Clear Communications for Union Communications, Canadian Labour Congress. 2002. (Training manual and desk screen) Order online at: www.clc-ctc.ca

Resources on Plain Language and Health

Canadian Public Health Association

Directory of Plain Language Health Information (aussi disponible en français)

(<http://www.pls.cpha.ca/english/directory.htm>)

Centre for Literacy of Quebec (with McGill University)

Needs Assessment of the Health Education and Information Needs of Hard-to-Reach Patients

(<http://www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca/health/finalsum/bd/backdoc.pdf>)

More than Plain Language: Adapting Health Communication for Hard-to-Reach Patients

(<http://www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca/health/phase2/morethan.pdf>)

Research Brief #1 - *Plain language and patient education: A summary of current research*

(<http://www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca/health/briefs/no1/no1.pdf>)

Research Brief #2 - *Audiotapes and literacy: A summary of current research*

(<http://www.centreforliteracy.qc.ca/health/briefs/no2/no2.pdf>)

Resources on Clear Language Legal Writing

Canadian Bar Association

Part 1: Writing As A Process

(<http://www.cba.org/CBA/practicelink/CS/plainlanguage1.asp>)

Part 2: Writing To Be Understood

(<http://www.cba.org/CBA/practicelink/CS/plainlanguage2.asp>)

10 Writing Tips for Clearer Communications with Clients

(<http://www.cba.org/CBA/practicelink/tips/clear.asp>)

Resources for Effective Web Sites

Dr. Jakob Neilson – an expert on web usability (<http://www.useit.com>)
Easy to read information on web design and usage – free email newsletter available – March 14, 2005 edition focused on users with lower literacy skills.

Web Accessibility Testing and Services

(<http://www.wats.ca/presentations/intro>) *Guidelines for "Developing an Accessible Website to Better Serve All Citizens"*

General Resources On Literacy and Clear Language

Putting Plain Language Into Practice – A wide ranging review of clear language practices in different contexts across Canada (May 2004 - Northwest Territories Literacy Council)
(<http://www.nwt.literacy.ca/plainlng/practice/cover.htm>) (Adobe PDF File)

Connecting Literacy to Community – Report on a project in 6 Alberta communities – Includes resources to assess an organization's sensitivity to literacy in its written and verbal communications and its interactions with community members. (*Audrey Gander, Bow Valley College, 2003*)
(<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/connect/focus/cover.htm>)

Issues and Challenges in Communicating with Less Literate Canadians (Communications Canada 2002) (<http://www.communications.gc.ca>) (*aussi disponible en français*)

The Benefits of Improving Literacy Skills in the Workplace (ABC Canada)
(http://www.abc-canada.org/workplace_education/skills.asp)

Workplace Literacy – Overview of Public Awareness Campaigns
(<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/worklit/cover.htm>)
(For Adobe PDF File: <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/worklit/worklit.pdf>)

Plain Language and the Bottom Line – Summary of evidence that substantiates benefits from using clear language for employee communications (Rose Grotsky)
(<http://www.nald.ca/whatnew/hnews/2005/grotsky.htm>)

Literacy Facts: Workforce Literacy (Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2003)
(<http://www.on.literacy.ca/literacy/aboutlit.htm>)

Print Resources

Do your members know their contract? A clear language guide for CUPE locals, Canadian Union of Public Employees. 2003 Available online at:
<http://www.cupe.ca/www/litresources> OR order from the CUPE Literacy Project - literacy@cupe.ca 613-237-1590

Get to the Point: A strategy for writing clearly at work, Rose Grotsky. Toronto: Praxis. 1998.

Making It Clear: Clear Communications for Union Communications, Canadian Labour Congress. 2002. (Training manual and desk screen) Order online at: www.clc-ctc.ca

Presenting numbers, tables and charts, Sally Bigwood and Melissa Spore. New York: Oxford, 2003.

The Literacy Audit Kit, Literacy Alberta, 1997. Order online at:
<http://www.literacy-alberta.ca/resource/auditkit/audktpg1.htm>

The Non-Designer's Web Book (2nd edition), Robin Williams and John Tollett. Berkeley, CA: Peachpit Press, 2000.

Appendix 2

Municipal Initiatives

City of Red Deer, Alberta

Contact: Jilaire Wagner, Coordinator, Communications and Customer Service
(403-343-8320)1. jilaire.wagner@reddeer.ca

Background:

In 1998, the City of Red Deer approved a communications plan that focused on making the City's communications with the public more effective. Their first concern was with eliminating legal jargon in minutes and letters to the public. The City hoped to develop a more 'approachable' image by writing more clearly.

The communications plan was written by the Coordinator of Communications and Customer Service at that time. She was a leader in getting the clear language initiative started, but it has continued since her retirement.

The City began offering clear language training for staff in 1999. Since the beginning they have worked with Christine Mowat of Wordsmith Associates ([http:// www.wordsmithassociates.com](http://www.wordsmithassociates.com)). Two courses were offered in the first year. Jilaire Wagner, the current Coordinator of Communications and Customer Service, indicated that they did try to target some departments at first, for example Communications and Corporate Planning, Legislative and Administrative Services. Now, however, the courses are open to anyone who wants to attend. Some City councillors have also attended clear language training over the years.

Current status:

The courses have proven to be very popular – they always get good feedback from participants. The City currently offers the course every two years, depending on need. New staff are encouraged to take part. The class is 2 days and limited to a maximum of 15 participants. Wordsmith provides a training manual and also tailors the course to the people taking part. Participants provide writing samples in advance and have the opportunity for one-to-one discussion of their writing during the course.

The City does not have a clear language policy. Staff from the Personnel department have participated in clear language training but there have been no

specific efforts in the area of labour relations (e.g. contracts, letters to employees). Red Deer does not have a workplace literacy program.

Investment in clear language:

The Communications and Customer Service Department recovers some of the cost for the training by charging the participant's department a portion of the cost. Departments also cover the cost for replacing staff for the two days, if necessary. (Jilaire is going to try and estimate the City's overall investment in clear language training since the courses began.)

Results/ sustainability:

More than 50 staff from administrative positions have participated in clear language training. Since there is not a high staff turnover in these jobs, Ms Wagner feels confident that the knowledge has been retained at the City, unless some of the people have retired. She indicated that she feels staff are making a greater effort to write clearly than ever before. The Legislative and Administrative Services department frequently consults her to review their draft material for clarity.

The City has not documented changes as a result of the investment in clear language. Nor has the City developed any formal way of measuring effectiveness. However, Ms Wagner indicated that she believes the City is doing a better job of serving citizens by providing information that is clear and relevant.

City of Toronto

Contact: Robert Mackenzie, City Clerk's Office (416-392-1438)
Andrew Kerr, Project Manager, Meeting Management Initiative
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Background:

According to Robert Mackenzie, the City of Toronto has been offering clear language training for staff for approximately 15 years (before and since amalgamation). Since amalgamation, communication functions have been decentralized. While all communications staff try to implement clear language, they often face barriers from decision makers in their departments. Mr. Mackenzie indicated that the people who participate in the training courses are usually not the ones who have authority or influence to affect change.

Mr. Mackenzie noted that Community and Social Services and Public Health have been quite successful in producing material that is very clear. Effective communications are particularly important for these units because they must reach a very broad audience with a wide range of skills.

The City does not have a corporate policy or standards for clear language. Neither is there an umbrella group for coordination of clear language initiatives. The City does publish a Style Guide for staff (being revised).

Current Status:

The Human Resources Department provides two writing courses for staff: Clear Language and Design and Writing for Busy People (which focuses on report writing). Courses are offered 3-4 times per year; class size is 25-30 people. Even though more than 100 people may be trained each year, the classes still only reach a small percentage of the City of Toronto's total workforce. It also seems that managers are not taking part.

However, the situation may be changing as a result of an initiative that City Council has recently introduced. The *Meeting Management Initiative* is a 3-year, \$4.5 million project to "make the decision making process of City Council as open, transparent and accountable as possible by changing the way the corporation presents and processes information." Clear language training and tools are important components of this initiative.

The City has established an inter-departmental working group to manage this new initiative and intends to hire a clear language expert to provide training and support for a pilot project with the Public Health department.

Mr. Mackenzie hopes that this initiative will 'set the standard' for clear language use throughout the City. The City Clerk's office is monitoring implementation of the project and will report to City Council on its progress. They are hoping that it will be operating fully by December 2005.

The City of Toronto has also had a Working Group on Language Equity and Literacy Issues since 2002. The Committee includes elected officials, City staff, representatives from CUPE, and representatives from community associations. Clear language has been acknowledged as a concern for this committee. However, it seems to have had a greater focus on events to promote community awareness about literacy and equity issues (International Literacy Day, spelling bee, library partnerships). Its last meeting (March 2005) included presentations and discussion about workplace literacy issues.

City of Winnipeg

Contacts:

Rhonda Tone, Manager Human Resource Development, Corporate Services
Department

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Cindy Bolton, HR Development Consultant, (204-986-7231)

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Jane Dick, Communications Officer, Winnipeg

Kathy Taylor, Public Information Officer, Water and Waste Dept

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Maureen Kennedy, Clear Language Consultant, Eclectic Communications

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Background:

Jane Dick was the original 'champion' for clear language in Winnipeg. Based on information she had collected about the positive results other municipalities had achieved by adopting a clear language approach, she convinced the Corporate Communications Department to undertake a pilot training project in 1996. The pilot project was directed to communications officers, supervisors and managers. The course was a success and has continued each year. It is now open to anyone who wants to participate. Approximately 325 people have taken part in the 'Power of Plain Language' course. Follow-up surveys after six months indicate that participants feel the training has a positive impact on their writing.

Responsibility for communications has now been decentralized. Each department has a communications specialist and is responsible for internal communications as well as communications with the public. All of the communications specialists have participated in the 'Power of Plain Language' course. Each department also has the freedom to hire consultants. The Water and Waste Department works with a clear language consultant to review all of the material it produces. This department is in the process of revising a sewer bylaw – it will be the first bylaw written in clear language.

The City does not have a corporate policy for clear language. It does provide guidelines for writing reports, which focus primarily on organization of information. The guidelines adhere to clear language principles but do not require writers to use clear language.

All of the staff interviewed indicated that they feel clear language has been incorporated into the City's way of working. However, there are still some departments that have not participated in training, most notably the Labour Relations department, which is primarily responsible for communications with

employees, including collective agreements. In spite of this, Rhonda Tone indicated that pension information was redrafted several years ago using clear language.

Current Status:

Corporate Education now coordinates all training for the City and offers a wide variety of courses. This department works with Maureen Kennedy (Eclectic Communications) to provide 4 courses related to writing:

1. Power of Plain Language – 2 day course, maximum 16 people, content tailored to participants, resource manual provided
2. Take Your Writing Skills to a Higher Level – 1 day – a more advanced writing course but based on clear language principles – participants must have taken first course
3. Customer-focused Emails – 1 day – many front-line workers take this course
4. Writing Effective Minutes – 1 day – a new course for 2005

The plain language courses are very popular and very highly rated by participants. The 'Power of Plain Language' workbook is also rated as a very valuable resource.

The Water and Waste Department is a good example of how clear language is being incorporated into the City's communications. Kathy Taylor, the Information Officer, has taken the training courses and works with an assistant who took a similar course at the university. Together, they review all the department's written material, especially information that is going to the public. Ms Taylor also works with a clear language consultant (Charles Moody) to review and revise material as needed. Clear language is considered 'mandatory' for this department.

Ms Taylor indicated that senior managers of the department understand the value of clear language and ensure that, for most projects, time is built in for a clear language review. The only exceptions have been engineering reports to Council, which often have to be prepared within a very short time frame.

City Council made the decision to revise the sewer bylaw. When Ms Taylor learned that engineers and lawyers would be primarily responsible for the revisions, she asked that the department be allowed to do a clear language review. The project is currently underway. The revised sewer bylaw will be the first bylaw written in clear language.

Results/ Sustainability:

Factors that suggest positive results from the training include:

- Good attendance and high rating for the clear language classes indicates the classes are successful.
- The follow-up survey indicates that staff find the skills useful for their work.
- The courses are provided by a very experienced clear language consultant who also does training for the provincial government.
- Corporate Education has continued to work with the same consultant, which ensures (1) consistency in the clear language approach, and (2) that courses are tailored to the City's needs.
- New courses are being offered to build on the initial training in clear language and apply the skills learned to new areas.
- Staff generally stay with the City for a long time, so the knowledge about clear language is likely being retained.
- Communications officers are reported to be 'vigilant' about using clear language and meet regularly as a group.
- Some departments have implemented clear language for all communications.
- Some departments have undertaken clear language projects at their own expense (revisions of pension information and sewer bylaw).

There has been no formal assessment of the results of any clear language project. However, there is anecdotal information to suggest that communications with the public have improved. The Water and Waste department, for example, reported that citizens were following new requirements for recycling, which had been advertised recently.

Lessons:

Working at the more senior level first helped to get the training started. It also helped to ensure that managers 'bought in' to the approach.

Need to continue to raise awareness – They have the clear language consultant come out to speak periodically at monthly leadership meetings.

Appendix 3

Case Studies

- **Saskatchewan Employment Supplement (PowerPoint)**
- **PEI Student Financial Services (PowerPoint)**
- **Clarica Insurance Company (Word document)**