

UNSESSION | Plain Language

Better Government for a Better Minnesota

Dense forms, documents, and websites full of complicated jargon and hard-to-find links create confusion and waste Minnesotans' time. To make state government better for the people it serves, Governor Dayton has implemented the state's first ever Plain Language policy. The Governor's Plain Language initiative directs all state agencies to use commonly used language, write in clear and concise sentences, and reduce the use of jargon and acronyms that make state government nearly impossible to understand.

How Plain Language Is Helping Minnesotans

- **Better Customer Service.** Last year, thousands of Minnesotans used the Minnesota Department of Revenue website to file their Homestead Credit Refund or Renter's Property Tax Refund return. However, over 800 renters tried to file their Renter's Property Tax return using the link that was intended to be used by homeowners. To make filing easier, the department built separate pages for renters and home owners so all taxpayers could get their refunds faster.
- **Better Results.** The Department of Labor and Industry's licensing renewal postcard is sent to 92,000 businesses annually. With an updated, clear design and simple instructions, there has been a 20 percent increase in online renewals of construction licenses.
- **Better Access.** The Department of Natural Resources transformed a dense, 92-page fishing regulations manual into a new, mobile-friendly website that is easy-to-use and understand. This new mobile-accessible solution helps anglers easily access the information they need when they are on-the-go.
- **Better Websites.** The Minnesota Department of Transportation's new and improved 511 traveler information system provides timely and easy to understand information on weather-related road conditions and maintenance and construction projects.
- **Better Care.** The Minnesota Department of Health sends a letter to the families of people who are hospitalized for traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries in Minnesota. In response to the Governor's Plain Language Initiative, the Health Department revised the letter – changing it from a complicated explanation of statutes into an easy-to-read letter focused on programs and services available to injured Minnesotans.
- **Better Welcome Home Letters.** In the previous version of the welcome home letter, the information on how veterans could start accessing their benefits was buried in technical terms and regulations. The MDVA rewrote the letter to make it clear how veterans can access their benefits right away. In 2013, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs welcomed over 5,000 Minnesota veterans home. In 2014, over 1,000 Veterans already have received the new letter.
- **Better Explanations.** The Minnesota Department of Agriculture works to ensure Minnesotans have access to fresh, locally grown foods. The Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides eligible participants with checks to use at markets over the course of the summer. Farmers market vendors need to be aware of the rules to participate in the program – but the department's nutritional manual was dense and difficult to understand. Now, with simple charts and clear explanations, 400 new and existing farmers will have the information they need for the market season this summer.