Plain Language and Style Instructions

Agencies must use plain language when writing their budget narratives to help Minnesotans understand your agency's mission, purpose and activities. Below are some tips on how use plain language specifically for the budget narratives.

Plain Language

What is Plain Language?
A document is in plain language when the reader can **find** what they need, **understand** what they find, and **use** what they find to meet their needs **on the first try**.

How do I write in Plain Language?

Plan

- Explain your purpose
- Know you reader. Your readers are legislators, legislative staff, executive branch staff, and Minnesotans. Your document should provide an objective, factual description of your agency's mission, goals, activities, and results to these audiences.

Organize

- Determine your key message
- Only include essential information, facts, data and details
- Answer your readers anticipated questions
- Determine a logical sequence of information

Write

- Use short sentences. If your reader has to read the sentence more than once to understand it, rewrite it!
- Use active descriptive words
- Use active voice
- Use your readers words
- Avoid jargon and legalese

Edit

- Use lists and tables
- Use acronyms sparingly. If you must use them, spell them out the first time they are used in each document.
- Remove unnecessary words
- Watch for white space

Review

- Have someone unfamiliar with the document review it for understanding.

Style & Formatting Requirements

Narrative Style

- Use concise descriptions

Audience

The budget narrative documents are intended to provide an objective, factual presentation of your agency's mission, goals, activities and results. They are not intended to justify budget requests or decisions, or discuss results of budget cuts. The audience includes legislators, legislative staff, executive branch staff and the public at large.

Acronyms

If you must use acronyms, spell them out the first time they are used in each document.

Bullets and Numbers

If using bullets or a numbered list, use the feature on the home ribbon instead of typing the bullet or number. If multiple levels of bullets are used, a solid black circle is used for the first level (•) and a dash is used for the second level (-)

Styles

The template has been set with specific styles for headings and paragraphs for accessibility purposes; do not change the style or font.

Additional Information

- If you have supporting information your agency's website, include a link.
- For accessibility purposes, web links must include the full URL (http://www.---).
- If you are going to link text to a website (e.g., statutory reference), you will need to include the full URL in parentheses following the linked text. For example, "Pursuant to [M.S. 16A.127](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=16A.127)…"
- Never use "click here" as a description for a text link.

Don't

- Use custom styles
- Use text boxes
- Adjust the margins of the document
- Use section breaks
- Change the headers or footers on the templates
- Hyphenate words.

Page Limits

- Agency profiles should not exceed 2-3 pages
- Program or budget activity narratives should be limited to 1 -2 pages each
- Small programs and budget activities should be 1 page.