

ORDER NO. 2025-02
AN ORDER OF THE PORT OF SEATTLE COMMISSION

...to develop a portwide policy on plain language for the Port of Seattle.

ADOPTED
JANUARY 14, 2025

INTRODUCTION

The Port of Seattle is committed to clear communication and equitable access to information for all.

TEXT OF THE ORDER

The Port Commission hereby directs the Executive Director to develop a portwide policy on plain language to enhance the clarity and accessibility of public-facing documents. At a minimum, the plain language policy shall include guidelines for communication that prioritize clarity, simplicity, and accessibility, especially when it applies to public-facing documents.

The following should be considered in the development of this policy:

- A guide that establishes Port standards and expectations for plain language. This guide should align with best practices from private institutions and government agencies, including the federal¹ and state² governments.
- The types of documents or content that are subject to the plain language policy. The plain language writing and policy should apply to all public-facing documents. This includes, but is not limited to, website content, forms and applications, news releases, social media, public information materials, employment recruitment notices, and solicitations for public comment.
- A plan for inventorying key existing public information and documents that need to be reworked, prioritizing forms or public information directly affecting an individual's ability to access services or engage with the Port.
- A process or procedure for reviewing and updating documents to ensure they meet the standards set.
- A process or procedure for training staff on the principles of plain language writing and effective best practices for using plain language.

Standards for plain language for public-facing documents should be implemented no later than March 31, 2025.

¹ <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/media/FederalPLGuidelines.pdf>

² <https://governor.wa.gov/issues/efficient-government/plain-language>

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE ORDER

This Order seeks to build on and expand upon Order 2023-05, which the Port Commission adopted in April 2023 and directed the Executive Director to develop a portwide policy on language access.

Plain language writing ensures the intended message is easily understood, reducing confusion and misinterpretation. It also makes information accessible to people with different literacy levels, ultimately making it accessible to translate and supporting accessibility efforts for people who use accessibility and language access tools.

The federal and state governments, numerous private entities, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations have enacted plain language policies to ensure the public can access information without unnecessary barriers and promote transparency and effective communication.

Accordingly, the Port recognizes that our responsibility is to make public information accessible and easy to understand, particularly for those who may face barriers due to language or disability. By adopting plain language principles, we can improve the user experience, reduce confusion, and foster a sense of inclusion. Research shows that plain language significantly enhances comprehension, especially for marginalized communities. This initiative supports the Port's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion and aligns with state and federal accessibility standards. Through this Order, we aim to fulfill our obligation to serve the public effectively.

The development and implementation of a plain language policy is essential to enhance communication with the public, especially as the Port continues to engage and update its community engagement and language access plans in partnership with community.