



(The Plain Language Logo)



The Norwegian Plain Language Project

Efforts today – and the next steps

(An OGP "Inspiring Story")



(The Plain Language Prize)



NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT
ADMINISTRATION, REFORM AND CHURCH AFFAIRS



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In this document you will find more information about why the Plain language was started, how it was organized, what kind of policy instruments we used, lessons learned so far and the next steps. You will also find contact information if you want to learn more about this project.

1. Background

The Norwegian Government invited almost 100 ordinary citizens to “The Governments Citizen Conference on March 20th, 2007. Two of the most important feedbacks from the citizens was that the Government should treat the citizens with respect, and use plain language.

In 2008, [The Agency for Public Management and eGovernment](#) (Difi) was awarded the task of «working, in cooperation with the Language Council of Norway (In Norwegian: Språkrådet), to promote clearer language and more accessible content in public documents and publications intended for citizens».

The project was formally launched in March 2009 and the aim was to stimulate public agencies to adopt good and user-friendly language.

A survey (telephone interviews) in 2009 revealed that 2 of 3 Norwegian citizens thought the public sector does not write in plain language and that public forms are difficult to complete.

It is written in The first Norwegian OGP Action Plan, launched in September 2011, that we will develop The Plain Language Project. A report on this project so far can be found in the Norwegian Self Assessment report from April 2013, page 4 - 5.

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2. How the project was organized

The [Norwegian Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs \(FAD\)](#) has the superior responsibility for The Plain Language Project.

Difi was responsible for the project's management and communication, and the Language Council of Norway ([Språkrådet](#)) was responsible for matters which require language expertise. The project group also had an associated resource group which provided advice and feedback throughout the project.

The combination of the technical resources and the professional expertise in both Difi and the Language Council was crucial for the project's success. Difi's competence within government administration, public communication and project management in combination with the language expertise in the Language Council, led to choosing the right activities in the project and to reach a large group of the government agencies.

3. Policy instruments and activities

The year 2008 was used to plan and develop project activities.

In 2009 - 2010, the following activities were initiated:

- www.klarsprak.no: A web-based toolbox for civil servants: The toolbox includes advice, tools and tips on how written language can be made more user-friendly, clear and understandable. In addition, users of the web site can find information on how to carry out language projects in public agencies. Some information on the website is in English.

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- **Courses:** Civil servants are given the opportunity to attend courses on how to write clearly. The project group has also created a specific course for people wanting to start language improvement projects within their workplaces.
- **Project grants and support:** Public agencies can apply for central provides fundings towards language improvement projects. Public agencies can also receive practical support in the form of advice from Difi and the Language Council of Norway.
- **The Plain Language Prize:** FAD awards an annual prize to the public agency which has worked best to improve its written information. The prize aims to encourage agencies to continue their efforts in using good, clear language. The prize has been awarded four times, and the winners are appointed by an independent committee.
- **Surveys and documentation:** The project gathers findings from relevant surveys, research and other documentation about language used by the Norwegian Civil Service. The project has also conducted their own surveys, for instance a survey on plain language in acts and regulations. The findings are published on www.klarsprak.no.
- **Experience from language improvement projects:** The project «Plain Language in Norway's Civil Service» reviews a number of other government language projects and publishes findings from these on www.klarsprak.no
- **Lectures and presentations:** The project group arranges lectures and presentations for public agencies and related organizations who wish to carry out plain language related work.

4. The evaluation and lessons learned

The Norwegian Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs (FAD is responsible for the implementation of the evaluation.

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An independent firm ([Ideas2evidence](#)) is conducting the evaluation. A preliminary report was delivered in December 2012, and the final report will be launched in November 2013.

Lessons learned so far:

- Involvement from the management is crucial when working with plain language.
- Documentation and facts are important.
- Investment in plain language is important for promoting democracy, but in many cases it can save money as well (fewer complaints and fewer requests for information and help).
- Involvement of enthusiast (fiery souls) is very helpful in the initial phase, but not enough in the long run. The plain language work must be included in the daily work of the organization.
- The Plain Language Prize is an effective policy instrument in order to gain publicity and also an inspiration for the public agencies in their plain language work.
- Project grants and professional support from an external source is very helpful in order to initiate local projects.
- The origin of unclear letters and unclear forms is often unclear language in acts and central regulations. In some cases, one central act could be the basis of several hundred or thousands of letters to the citizens. In such cases, it is more efficient to work with the cause, rather than the symptom.

5. The next steps

The Plain language Project was formally closed by December 31th, 2012.

Based on the experiences, The Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs has decided pursue the Plain Language Prize, the website and som of the central initiatives, like differnt types of courses.

