



PLAIN LANGUAGE
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL

Annual Report to PLAIN Members 2015

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1. President's report

Greetings members of PLAIN. This report brings you up to date on PLAIN's activities over the past year in preparation for our upcoming Annual General Meeting, which will be held in Dublin, Ireland, on September 20, 2015.

1.1 PLAIN has made great progress this year

2015 Conference

Our 2015 conference, focusing on **clearer language, greater efficiency and effectiveness**, will be held in Dublin, Ireland September 17–20, 2015. We currently have more than 30 prominent speakers and registration of more than 200 attendees. We are partnering with the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA), a leader in the field of adult education in Ireland. You can read more about NALA's work at its [website](#).

Thanks to Board members Robert Linsky (US), Claire Riordan (Ireland), and committees from PLAIN and NALA who have worked to plan and execute the conference.

Strategic Plan

Thanks to Neil James and members of PLAIN standing committees, we are bringing a new strategic plan to our members. The consultation draft includes increasing membership, developing plain language training, improving communication with and benefits for members, looking at a certification program, and other means to improve the quality of PLAIN.

Our new website

Within the next couple of months, PLAIN will launch its completely revised and invigorated website. Many thanks to Joanna Richardson, Kim McCutcheon, and Robert Linsky for their guidance, leadership, and hard work in creating a more interactive, up-to-date website.

Board elections

Ron Wohl and Ruth Baldwin are leaving the board after 6 years of service to PLAIN. We appreciate all the time and effort they have given to our organization.

We will be electing new members to the board this year. This report includes information on the 2015 elections.

1.2 We welcome your involvement in our unique organization

Although we have a board devoted to PLAIN, we also recognize how important our membership is to the organization's health and wellbeing. We know our members have great ideas to share.

Contact me at deborah@theplainlanguagegroup.com if you'd like to get more involved in the only international organization that focuses on all areas of plain language. Consider, for example,

getting involved in our membership committee, planning the 2017 conference, or improving communications with members.

Be sure to take part in the discussion of PLAIN 2020 – our draft strategic plan for the next five years. You can do that in person at the AGM or through a survey indicated in the discussion document.

As we grow and change, we remain ever mindful that we exist to serve the needs of our members and to advocate for the use of plain language internationally. Please encourage other plain language practitioners in your networks to become members.

2. Treasurer's report

2.1 Financial reports 2014 and 2015 are healthy

Two financial reports accompany this report. The first is for January 1–December 31, 2014 and the second is for the first six months of 2015.

Under Canada's new Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, an organization's financial report must be presented to the membership within 3 months of the financial year end. Since PLAIN usually holds its AGM in the fall, we had to change our financial year from the calendar year to July 1–June 30. This change was approved at the 2014 AGM. Next year's financial review will cover July 1, 2015–June 30, 2016.

The financial review was conducted by George Thomson, of the firm MFGT, based in Ottawa, Canada. The members approved using this firm at both the 2013 and 2014 AGMs.

As explained in previous years, this is a financial review not a complete audit. A financial review fulfills our legal obligations and it costs significantly less than a full audit.

Although the financial review shows slight operating deficit, PLAIN is in a very healthy financial position.

Notes for financial report – January 1–December 31, 2014

Page 1 - Statement of Financial Position

Assets

- *Prepaid expenses* – includes prorated amounts for insurance, the internet server, and the Wild Apricot membership system.

Liabilities and Net Assets

- *Accounts payable* - the fee for the financial review

Page 2 - Statement of Receipts and Disbursements

Receipts

- *Membership fees* – This amount has decreased slightly from the previous year.
- *Conference* – This is the final payment to PLAIN from the 2013 conference. It includes repayment of money advanced by PLAIN and a small profit (\$1003.18).

Disbursements

- *Business tax* – the annual fee PLAIN pays to the government
- *C. Mowat award* – The award was not given in 2014 so there is no expense.
- *Communications* – board conference calls. We have now switched to an online service so this cost will go down.
- *Insurance* – Directors and Officers Liability Insurance prorated to Dec 31/14
- *Interest and bank charges* – Our bank does not charge a monthly fee because we keep all funds in one chequing account. However, they do charge if we receive payment by electronic transfers. The other major cost in this category is PayPal fees. We are charged per payment and the fee varies by currency and amount. The more you take in, the more you pay.
- *Internet expense* – Server fee (prorated), technical support
- *Memberships* – Wild Apricot fee (prorated)
- *Office* – includes postage, shipping, office supplies, and printing for the 2014 AGM PLAIN's website
- *Professional fees* – Auditor, lawyer for PLAKIN's registration under NPF Act

Page 3 - Changes in Net Asset

- You will note that PLAIN took in more than it spent in 2014. That is typical of the year between conferences. As a result, PLAIN reported net assets of \$19,419 at the end of the year. Of this amount, \$1,252 is reserved for the Mowat award.

Notes for financial report – January 1–June 30, 2015

The notes below explain information on each page of the review report.

Page 1 - Statement of Financial Position

Assets

- *Prepaid expenses* – includes prorated amounts for the Wild Apricot membership system and GoToMeeting web conferencing.

Liabilities and Net Assets

- *Accounts payable* - the fee for this financial review and the cost for Wild Apricot for the rest of 2015.

Page 2 - Statement of Receipts and Disbursements

Receipts

- *Membership fees* – This amount, for the first 6 months, shows PLAIN is on track compared to last year. We may see an increase in the period coming up to the conference.
- *C. Mowat award* – Once again, Christine Mowat has supported this award. Many thanks!
- *Sponsorship* – PLAIN was delighted to receive sponsorship for 2015-16 from Australia's Plain English Foundation in the amount of \$4450. Many thanks!

Disbursements

- *Business tax* – the annual fee PLAIN pays to the government – not paid before end of the period.
- *Communications* – board conference calls and GoToMeeting subscription (prorated)
- *Conference 2015* – payment to Ireland's National Adult Literacy Agency, co-host for the 2015 conference
- *Insurance* – Directors and Officers Liability Insurance prorated to Dec 31/13
- *Interest and bank charges* – Our bank does not charge a monthly fee because we keep all funds in one chequing account. However, they do charge if we receive payment by electronic transfers. The other major cost in this category is PayPal fees. We are charged per payment and the fee varies by currency and amount. The more you take in, the more you pay.
- *Internet expense* – Server fee (prorated), first payment for website redesign
- *Memberships* – Wild Apricot fee (prorated)
- *Office* – includes postage
- *Professional fees* – Auditor for this review
- *Communication* – Bell conference calls and GoToMeeting subscription (prorated)

You will note that we spent more than we took in during this period.

We had several notable expenses:

- *GoToMeeting* - The cost for a one-year subscription is much lower than the cost of conference calls reported in previous years. We will see a significant saving in Communication costs next year. This period still includes conference calls early in the year.
- *Wild Apricot pre-payment* - By pre-paying for 2 years, we were able to keep the old rate instead of paying a higher price. The higher price will apply in 2017.

- Half the fee for design of the new website.
- Advance for PLAIN 2015

2.2 We need to appoint an auditor for 2015–16

The Board recommends that we appoint the firm MFGT, licensed public accountants and certified general accountants, Ottawa and Bradford, Canada to conduct a financial review for PLAIN’s 2015–16 financial year.

3. Communications committee report

3.1 Our new website launches in time for the conference

In the 2014 Communications Report we identified that, although the PLAIN website was relatively new, having been updated in 2012, it had the following issues:

- not mobile/tablet responsive
- no way to analyze usage
- needed IT tech support to make any updates.

It was impossible to adapt the 2012 website, and given that users today are increasingly accessing the internet exclusively on their portable devices, we took a big step. In January 2015 the Communications subcommittee got the Board's agreement to develop an entirely new website with the following features:

- mobile/tablet responsive
- Google Analytics to track usage
- WordPress format to allow a trained volunteer with no IT skills to make updates
- Twitter feed on website.

The Board approved a preliminary budget of up to \$5,000 CAD and a website subcommittee was formed with Board members Joanna Richardson, Kim McCutcheon, and Robert Linsky.

Quotes: The subcommittee sought quotes from 5 recommended web developers. The proposals were evaluated against our requirements and Cam Turnbull of Turnbull+Co won the contract.

Project: Turnbull+Co presented a draft design that the Board reviewed. The subcommittee wrote new content and collected graphics.

Launch date: The website is due to go live with the Conference in mid-September. It contains more content than the previous site and there are plans to continue to add content as resources permit.

Training for website updates: Kim McCutcheon and Joanna Richardson will receive training from the web developer so they'll be able to update the new PLAIN website.

Request: The Communications Committee will recruit one of the new Board members elected at the 2015 AGM to join the Communications Committee and receive WordPress training. This is to ensure a smooth transition down the line.

Thanks! Many thanks to Stéphane Ouimette and Stéphanie Roy from Éducaloi for their help with the PLAIN website over the years.

3.2 Our existing forum fails to fully engage members

As noted in the 2014 Annual Report, the PLAIN Forum has continued to see a decline in use. There are 144 members, but of those only a small percentage participate actively. One of the main problems of the Yahoo group is that it is not mobile/tablet friendly. Therefore, we recommend, in the next Board year, moving the online discussion to either or both:

- Facebook – possibly with a members-only backroom chat
- LinkedIn – again with a members-only format.

Archives: We recommend not closing the Yahoo Forum as one of its assets is the Archives which cannot be exported from the Forum and the question of what to do with the archives remains unanswered.

Numbers: Since the 2014 Report, 20 new people have joined the Forum, and of those, 12 became PLAIN members and have stayed on the Forum.

Our social media presence

PLAIN has a Twitter account: @PLAIN_Lang_Intl which had been dormant for the last year or so. However, since March 2015, we've been tweeting regularly and gaining 2 to 3 followers per day. Currently, PLAIN has 615 followers and we are tweeting daily about the Conference as well as other relevant content.

For other social media networks, once the new website is up and there is a social media email address, we will make a stake in all the usual networks: Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat. But we will need more **volunteers** to manage those media.

Conclusions

PLAIN's Communications Committee has made huge strides in 2015 with the new website and a more active Twitter presence. But we may need to consider getting professional communications input to prepare and carry out a communications plan to effectively build on these successes.

We will also need **volunteers** to analyze and filter pages saved from the old PLAIN website to assess the suitability of material for the new website.

4. Conference committee report

Over the last year PLAIN worked with the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in Ireland to plan its 10th conference due to be held 17-19 September 2015 in Dublin Castle Conference Centre.

Its theme – **clearer language, greater efficiency and effectiveness** – reflects the importance of communicating clearly in all aspects of business and life.

4.1 PLAIN and NALA formed a dedicated conference planning group

A dedicated group made up of Deborah Bosley, PLAIN's President, Ruth Baldwin, Treasurer, and board member, Robert Linsky, worked with the local planning team from NALA. They group met monthly to plan and to check progress on the conference budget, program and venue. This group reported back regularly to PLAIN's Board. A special sub-group was formed to assist with the program.

Website and social media

The conference website went live in 2015 (www.plain2015.ie). Dominique Joseph and Heather Walsh also set up a dedicated plain language group on LinkedIn, which proved to be popular.

Program planning

NALA issued an invitation for conference papers early in the year. The conference group was impressed with the quality and number of submissions received. PLAIN and NALA sourced top national and international speakers on the conference theme. These were then organised into a quality program with contributors from around the world.

The group achieved its aim of providing a program that would highlight experience, case-studies and research from fields relevant to conference delegates' work: plain language, usability, user experience, technical communication, and information design.

4.2 We approach the conference in a strong position

Promotion

PLAIN provided available details from past conferences to NALA while NALA developed its database of existing contacts –including its members (800), government departments and client stakeholders – and from its own research of relevant contacts, particularly in the legal sector, technology and financial sectors.

The health sector was already well represented on NALA's existing databases. PLAIN promoted the conference with its members and related organisations. They also linked in with Clarity and the Centre for Plain Language to assist with promotion efforts.

NALA issued a series of general and themed ezines to potential delegates. The themed ezines were the most effective in increased registration numbers. The themed emails were targeted at CEOs,

HR, communication personnel, and corporate social responsibility leaders who had an awareness and interest in plain language. NALA also issued ezines to conference delegates in the lead up to the conference to build excitement and to share useful tips.

Sponsors and partners

The conference achieved €50,000 (approx. US \$52,270 or Can \$ 71,000) in direct sponsorship income as well as significant support in kind (examples: significant support with venue costs and free conference bags, and so on). Sponsorship mainly came from clients of NALA's Plain English Editing and Training Service and from PLAIN's members, including significant sponsorship from the Plain English Foundation (Australia).

Registration

Initially conference bookings were low, however, by July 130 people had registered and by August this figure had risen to 181 – slightly higher than Vancouver figures. The quality of the program, the success of previous PLAIN conferences, promotional work, and the fact that the conference was in Ireland were important factors in increasing delegate numbers.

Conclusion

Our 10th international conference in Dublin will be a milestone as it marks our achievements to date and allows us to showcase our future through our new draft strategic plan.

5. Governance committee report

5.1 Key bylaws and documents needed our attention

Revision of our bylaws to meet new Canadian legal requirements

At the 2014 AGM, members unanimously approved a special resolution, revised bylaw, and articles of continuance for PLAIN to comply with Canada's new law governing not-for-profit organizations. We filed the required documents on time and they were approved by the Canadian government on October 10, 2014.

Change of address for PLAIN

PLAIN was incorporated using the Treasurer's home address as the head office address. Since the current Treasurer, Ruth Baldwin, is leaving after completing 6 years on the Board, PLAIN needs a new head office address. This change must be approved by the members at the AGM.

The Board is recommending changing the address to that of the new Treasurer, Ingrid Sapon. We will also be looking at options for finding a permanent address for the future.

Contributions to the Strategic Plan and supporting policies

Committee chair, Ruth Baldwin, participated in drafting the Governance and Finance sections of the proposed Strategic Plan. Over the next year, the committee will begin drafting policies to make PLAIN’s decision making consistent and transparent.

5.2 Board changes mean elections for 4 positions

Board of directors changes

Two board members are retiring this year after serving for 6 years – Ron Wohl and Ruth Baldwin.

Ron served as acting President in 2008, the year before PLAIN was incorporated, and as Vice-President from 2009-2011. He helped with PLAIN’s incorporation and coordinated the PLAIN member survey in 2009.

Ruth acted as Treasurer throughout her time on the Board, as well as coordinating membership, and acting as Secretary and Chair of the Governance committee for several years. She led PLAIN’s incorporation in 2009 and its transition under Canada’s NPF Act in 2014.

PLAIN heartily thanks Ron and Ruth for their contributions to building the organization. We wish them both success in their future activities.

Elections

Four positions are available this year: three for 3-year terms and one for a 1-year term. We received two nominations for the 3-year terms. Two current board members are standing for re-election – one for three years and one for the 1-year term.

A short description for each candidate appears below.

The board recommends that the following people be confirmed as directors for the terms shown.

Term	Candidates
3 years: 2015-2018	Sylviane Duval (Canada) Jana Goldman (USA) Joanna Richardson (Argentina) (current board member)
1 year: 2015-2016	Deborah S. Bosley (USA) (current board member)

Introduction to Board nominees

Three-year positions (2015-2018) (three available)

Candidate	Details
<p>Sylviane Duval Canada</p>	<p>Sylviane is Vice President of the Canadian Science Writers' Association's board of directors, and member of Allergen's IP Advisory Committee and FIBRE's Governance Committee. She has run her own knowledge transfer and research communications business since 2003. She is effective, efficient, knowledgeable, and fluently bilingual (English/French).</p> <p>Sylviane brings to the board her knowledge of communications products as they relate to marketing and promotion. (The board asked for people with this expertise to step forward.) She is keen to plan future conferences, building membership, and helping to select the winner of the Christine Mowat Plain Language Achievement Award.</p>
<p>Jana Goldman U.S.A.</p>	<p>Jana's been a plain language advocate throughout her communications career. She began as a daily newspaper reporter and editor and retired in 2013 as the press officer for a group of US government scientists. Her firm, Press Here (www.pressherejg.com) trains scientists to use plain language to talk about their work to non-scientists.</p> <p>She became a federal plain-language trainer to explain the Plain Writing Act of 2010. Jana is eager to use her extensive communications background to benefit PLAIN's marketing and promotion activities. She is a member and former board member of the Center for Plain Language.</p>
<p>Joanna Richardson Argentina</p>	<p>Joanna has worked in the area of clear communications since 2001, initially teaching professionals who do not have English as a native language to write in plain language. Her teaching now includes skills for effective presentations. She works in-house at Argentina's leading law firm, Marval, O'Farrell & Mairal as plain English instructor and also as a clear communications consultant to other private organizations.</p> <p>She is on the board of two Argentine committees and has contributed to a relocation guide for Buenos Aires. Her multicultural expertise, both professionally and personally, is useful for PLAIN as the organization seeks a stronger international outreach.</p> <p>Joanna has served on PLAIN's Board of Directors for 3 years. In the last 2 years she co-chaired PLAIN's Communications Committee, and hopes to be re-elected to continue the work of the Committee as outlined in PLAIN's draft Strategic Plan.</p>

One-year position (2015-2016) (one available)

Candidate	Details
Deborah S. Bosley U.S.A.	<p>As Principal of the Plain Language Group, Deborah helps corporations, government agencies, and non-profits create written information that is easy to read. Making written communication simple and useful is her passion.</p> <p>As PLAIN's President for the past 3 years, she led the strategic planning process and helped lead PLAIN to take ownership of its conferences to strengthen the organization financially and to provide resources for its members. If re-elected, she looks forward to implementing PLAIN's strategic plan once members approved it.</p>

6. Strategic Plan report

6.1 Consultation draft signals our proposed directions

The PLAIN Board has reviewed the current status of our organization and how it should evolve. Our starting point is the release of a consultation draft of *PLAIN 2020*, a strategic plan for the organization for the 5 years from 2016–2020.

Neil James led the project to draw up the plan and all Board members contributed to its development. The plan sets out our track record, challenges and future goals in 6 areas:

- membership
- conference
- communication
- publications
- professional development
- governance and finance.

6.2 An open online survey will run for several weeks

We have drafted the plan as a starting point for setting our future direction. Above all, PLAIN must be an organization for its members. This means we would like members to let us know what they think about these goals. Only with member support will we then confirm the goals in this document. We will revise the consultation draft in line with what our members want.

We will email members with a link to the online survey and non-members will be able to take part in a similar questionnaire.

7. Membership committee report

7.1 Some key activities will expand international membership

The Membership Committee includes Deborah Bosley (USA), Darlene Shura (Canada), and Cathy Basterfield (Australia). As part of the strategic planning process, the committee developed an action plan to:

- increase PLAIN's membership world-wide
- improve benefits for members
- collaborate with other plain language organizations.

7.2 English-speaking countries dominate our membership summary

This summary was prepared by the Treasurer, who manages our automated membership system.

As of September 1, 2015, we have **210** active members, including 188 individuals, 1 student, and 21 organizations.

Our members come from 21 countries, with Canada and the U.S. leading in number of members. As noted previously, the majority of members come from English-speaking countries.

The table below shows the distribution of PLAIN memberships.

Distribution of PLAIN membership at September 1, 2015

Country	Members
Canada	86
U.S.A.	52
Australia	23
Sweden	10
New Zealand	6
U.K.	5
Brazil	4
Norway	4
Finland	3
South Africa	3
Argentina	2
Netherlands	2
Ireland	2
Belgium	1
Cayman Islands	1
France	1
Hungary	1
Italy	1
Nigeria	1
Singapore	1
South Korea	1
Total	210

8. PLAIN board of directors and committees

Role	Name	Country
President	Deborah S. Bosley	U.S.A.
Vice-president	Neil James	Australia
Treasurer	Ruth Baldwin	Canada
Secretary	Greg Moriarty	Australia
Director	Robert Linsky	U.S.A.
Director	Kim McCutcheon	Canada
Director	Claire O’Riordan	Ireland
Director	Joanna Richardson	Argentina
Director	Ingrid Sapona	Canada
Director	Darlene Shura	Canada
Director	Ron Wohl	U.S.A.

Committees	Directors
Communications	Joanna, Kim, Robert
2015 conference	Claire, Robert
Governance	Ruth, Ingrid
Membership	Darlene, Deborah, Ruth
Strategic Plan	Neil

9. Accompanying documents

- Minutes of PLAIN’s 2014 Annual General Meeting
- PLAIN Financial Statement – Year Ended December 31, 2014
- PLAIN Financial Statement – January 1, 2015 to June 30, 2015
- PLAIN 2020 – Strategic Plan – Consultation Draft
- Resolutions for the Annual General Meeting
- Proxy Voting Form