



PLAIN LANGUAGE
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL

Annual Report to Members 2014

PLAIN, c/o 893 Watson Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2B 6B8, Canada

Contents

1. President’s Report – Deborah S. Bosley	1
<i>Where We Are</i>	1
PLAIN 2013 Conference	1
2015 Conference	1
Strategic Plan	1
International Consortium for Clear Communication (IC-Clear)	2
Board Elections	2
<i>What You Can Do</i>	2
2. Treasurer’s Report – Ruth Baldwin	3
Financial Report 2013	3
Appointment of Auditor.....	4
3. Committee Reports	4
<i>Communications</i>	4
PLAIN Yahoo Forum Report – Joanna Richardson, Forum Moderator	5
Web Manager’s Report – Michelle Black.....	5
Learning and Proposed Strategies	6
<i>Conference 2015 Committee</i> – Robert Linsky	7
<i>Governance Committee</i> – Ruth Baldwin	9
Revision of PLAIN bylaws to meet new Canadian legal requirements	9
Board Elections	9
Description of Candidates for PLAIN Board of Directors	10
4. Membership – Deborah Bosley/ Ruth Baldwin	11
Appendices	13



PLAIN LANGUAGE
ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL

Annual Report to Members 2014

1. President's Report – Deborah S. Bosley

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 Toronto, Canada, September 20, 2014.

Where We Are

PLAIN 2013 Conference

I am happy to report that PLAIN 2013 was not only successful in presenting a wide variety of interesting speakers but it also made a small profit. This was largely a result of the board's success in getting sponsorships—we raised \$30,000 towards the cost of the conference! Since this was our first experience with both co-sponsoring and fundraising, we were very happy with the results. Thanks to all of our sponsors and to the board members who took on fundraising for the conference.

I am also happy to report that a number of presentations from the conference will be included in the next issue of Clarity (Spring 2015).

2015 Conference

PLAIN's 2015 conference will be held in Dublin, Ireland September 17-20, 2015. 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](#).

Board members Robert Linsky (US) and Claire Riordan (Ireland) and committees from PLAIN and NALA are working together to plan and execute the conference. The conference theme is: ***Clearer language, greater efficiency and effectiveness***. Watch for more information about the conference in the coming months.

Strategic Plan

We had hoped to have a new strategic plan completed by our October 2013 conference. However, when we realized how much work was necessary to make the conference a success, we set planning aside for a time. As a result, we are still developing the strategic plan.

We have established the following committees – communications, conference 2015,

governance, and membership. As you will see from the committee reports included here, the communications and membership committees are strategizing on ways to gain greater recognition and more members to PLAIN. The governance committee has circulated proposed new bylaws to the members for feedback, and the conference committee is hard at work. We will spend the rest of the year and into 2015 preparing a draft strategic plan to share with our members.

International Consortium for Clear Communication (IC-Clear)

PLAIN continues to be involved with IC-Clear's efforts to develop, pilot and implement a postgraduate course in clear communication. President Deborah Bosley and Board member Robert Linsky sit on the IC-Clear Advisory Committee. IC-Clear has been running a pilot program to test its curriculum and expects to launch the online course in November 2014 at the IC-Clear/Clarity conference in Belgium. For more information on IC-Clear go to <http://icclear.net/project/>

Board Elections

Michelle Black (Canada) is leaving the board after two busy years in which she oversaw the renovation of PLAIN's website. As she indicates in her report, the work is not yet complete but we have a better understanding of what our members want. Thanks to Michelle for all her effort!

We will be electing two new members to the board this year. Information on the 2014 elections is included in this report.

It's not too soon to think about PLAIN's 2015 elections. At least four positions will be available. Do you know someone who could make a contribution to PLAIN? Could you? People who could help with our website (or other social media) and with marketing would be valuable additions to the board

You can nominate yourself or another member. PLAIN can only thrive if we have people who are willing and committed to helping the organization grow.

What You Can Do

Although we have a board devoted to PLAIN, we also recognize how important our membership is to the organization's health and well-being. 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 a committee for strategic planning, planning the 2015 conference, or improving communications with members.

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.

By collaborating internationally, we all create a better world.

2. Treasurer's Report – Ruth Baldwin

Financial Report 2013

PLAIN's financial report for January 1–December 31, 2013 accompanies this report. The financial review was conducted by George Thomson, of the firm MFGT, based in Ottawa, Canada. The members approved using this firm for 2012 at the 2013 AGM.

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.

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

1. 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

2. Page 2 - Statement of Receipts and Disbursements

Receipts

- *Membership fees* – Once again, this amount has increased from the previous year. We are always happy to have new members join PLAIN.
- *C. Mowat award* – Once again, Christine Mowat has supported this award.
- *Conference* – sponsorships and other amounts received by PLAIN
- *Other* – miscellaneous payments including, two donations; royalties for downloads from the PLAIN website (paid to the author – see Disbursements – Professional fees); book purchase; repayment of a software cancellation fee.

Disbursements

- *Business tax* – the annual fee PLAIN pays to the government
- *C. Mowat award* – includes preparation of the award, shipping, and stipend for Martin Cutts
- *Communications* – board conference calls
- *Conference 2013* – payments to Community Plain Language Services of amounts received by PLAIN, miscellaneous costs
- *20th Anniversary dinner speaker* – includes travel, hotel and meals
- *Donations* – donation in memory of Deborah Bosley's mother

- *Founders' awards* – custom necklaces and framed certificates for PLAIN's founders, Cheryl Stephens and Kate Harrison-Whiteside
- *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), technical support
- Memberships – Wild Apricot fee (prorated)
- Office – includes postage, shipping, office supplies, printing for the AGM, and purchase of software to renovate PLAIN's website
- Professional fees – Auditor, Cheryl Stephens (download royalties)

You will note on this page and on page 3 - Changes in Net Asset - that PLAIN spent more than it took in for the year. Reasons for this include:

7. We received a donation of \$1000 from Christine Mowat but paid \$2,243 for expenses related to the award. The difference came from funds that were set aside for the award.
 8. We had expenses for upgrading the website - software and technical support - that were necessary and approved by the board.
- c) The Founders' awards were one-time expenses approved by the board.

Note also that:

- We received a \$10,000 sponsorship payment in 2012 but paid it out in 2013. This shows up on page 4 - Statement of Cash Flows.
- We did not receive the final conference payment from Community Plain Language Services until 2014. It will show up in the next financial statement. (Final profit to PLAIN from the conference \$1003.18.)

Appointment of Auditor

The Treasurer recommends that we appoint the firm MFGT, licensed public accountants and certified general accountants, Ottawa, Canada to conduct a financial review for PLAIN's 2014 financial year.

3. Committee Reports

1. Communications

As part of PLAIN's strategic planning process, the board created a new Communications Committee made up of Joanna Richardson (Argentina), Kim McCutcheon (Canada), and Michelle Black (Canada). This committee will be responsible for developing proposals to make both the email forum and the

PLAIN website more effective tools for PLAIN's communications with its members. The committee's work to date is summarized in the table on pages 6-7.

PLAIN Yahoo Forum Report – Joanna Richardson, Forum Moderator

We currently have 135 forum members. The number of forum members has dropped since last year and there are still many PLAIN members who have not joined the forum. We have 14 new forum members since October 1, 2013. We had at least 1 person rejoin PLAIN after an extended absence.

Problems: Several email addresses were bad and when confirming membership they bounced; it is not possible to trace these addresses.

We had no off-topic issues that needed moderation and only a handful of spam issues. The spam issues we did have were related to established email accounts being hacked. While the relative lack of spam is attributable to our process of manually approving new members, the lack of other issues is directly attributable to the self-moderating nature of this forum.

Between October 1, 2013 and August 11, 2014, we had 544 member posts, a significant drop of the 1000 member posts from a similar period the year before. It is not clear why this might be the case but several of the new Forum members have commented that the Forum is not mobile-friendly. Since many people now only look at their mail on their phones, this is a possible explanation.

We still have a number of people not registered as Yahoo users, which means they are unable to search the archives, which date back to November 2001 and contain over 19,000 messages. The archive is a wonderful resource and available to everyone who is a member of the forum.

Web Manager's Report – Michelle Black

After refreshing the look, feel, and some of the content of our website in 2013, we are learning how visitors and members use the site. Over the past year, we received approximately 20 messages from visitors to the PLAIN website as well as suggestions from board members to update the News section on the homepage.

Based on this feedback and our experience managing the site through a volunteer network, we now have some proposals to improve the website so it meets visitors' needs and also reflects our rich network to members and the world.

The objectives for these proposals are:

- to make the site easier to use,
- to make our communications with members and other plain-language practitioners more relevant to their needs and communication preferences, and
- to make it easier and faster for the board and committee volunteers to manage PLAIN's communications.

Thanks to the volunteers from the Communications Committee and from the PLAIN board, who have helped keep momentum going and provided timely support for changes or updates. Merci

bien to Stéphane Ouimette, the web designer, and Stéphanie Roi, the administrator from Educaloi (Montreal, Canada), who have continued to work with us to manage and maintain the site and to recommend seamless improvements.

In the coming year, we look forward to taking action that will improve the website, further the organization’s objectives for the website, and complement the overall goals of the strategic plan.

Learning and Proposed Strategies

The table below shows the key elements learned over the past year, and suggestions for addressing these concerns over the next year and beyond. The board and Communications Committee will expand on this analysis during the strategic planning process.

2013 – 14 Experience	Proposed Strategy
<p>Discussion group The Yahoo list includes only a relatively small group of active participants. We believe we could attract more interaction from a wider global group by using a tool that meets current and future preferences of site visitors.</p>	<p>We propose to migrate our listserv to LinkedIn, with a members-only format. To ensure a smooth transition, we will send e-mail blasts beforehand to provide the link for members.</p> <p>The group will have a moderator to approve or reject requests so that the group remains a members-only benefit.</p> <p>Our discussion group will stand alongside other groups about writing etc., but be unique in specifically addressing members’ issues, and providing info and updates relevant to members of PLAIN and the field.</p>
<p>Website content Since we updated the website only a year ago, we don't recommend any major layout or design changes.</p> <p>However, the content still needs to be more in-depth, relevant, and timely for members. We have found it difficult to achieve this goal with only volunteer resources over the past year.</p>	<p>We propose to build on what we have and migrate content to a site that has a Content Management System running in the background. We will need technical support in order to do this.</p> <p>A content management system (such as Wordpress) would allow PLAIN to integrate and automate social media tools with the website. It would also make it easier for volunteers who don’t have technical knowledge of HTML to update content.</p>

<p>Resources for members</p> <p>The Resources page includes out-of-date content and links that don't work. This feedback has come from both the authors and interested readers of these listings.</p> <p>We receive requests from people who want to publish their resources or links on our site, but we don't have a process to review such material and, if approved, post it quickly.</p>	<p>We propose to set up a process that will make it easier for site managers to maintain the content. Among other things, it should establish methods to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vet current and new resources and ensure the links stay correct, and • identify sources and criteria for selecting newsworthy items. <p>In addition, we will develop policies to guide our management of resources on the website.</p>
<p>Our membership process is unclear in a few areas, with our technical and membership volunteers needing to respond to members and make fixes on short notice.</p>	<p>A separate review by a few members – and perhaps field testing of the changes – could achieve quick improvements.</p>
<p>The content on the home page does not change quickly. It currently includes news from the 2013 conference.</p>	<p>We propose to develop a system that will allow us to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • update the Home page regularly with newsworthy items from around the world; • save the updates to an Archives page (so we can track them as part of our history). <p>We may need technical support in order to do this.</p>
<p>Our conference advertising will need to link seamlessly with—and appear similar to—the 2015 Dublin Conference website.</p>	<p>The Web and Conference committees must consult regularly over the next six months to achieve these goals.</p>

2. Conference 2015 Committee – Robert Linsky

Join us in Ireland at beautiful Dublin Castle for PLAIN's 2015 conference!

Planning is underway, with PLAIN and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) working together to make this conference spectacular. We have identified potential plenary speakers and organizations with similar interests that might publicize the conference to their members. We are looking for sponsors in Europe and elsewhere and will soon have information on the sponsorship packages available.

If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, or helping the conference committee, contact Robert Linsky or Claire O’Riordan for more information.



PLAIN 2015

The theme of clear language as a means to greater efficiency is key for the climate we are in today. It is increasingly important for information providers to be efficient and effective in their communications with their customers.

The PLAIN 2015 conference will show how organisations can improve their efficiency and effectiveness. It will:

- present and discuss research-based plain language initiatives;
- share best practice in – written, verbal, numerical and visual communication; and
- consider communication developments in Europe and further afield.

Hosted by



The National Adult Literacy Agency of Ireland (NALA) is a membership organisation and a registered charity. Our mission is to promote the development of adult literacy. An important part of our work is to support organisations to become more accessible to the public. As part of this, we offer a Plain Language Editing and Training Service.

We have worked with most Government Departments and a wide range of public and private bodies. **NALA is delighted to be the host of PLAIN 2015 and look forward to welcoming you.**

Dublin, Ireland

The conference will be held in Ireland’s capital city, Dublin, a city that is steeped in over a thousand years of history yet buzzing with energy.

Dublin is easily accessible from the UK, continental Europe, the east and west coasts of the USA and Canada and the Middle East. More than 36 airlines fly regularly into Dublin Airport, which is located 12 km from the city centre.

Further information

Please contact **Claire O’Riordan**, Plain English Coordinator, NALA
Tel: + 353 1 412 7922
Email: coriordan@nala.ie

Websites: www.simplyput.ie www.nala.ie

3. Governance Committee – Ruth Baldwin

Revision of PLAIN bylaws to meet new Canadian legal requirements

The committee focused on revising PLAIN’s bylaw and articles of continuance to comply with Canada’s new law governing not-for-profit organizations. A draft version of each of the required documents was circulated to members for comment. Thanks to all those who sent comments back.

In response to your suggestion that PLAIN’s bylaw should use plain language as much as possible, the draft documents were revised again. Toronto member, Ingrid Sapona, who is both a lawyer and a plain language consultant, provided invaluable help to finalize the version that members will be asked to vote on at the 2014 Annual General Meeting. The PLAIN board has approved the final version, which was sent out to members with the revised agenda for the AGM.

For PLAIN to maintain its status as a Canadian not-for-profit organization, two-thirds of the members who attend the AGM must approve the special resolution that accompanies this report. The resolution, bylaw, and articles of continuance must be filed with the government by October 17, 2014.

Board Elections

We received two nominations for the two-year positions on the board. Current board members are standing for election to the three-year and one-year terms. A short description of each candidate is included below.

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

Term	Candidates
3 years: 2014-2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neil James (Australia)• Robert Linsky (USA)• Darlene Shura (Canada)
2 years: 2014-2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greg Moriarty (Australia)• Ingrid Sapona (Canada)
1 year: 2014-2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ron Wohl (USA)

Description of Candidates for PLAIN Board of Directors

Candidates for three-year positions (2014-2017) (three available)

Neil James (Australia)

Neil served on the PLAIN board from 2007-2009 and was re-elected in 2011. For the past three years, he has served as PLAIN's Vice-President.

Neil is a leading exponent of plain language as Executive Director of the Plain English Foundation in Australia and the author of *Writing at Work*. Neil chairs the International Plain Language Working Group and was the co-convenor of the 2009 PLAIN conference in Sydney, Australia.

Robert Linsky (USA)

Robert brings 25 years' experience and expertise in information design to the PLAIN board. A board member since 2011, he currently serves as PLAIN's representative to the 2015 conference committee.

Robert developed LUNA™ (Locate/UNderstand/Act), a methodology for designing information to ensure clear communications. He is a member of the International Institute for Information Design (IIID), a board member of the Information Design Association (IDA), a Life Fellow of the Communications Research Institute, and a member of the editorial board of the Information Design Journal (IDJ). He has spoken at many events, most recently at PLAIN 2013 in Vancouver. He has also written many articles on information design.

Darlene Shura (Canada)

Darlene has been a board member since 2011 and took a major role in developing sponsorship opportunities for PLAIN's 2013 conference.

As the owner of Renaissance Communications, she has extensive experience in training, writing and editing. Her passion for plain language and readability is reflected in all her work. Darlene has a good understanding of the issues facing PLAIN in its efforts to develop standards and practices for the plain-language field.

Candidates for two-year positions (2014-2016) (two available)

Greg Moriarty (Australia)

Greg has been a member of PLAIN since 2013. He is employed by the Plain English Foundation, Australia. Greg has delivered writing workshops for the Foundation for 4 years and has been its training manager for the last 2. He co-presented a workshop at PLAIN's 2013 conference on persuading clients that plain language works. In November, he will make a presentation at the IC-Clear/Clarity conference in Belgium.

PLAIN would benefit from Greg's organization, leadership, and communication skills. He is thorough and creative in his work, and would commit his time and enthusiasm to PLAIN. Greg has been a committee member of his local Toastmasters club for 3 years, including a year as president.

Ingrid Sapona (Canada)

Ingrid has been a plain language consultant since 1997. She promotes plain language through her work and in seminars and articles. As someone who has practiced law in Canada and the U.S., she

brings a valuable perspective to the Board and would be a persuasive voice in advocating for plain language.

She's been a member of PLAIN since 2010 and participated in the 2012/2013 Website Redesign committee. She worked on the 2012 International Plain Language Day festivities in Toronto and has extensive volunteer board experience, including for the Heart and Stroke (North York) Board, Fort York Food Bank Board, and Etobicoke Yacht Club.

Candidate for one-year position (2014-2015) (one vacancy due to a resignation)

Ron Wohl (USA)

Ron has been a member of the PLAIN board of directors since 2009. As acting president in 2008-09, he helped with PLAIN's incorporation and served as vice-president from 2009-2011. He supports PLAIN's mission and would like to see individual countries develop their own plain language organizations.

Ron is a certified management consultant specializing in management communications, and the founder and owner of one of the first plain-English consulting firms in the USA. He is also vice-president of Wohl Communication Services, Inc., an international business that helps persons with special needs to be successful in test situations. Ron has also authored the first plain-English interactive poetry book, "Hope and Joy".

4. Membership – Deborah Bosley/ Ruth Baldwin

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

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

Membership Summary

The information on membership shown below was prepared by the Secretary-Treasurer, who manages PLAIN's automated membership system.

As of September 5, 2014, PLAIN has **208** active members (a slight decrease since last year), including 183 individuals, 5 students, and 20 organizations.

Members come from 21 countries, with Canada and the U.S. leading in number of members. As noted at last year's annual meeting, the majority of members come from English-speaking countries. The table below shows the distribution of PLAIN memberships.

Distribution of PLAIN membership Sept 5, 2014	
Country	Members
Canada	87
U.S.A	50
Australia	25
Sweden	10
U.K.	6
Brazil	5
New Zealand	4
Argentina	3
Finland	3
South Africa	3
Netherlands	2
Norway	2
Belgium	1
Colombia	1
Denmark	1
France	1
Ireland	1
Italy	1
Malaysia	1
Portugal	1
TOTAL	208

Appendices

1. Minutes of PLAIN's 2013 Annual General Meeting
2. PLAIN Financial Statement - Year Ended December 31, 2013
3. Special Resolution of Members