



Guidance for Communications and Notices:

Does the recipient know what action is required of them?

What's the purpose?

- Compliance
- Notice
- Participation
- Understanding

Who's Your Audience?

- **How do customers want to be connected?** Think beyond mailers. What is the best way to relay your message and actually have the customer read and understand the information? (e.g., postcards vs. letters vs. door hangers)
- **Who are you trying to reach?** Neighborhood demographics can be useful. Try Portland Pulse at this link: <http://portlandpulse.org/>.
- **Consider multiple languages.** Should this notice be in a different language to achieve the desired outcome? Translation resources: www.portlandoregon.gov/brfs/63023
- **Consult with people working in the field or providing direct service.** They often hear from community members about notices or mailings. They can also provide valuable insight about the people living in the area you want to reach.
- **Consult with your bureau's communications or public involvement staff.** They may have additional tools or a different perspective about how to reach your audience.

What's the Message?

- **Keep tone friendly.** Have a positive opening and closing statement.
- **Start with a values or benefits statement.** Example: Your financial security is our top priority.
- **Use plain language.** Limit jargon or industry specific language. Include legal or regulatory language only as necessary, and keep in mind that this is often confusing to a reader. Consider adding these to the end or providing a section "for more information", but use plain language to describe the action necessary or the reason for the required action.
 - Evaluate your message for its ease of reading comprehension and grade level equivalent: <https://readability-score.com/>
 - Federal Government's plain language guidelines: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/>
- **Use gender neutral language.** Consider using "they" instead of "he/she" or identify titles or monikers (e.g. neighbor, applicant, vendor, etc.)
- **Use positive language.** (e.g., "We've always operated safely." As opposed to, "We've never had an accident.")
- **Spell out acronyms,** at least the first time they're used in a document.
- **Use the terms "neighbor", "customer", or "community member" instead of "citizen".** Not every community member is a citizen.

- **Include a Civil Rights Act Title VI/Americans with Disabilities Title II Accommodation statement.** This is a City requirement. Note the contact information to request an accommodation should be someone from your bureau. There is no citywide, central accommodation resource. Use the following link for sample language: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oehr/71544>.
- **Include a contact person with phone number and email.** Be sure the number is valid and messages are checked.
- **Evaluate contrast and look for ways to increase contrast.** This is important for design and paper choices. Although materials are generally black and white (very high contrast), when they are printed on colored paper stocks some contrast is lost, depending on the color value of the paper.
- **Check terminology.** (e.g., “Green streets” and “facility” did not resonate with some reviewers.)
- **Ensure proper grammar and spelling.**

How Did You Consider Equity?

- Using an Equity Lens (list of questions below) will help you determine who is helped or burdened:
 - Is my implicit bias impacting how I think about this issue?
 - How will this issue impact communities of color?
 - How will this issue impact people with disabilities?
 - Is there an opportunity to reduce disparities?

How Should It Look?

- **Consider graphical elements.** These can be read at a glance. Graphics and diagrams are easy to read, add interest, and can relay information regardless of the language someone speaks.
- **Spell check.** Have someone else read it for spelling, grammar, and understanding.
- **Read your communication out loud.** This helps grammar and verifies tone.
- **Choose a friendly color palette or style.**
- **Limit the number of different fonts or colors.**
- **Consider users of the document.** If creating a template, consider the how the staff who “fill in the blanks” will use it.