

## **Plain Talk Writing Tip #5**

### **Measuring Your Efforts Provides Valuable Information**

Revenue's first measured success with clear communication was a use tax letter that was sent out in early 2002. The result: a significant increase in voluntary payments.

That outcome inspired the Department to vigorously pursue clear communication in all written information, both electronic and paper.

While measuring the success of your Plain Talk project is the last thing you'll do, it has its origins in the project selection process. If your project is chosen to address some problem identified by your division or to impact a division performance measure, the measures have already been decided.

#### **Is it working?**

Measuring the success of your Plain Talk projects is the best way to find out if what you are doing is effective. Developing a good measurement strategy takes some thought and a plan. To determine appropriate measures, ask yourself questions about your project, such as:

- If we improve this document, what impact will this have on the agency? Fewer support phone calls? More voluntary compliance? Better collection rates? Fewer appeals?
- If we improve this letter, what impact will this have on our target audience? Better understanding? Better customer relations? Reduced penalties due to timely action?

Once you've identified a measurable objective, write a clear statement that includes a unit of measure. *Example:* This document will decrease support calls by five percent.

#### **Before and after**

A measurement is only meaningful when it is compared to something. With Plain Talk efforts, the most meaningful measure is against the previous version of the document you are revising. If you have measurements for the earlier version, then you are on your way to having data that will directly illustrate the impact of your rewrite.

If the earlier version does not have specific measures, perhaps you can create some and start measuring while working on your rewrite. If your project asked for the reader to take some action, create a baseline of how frequently that action was taken after the old version of the letter and compare it to the results of the rewritten letter

Good government depends on clear communications. By measuring our Plain Talk efforts, we'll know whether we are on the right track.

Plain Talk contest entries are due soon.

Happy Plain Talking!