

Building Plain Language Capacity within Virginia's HHR Agencies

24 HHR leaders are newly equipped to meet the plain language needs of Virginians.

To build a plain language community of practice, the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities sponsored a training series for Virginia's Health and Human Resources (HHR) agencies. The training series focused on best practices for writing in plain language and moving beyond plain language to develop materials for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

RTI International provided 4 hands-on training sessions, a material development workshop, and 1-on-1 consultations. After the training, trainees

- Reported increased knowledge and confidence to develop plain language materials
- Developed plain language materials using the principles they learned
- Reported high satisfaction with the training series



**4 in 10 Americans
have difficulty
understanding
print or digital
information.**


"In many ways [the training has] made me reconsider the communications I work on, and even how I write my emails."


"I will put this training into direct practice as my office is responsible for developing family-friendly materials."

Who did we reach?

In early 2025, we trained **24** Virginia state employees from **10** agencies.

Virginia Department for
Aging and Rehabilitative
Services 

Virginia Department
of Medical Assistance
Services 


Chesterfield Mental
Health Support Services
(Community Services
Board) 

Virginia Department of
Behavioral Health and
Developmental Services



Virginia Department
of Health 

Virginia Department of
Social Services 

Office of Children's
Services 

Virginia Board for People
with Disabilities 

Virginia Department
for the Blind and Vision
Impaired 

Virginia Department for
the Deaf and Hard of
Hearing 

Program Summary

What did trainees learn?

Through a mix of instruction, activities, and practice, trainees learned how to

- Simplify complex information
- Organize information effectively
- Create clear and concise messages
- Use active voice
- Use visuals to enhance understanding
- Break behaviors or situations down into easy steps

“I am using the [training] resources in my day-to-day communications.”

“I have already started thinking more about the way that I write when I am creating materials for my agency.”

After the training



3 in 4 trainees say they now know **a lot more** about how to develop plain language materials



All trainees say they now know **a lot more** about how to develop materials for people with IDD

As a result of the training series, trainees reported a

19% boost in self-confidence and **13% boost** in feeling prepared to develop plain language materials

and a

17% boost in self-confidence and **55% boost** in feeling prepared to develop materials for people with IDD

How did trainees apply what they learned?

Trainees used concepts from the training series to create new materials.

One trainee updated a flyer describing their agency's services (see before and after).



Before



After

About the training team

RTI International, a non-profit research organization with plain language expertise, conducted the training series. Contact Linda Squiers (lsquiers@rti.org) to discuss how RTI can help train your staff.

Funding for this product was supported, in part, by the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, under grant number 2401VASDCC-00, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.