

**APPENDIX C:**

**Final Combined Report on Survey of Members and Non-Members  
Plain Language Association InterNational**

**September 2009**



# Plain Language Association InterNational Membership Committee Report

## Membership Committee and Their Responsibilities

The PLAIN Membership Committee, which created this survey and analyzed the data, consists of Gina Frampton, Marília Riley, Deborah Bosley, Laura Murto-Linden, Dave Fox, Cheryl Stephens, and Ronald Wohl, Chair. Two surveys were sent electronically to all PLAIN registered **members** and to **non-member** users of the PLAIN On-Line Forum during the summer of 2009.

This report was prepared by Membership Committee members: Gina Frampton, Marília Riley, Cheryl Stephens and Deborah Bosley, with the assistance of Membership Chair and PLAIN Vice President, Ronald Wohl. The Membership Committee is comprised of PLAIN members from Canada, Australia, Finland, the UK and the United States. Much appreciation is due to the Committee for their long hours and dedicated service.

*Ronald Wohl, PLAIN Vice President, September 2009*

## 1. Who we surveyed and why

The **members'** survey was completed by 93 of 129 members (72%).

We surveyed members to gain information to

- enhance membership satisfaction by providing most demanded services
- evaluate the value of online forum to members
- obtain demographic data
- consider recruitment methods

The **nonmembers'** survey was completed by 44 individuals of the 90 nonmembers who have used the forum at least twice in the last year (49%). Although 589 people have used the online forum sometime in its existence, we limited our non-member survey to users for 2009. Our respondents represent 7.5% the 589 people who have ever used the online forum.

We surveyed nonmembers to

- learn which aspects of the online forum were most valuable to non-members
- determine if and how membership could be made attractive to non-members to motivate them to join our organization

## Demographics of participants

Our demographics show a high rate of participants over the age of 40: 89%. More than 80% of **members** have post-graduate qualifications. More than 60% of **nonmembers** have postgraduate qualifications.

**Field of work**

Government	29%
Business/Finance	26%
Law	22%

**Role in the plain language field**

The main role of members is editor, then writer, consultant, teacher/trainer. For nonmembers, the main role is writer.

**2. Summary of Results**

**Members** value membership in PLAIN for

- learning about plain language successes around the world
- discussing plain language problems with peers
- helping them to promote plain language in their own countries

The major motivation for joining plain was to advance the use of plain language. Networking and sharing advice were of next importance to members and are their main expectations of the association.

**Nonmembers** value it to

- access updated information on writing
- monitor and gain knowledge on a writing topic of interest
- network with others who care about plain language

Over half of nonmembers share this motivation to advance the use of plain language because they want PLAIN to promote plain language to government and corporate interests. *Half of the nonmembers answered they would join PLAIN for the online forum alone.*

**Website**

**Members** see the priority purposes of the website as sharing information, maintaining a library of resources, reporting on plain language developments, and providing information about members that facilitates networking. **Nonmembers** expressed the same desires.

**General services**

**Members** have practically equal interest in these services

- promoting and archiving studies on plain language as services they wanted from PLAIN
- using the forum to access updated information and network
- promoting plain language to government and corporate markets as desired services

**Members** value the online forum for

- Access to updated information on writing
- Networking
- Gaining knowledge on writing topics

**Members** offered several suggestions to make PLAIN more helpful through communications, international expansion, enhancement of the website, and accreditation.

### **Recruitment options**

**College students:** To encourage the college students to join, **members** favor a reduced cost membership with limited services and a mentorship program.

**Free services to others:** **Members** are divided over whether or not to provide free services. Some members suggest limited free services facilitates recruitment and marketing.

### **Membership organizations**

**Members** named 25 other organizations they belong to as writers, editors, or professional communicators. **Non-member** participants in the online forum added names of nine usability, design, and Swedish organizations.

**Members** are satisfied with PLAIN services and are willing to pay higher fees than **nonmembers**.

### **Concerns about the process to join PLAIN**

Both **members and nonmembers** expressed problems joining the association, which break out into two categories:

1. the process: finding out how to join or to whom to mail the money, perceptions of inadequate service,
2. non-existent, alternative pay arrangements, especially online systems.

Most non-member participants had not tried to join PLAIN. Some tried, but failed, to join PLAIN.

## **3. Report of the Findings**

### **Views on value of PLAIN**

**Members** value membership in PLAIN for

- learning about successes around the world,
- discussing plain language problems with peers, and
- helping them to promote plain language in their own countries.

**Nonmembers** value PLAIN to

- access updated information on writing
- monitor and gain knowledge on a writing topic of interest
- network with others who care about plain language.

The major motivation for joining PLAIN was to advance the use of plain language. Networking and sharing advice were of next importance to members and are their main expectations of the association.

Over half of nonmembers share this motivation to advance the use of plain language and want PLAIN to promote plain language to government and corporate interests. *Half of the nonmembers answered they would join PLAIN for the online forum alone.*

**Reason for not yet joining PLAIN**

41% of nonmember respondents did not see enough value to justify joining, and 25% of nonmembers gave financial reasons or difficulty in making payment as a reason for not joining.

There was one strong comment about the elitist focus of the forum, and about how much information is available for free elsewhere so that there is no need to join.

**Purposes of website**

Members see the priority purposes of the website as

- sharing information
- maintaining a library of resources
- reporting on plain language developments
- providing information about members that facilitates networking.

Nonmembers expressed the same desires.

**Services Wanted**

Members have practically equal interest in the following services

- promoting and archiving studies on plain language
- using the forum to access updated information and network
- promoting plain language to government and corporate markets

Both members and nonmembers expressed some interest in online training programs and announcements of such programs.

**Members** report that the PLAIN services they currently use are

- Archives of tools, studies, and other information
- Online forum
- Networking
- Promotion to government and corporate markets

**Members** value the online forum for

- Access to updated information on writing
- Networking
- Gaining knowledge on writing topics

Half of the **nonmembers** say they would join PLAIN for the online forum alone. For half of all respondents, the most important reasons for using the forum were the same as for members. Getting answers from writing experts was listed as very important for a quarter of respondents and least important for an equal number. A minority (19%) said they wouldn't pay to join.

#### **4. The Membership Committee's recommendations**

##### **Strategic Recommendations**

- the **PLAIN** Board of Directors carefully study this report and the attached complete survey results
- individual board-led committees study specific areas as indicated here to develop a strategy for **PLAIN's** near and long term future, with the goal of announcing this strategy and the tactics to carry it out by the next biennial conference in Sweden in 2011.

Management of an organization must be dynamic; consequently, individual improvements should be implemented as soon as possible.

##### **Recommendations for Members**

In order to better serve the expressed needs of members, we propose

- developing teams or committees with special functions to enhance the **Website, the Yahoo online forum, public relations, advocacy, and training opportunities.**
- recruiting a younger membership by using the current communication tools and Internet media like Twitter and Facebook so we offer suggestions.
- encouraging local gatherings of members and friends for mutual support and networking, leading to individual national organizations that would be non-competitive affiliates of PLAIN

##### **Recommendations for Nonmembers**

We recommend

- creating a limited "free" trial period for the online forum.
- keeping dues as low as possible in order to broaden the membership base. considering a graduated membership fee.
- simplifying payment of membership fees from overseas members.

**Continued PLAIN Information Gathering**

We recommend that **PLAIN** continue surveying members on issues of organization and global plain language development to create discussions and possibly lead to consensus on plain language issues. This information could also be used by individual national plain language groups for stimulating discussion and membership interest within their countries. We further remember that we remain mindful that we are a global organization with members who face many different obstacles in promoting plain language versions of multiple nationally accepted languages in their individual countries.

**Recruitment options**

To encourage the college students to join, **members** favor a

- reduced cost membership with limited services
- mentorship program

**Nonmembers** think a free membership for students is better for recruitment than a mentorship program.

**Free services to others**

**Members** hold these views on providing free services

Yes	42.9%
Uncertain	37.4
No	19.8

Some **members** suggest limited free services could facilitate recruitment of members or marketing by members through the directory (11%). Offering free access to the “archives” is favored by 60% of members while 45% favor giving free access to the online forum. **Nonmembers** advocate a free trial period of use of the forum for recruitment.

Members are divided over whether we should offer free services for only a limited time. Concerns are costs of development, and time and effort required for maintenance. However, there is concern over the loss of influence and effectiveness if we do limit all access after a short trial period. The website serves a public relations and marketing purpose for the association although archives could be put behind a firewall for members.

Members suggest ways to make PLAIN more helpful

- More updates and info through email, including email reminders of what is available online
- Develop an international expansion strategy and appoint representatives in each country
- Enhancement of the website, both in looks and functionality, and addition of an online chat site
- Short editing competitions

- An electronic newsletter
- Accreditation in Plain English methods and tools

**Membership in other organizations**

Members belong to these groups

Plain Language Action and Information Network	IEEE Professional Communication Society
Center for Plain Language	ACM Special Interest Group in the Design of Communication
Editors Association of Canada (EAC)	Financial Communication Forum
Society of Editors	Grammar Police Patient Information Forum (UK)
Editorial Freelancers	Shareholder's Communication Forum
International Listening Association	CSE [Counsel of Science Editors?]
International Reading Association	Women's National Book Association
The Writers' Union of Canada	Reel Women
National Writers Association	Statute Law Society
Society for Technical Communication	Scribes
International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)	Clarity
Association of Professional Communication Consultant	Canadian Bar Association
	Legal Writing Institute

**Non-member** participants in the online forum belong to some of the above associations and also to

Usability Professionals Association	Suomen kääntäjien ja tulkkien liitto
International Institute for Information Design	Kääntäjien ammattijärjestö
Communications Research Institute	Australian Society of Authors
ESS (Swedish language consultants)	CALC
	IMC

Fees for these associations range from free to \$450. **Members** have joined for resources, networking, business opportunities, and job boards. Also, some memberships represent the honor of invitation.

**Nonmembers** joined other organizations for an assortment of reasons: professional development, networking, website resources, accreditation, credibility, local chapter, seminars, regular magazine, professional association, to learn about plain language and the law initiatives, magazine or journal, international network, active discussion, job board. Fees range up to \$350.

A unique suggestion on fees was offered: free for retired and unemployed, \$30 for students, \$50 for employed. A two-tier fee was suggested: \$75 individual, \$150 organizational.

The breakdown of **members'** opinions on a reasonable fee is

US\$30	20%
US\$50	37%
US\$75	26%

Not surprisingly, **nonmembers** favor lower fees. About 10% indicate that fees should be as low as possible—perhaps \$20 to \$25. Others consider these to be reasonable fees:

US\$30	46%
US\$50	40%

### Concerns about the process to join PLAIN

Both **members** (21%) and **nonmembers** (17%) expressed problems joining the association which break out into two categories:

- the process: finding out how to join or to whom to mail the money
- perceptions of inadequate service
- non-existent alternative pay arrangements, especially online systems

Some suggestions for payment of fees

- by EFT
- through PayPal
- without being sent to Canada
- to a USA location
- online
- in a local currency
- without requiring an international money draft
- by online subscription
- by credit card
- by bank transfer.

### Attempts to join Plain

Most **non-member** participants had not tried to join PLAIN (82%). Seven participants said they had tried, but failed, to join PLAIN

### Demographics of participants

#### Age of participants

Members are aging: 89% are over 40; 10% are between 26 and 40 with 1% under 25 years. [65% over 50 years]

#### Highest level of education

Over 80% have post-graduate qualifications; 20% have college education.

#### Field of work

Government	29%
Business/Finance	26%
Law	22%
Education/Training	16%
Health/Comm Serv	15%

#### Role in the plain language field

The main role is editor, then writer, consultant, teacher/trainer.

## **Non-Member Demographics**

### **Age of participants**

90% of participants were over 40, with 9% aged 26 – 40 and no one younger.

### **Highest level of education**

Over 60% had postgraduate qualifications.

### **Field of work**

Government, business and law make up the working areas of about 75% of participants, with government representing the majority at 30%.

### **Role in the plain language field**

Members function in the roles of

- Writer 55.8%
- Editor 53.5%
- Consultant 44.2%
- Teacher 37.2%

## **3. The Membership Committee's recommendations**

In order to better serve the expressed needs of **members**, we propose

### **Website**

Members want:

- online training programs on various writing topics
- news about plain language
- announcements of training programs
- highlights of plain language efforts
- an international network of plain language practitioners

PLAIN also wants to recruit younger members who are oriented to Internet resources.

In order to reach a wider and younger audience, PLAIN must use the current communication tools and Internet media. We recommend that there be a Web Team to include:

- current website manager
- blogger
- Twitter reporter
- LinkedIn coordinator
- Facebook Page manager

Widgets can be added to the website front page to “pull in” a Twitter feed and the blogposts. A division of labor can be reached so that, for example, notices of events and training are twitted while news of plain language projects is blogged.

**Online forum**

Members value archived studies on the use, benefit, value, and effects of plain language; online training program announcements; and sharing information on writing and using plain language.

We recommend the creation of a Yahoo Forum team to make maximum use of the services provided by Yahoo:

- current forum manager
- librarian
- database manager

The “files” feature and the database program provided by Yahoo are a convenient way to store articles and studies. A librarian can locate, collect, and upload materials to “files”. A database manager can figure out how to make such information more accessible and can make the membership information searchable for networking purposes. There could also be a database search for contracts or jobs.

**Advocacy**

Members want PLAIN to assist them to promote plain language to their government and corporate markets.

We recommend a public relations manager or committee to coordinate this work. This type of work would benefit from the same type of cooperation between groups as is seen in the International Working Group.

**Online training**

Members want both announcements of and delivery of online training programs on various writing topics. We recommend that the International Working Group take this into consideration.

**Networking**

Members want more networking. We recommend that PLAIN encourage local gatherings of members and friends for mutual support and networking.

**Concerning nonmembers**

- Give nonmembers a limited “free” trial period. The survey did not canvass opinions on how long that period should be.
- Keep dues as low as possible in order to broaden the membership base.
- Consider a graduated membership fee to accommodate the lower incomes of students, retirees and members from developing countries.
- Establish a page on our website that lists members’ efforts to promote plain language to government and corporate markets
- Simplify payment of membership fees from overseas members.

## 5. Full survey results

**Member** survey: <http://tinyurl.com/plainM> or  
[http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=YrvpoKrIAmCqLK2jixLE6Zng96y4D1kNrigptSZDjzE\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=YrvpoKrIAmCqLK2jixLE6Zng96y4D1kNrigptSZDjzE_3d)

**Non-member** survey: <http://tinyurl.com/plainN> or  
[http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=4PjWc9\\_2bWci\\_2bL06qY2c4kxOlaqZuOOiAXCL5gOecEkC0\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=4PjWc9_2bWci_2bL06qY2c4kxOlaqZuOOiAXCL5gOecEkC0_3d)