CAN A POLICYMAKER UNDERSTAND THIS? (WP6E)

Module
Writing for Policy Audiences (WP)

Format
Individual exercise and large group discussion

Purpose
This activity contributes to the module learning objectives by asking participants to apply elements of policy writing to a section of technical writing.

Time Required
- 45 mins.

Activity Description

This is an individual exercise in which participants practice removing jargon from technical writing. This exercise should ideally come after the Principles of Policy Writing (WP1L) and Conversational Writing (WP2L) sessions. It reinforces the same principles of clear writing, with a particular focus on jargon that is specific to research in the family planning and health arena.

Read the technical summary together. Discuss the content, and ensure that all participants understand the language and concepts (as participants come from different backgrounds, you may need to define some terminology). Ask the group to spend about 15-20 minutes individually rewriting the piece for a broader audience by removing jargon and technical language. When everybody is complete or nearly complete, ask people for examples of how they rewrote the piece. Go through sentence by sentence or segment by segment, asking for different examples and giving feedback.

The challenge in this exercise is to strike a balance between preserving the strength and meaning of the data presented in the original writing, while removing jargon and elements that are excessively technical. Many participants have a tendency to oversimplify the material and lose the punch of the information presented. When discussing how the piece was rewritten, participants are usually very eager to share. Stress that there are many correct ways to rewrite the piece, and each individual will make a choice about what level of detail is necessary. As time allows, discuss the challenges they faced in conveying the material in simple language. They do not need to preserve a 1:1 rewrite for every sentence—they may find that it makes sense to combine sentences, or break topics into two or three sentences in the rewrite.
A PRB rewrite of the piece is available, and should be handed out to the group at the end. Again, stress that this is not the right answer, but just one example of how the piece could be rewritten without using jargon.

Key Learning Concept(s)
- Identifying jargon and technical language.
- Retaining detail and conveying the nature of the data, while using simple and clear language.

Materials Needed
- Paper and pens

Associated Presentations
- Principles of Policy Writing (WP1L)
- Conversational Writing – presentation and exercises (WP2L and WP3E)

Required Preparation
- Read “Plain Language Considerations”