



Meeting Minutes

June 3, 2014

U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Peter Lee, Council Chairman, U.S. Department of the Treasury, opened the meeting and welcomed the members at 9:10 a.m. The members introduced themselves.

Functions and Responsibilities of Commerce's Executive Secretariat

Ms. Madhura Valverde, Executive Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce, discussed the functions of the Commerce executive secretariat office. Members asked what she requires for the turnaround time for congressional responses, which Ms Valverde said is 5 days. Members asked about how Commerce decides which letters their Secretary will sign. She said it depends on topics of interest and the members with whom the Secretary has closer relationships with.

Policy Discussion: Select USA

Mr. Vinai K. Thummalapally, Executive Director, Select USA, U.S. Department of Commerce, discussed his background as the head of a company that was a foreign direct investment in the United States. The company manufactured writeable CDs and DVDs. He later was appointed by the President to be the ambassador to Belize. Select USA is an office within the International Trade Administration. The purpose of the office is to attract more direct foreign investment into the United States and market the United States with the help of the State Department as a the best country to do business. Select USA partners with State economic development organizations as well as with a Federal interagency coordination group chaired by the National Economic Council which is called the Interagency Investment Working Group.

Best Practice Discussion: Plain Writing and Plain Language

Mr. Lee introduced Mr. Nicholas A. Fraser, from the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) within the Office of Management and Budget. He helped prepare the guidance in 2012 for the implementation of the Plain Language Act. He discussed the difficulty agencies have with assessing whether the act is working or not. He noted that getting more feedback from readers is key to make an assessment of whether their understanding of documents is improving. Agencies need to meet the minimum process requirements in the Act, but also providing some case studies proving the benefits in terms of increased compliance or cost savings. The members discussed whether the increased use of electronic communications forums has had an effect to encourage writers to be more clear.

Mr. Lee also introduced Ms. Jana Goldman, Center for Plain Language, and read her bio. She discussed what the Center for Plain Language is. She also discussed the issue that the Plain Language Act does not have an enforcement part to it. The Center decided to create report card grades for Government agencies and publicize them to help encourage agencies to follow the Act. The first year the center reported on compliance with the administrative requirements in the law. The next year the center evaluated sample documents that were supplied by the agencies or that they found randomly on agency Web sites. She discussed the Center's standards for the 2014 Report Card, which is attached. She discussed the expectations and deadlines for this year's report card. The members discussed some ideas

Council of Federal Executive Secretariats

*Peter Lee, Treasury, Chairman
Department of the Treasury*

*Annette Vietti-Cook, Vice Chair
Nuclear Regulatory Commission*



to help encourage the use of plain language, including providing simple guidance materials and some electronic editing assistance software. The members asked about the date of the annual report required in the law, and Mr. Fraser said that OMB was not directed in the law to set a date for the report but starting with the April date give some agencies a point to work from but there would be a one time delay but would have to be done by the end of the year. Mr. Wachter asked for an opportunity to get feedback for the reasons for a grade, particularly for a bad grade. Members suggested that the comments on the grading be automatically returned to the agency. Ms. Goldman said she would discuss it with her group. Mr. Harold Henderson, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) thanked Ms. Terry Layton, U.S. Department of Commerce, for providing training to the HHS office of civil rights and presented a certificate of appreciation from HHS.

White House Update

The White House Agency Liaison provided updates and guidance on White House case work.

Committee Reports

Membership and Meetings – Ms. Sally Liska, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Mr. Lee reported that Ms. Liska is working on the member directory.

Web – Ms. Tracy Catoe, U.S. Department of Education, reported that minutes and agendas for past meeting will be posted soon.

Technology – Ms. Linda McCarty, Internal Revenue Service, discussed a possible survey of technology use in Executive Secretariats that needs to be prepared.

Plain Writing – Terry Layton, U.S. Department of Commerce, updated members on the meetings of the Plain Language Action Network.

Open Forum

Mr. Lee discussed the summer luncheon in mid-July and asked for feedback from the group on whether a location outside downtown Washington in Rockville, Maryland, would work for the members. Several members indicated that they would be more likely to attend the lunch if it is at a downtown Washington location. Mr. Lee said he would send the invitation by email.

Adjourn

Mr. Lee adjourned the meeting at 11:34 a.m.