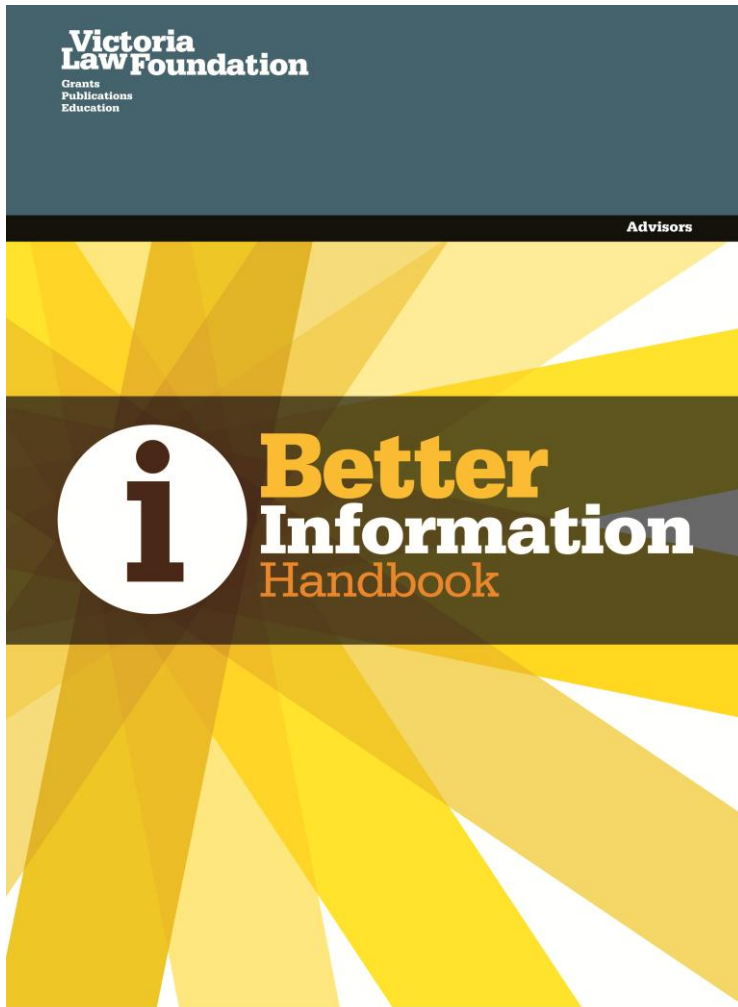


Creating better information

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Introductions



- Adapted from a UK publication by information service AdviceNow
- A free, step-by-step guide to producing better information for the community
- Available for download from www.victorialawfoundation.org.au

What is the handbook about?

Improving the quality of community legal information. By encouraging the use of plain language principles to create information that is:

- Audience-focused
- Can be understood the first time it's read
- Allows the reader to take action to fulfil their goals
- Works effectively as part of wider services and campaigns



So what is plain language?

audience focused writing that communicates its message clearly and concisely. It is not about 'dumbing' down but rather about writing appropriately for your audience.

- Use active voice (verbs rather than nouns)
- Speak directly to your audience
- Use language your audience will understand
- Use familiar words (usually the shorter ones)
- Explain terms that will be unfamiliar to the audience
- If it's possible to cut a word out, always cut it out
- Keep sentences short with one idea
- Avoid acronyms and abbreviations – at least, define on first use

What is in the handbook?

The handbook provides a step-by-step guide on every aspect of the development of community information - helping you achieve your goals when you produce a publication.

Today we are going to look at the project plan builder which will highlight some of the key content on the handbook.

Project plan builder

Turn to page 73-76 ...

Research and planning

What is the issue?

- Research the current problem
- Assess current publications
- Choose the medium
- Use experts
- Use intermediaries



What do you want to achieve?

What is your objective? Is it....

- to raise awareness?
- to increase understanding and knowledge?
- to guide people through a process?
- to offer support?
- to get people to take action?

Who is your audience?

It's important to be clear who your information is aimed at.

You need to know:

- what your audience will understand
- what your audience is capable of doing
- what your audience feels comfortable with

Researching your audience

You can research your audience's situation through:

- national statistics such as Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data
- Australian Council of Social Services and state organisations
- Social research organisations
- Talking to intermediaries

Think about demographics...

Such as:

- age
- gender
- education
- income
- ethnic or cultural backgrounds

... but avoid stereotyping

- make sure you fully understand your audience's situation
- don't pigeonhole them based on certain factors such as age, education level and so on

What format should I choose?

- Once you've established your audience, think about how you'll present your information.

Paper information

Leaflets and factsheets are:

- easily passed on to other people
- can be easily transported, so they can be used to explain a reader's rights to others
- a good opportunity for raising an organisation's profile.

Paper information

Leaflets and factsheets are also:

- expensive to produce
- only accessible to people who go to the places where the publications are available
- not accessible to people who have low literacy skills or visual impairments

Online information

Publishing material online:

- is a good way to reach lots of people
- means the information can be updated quickly, easily and cheaply
- allows organisations to receive and answer questions from users
- information can be made available to people with vision impairment or dyslexia

Online information

Publishing material online also...

- requires resources to ensure that information stays up-to-date and that links are relevant
- isn't available to those without internet access

Alternative formats

- Video
- Audio
- Braille
- Large print

Writing and piloting

What will you include?

- Make important information stand out
- Ask those who know for advice
- Pilot a draft

What language will you use?

- 2006 census data revealed that 46% of Australian adults had a literacy level of Grade 6 or below
- So it's critical that your information uses appropriate language
- Keep to the point
- Break up the text

Pilot a draft

- Ask users what they think of your material
- Choose a suitable method
- Be clear about what you want to know
- Consult as many people as possible
- Listen to everyone
- Ask advisors

Presentation and design

Which design will you use?

- research has shown that people won't pay attention to information that does not look as if it is meant for them

Good graphic design:

- attracts the reader
- holds their attention
- transforms your information from plain text into a visually engaging document

Design elements

- use colour
 - use photographs
 - use illustrations
 - use bullet lists
- ... but don't over-design!

Use a varied approach

Consider including:

- flow charts
- decision trees
- quizzes
- question and answer sections

Consider your format

- How will you best present your information?
- Consider the size and shape – A4, A5, DL, credit card
- Folded information – how will it work?

Tips for designing for print

- Choose bright colours and images where appropriate
- Break information into sections
- Consider the paper size and shape
- Leave lots of space on the pages
- Pilot the design

Tips for designing for the web

- Keep it short, particularly on the opening page
- Consider ‘scanability’
- Put important information up front
- Use clear headings
- Make keywords stand out
- Box it up

Marketing and distribution

Getting your message out there

- use your own organisation
- get your workmates involved
- use intermediaries

Tips for distribution

- See if you can share distribution costs with others who want to send out information to the same audience
- Avoid sending out information unless you know the recipient wants it
- Keep records of your distribution and use this information to help you

Ideas for promoting your material

- Start a mailing list
- Spread the word through networks
- Connect with other websites
- Make it easy to find online
- Contact the media

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring

Monitoring involves:

- tracking where your information went
- tracking how many people saw or used it

To monitor effectively, you must:

- record where your information goes
- look at what's effective

Evaluation

You might want to look at...

- particular features of the information (writing, design, format)
- the types of people who found and used the information
- how they used it
- what they thought of it
- whether they used it more than once, or passed it on to somebody else
- what the outcomes were

Keeping it up-to-date

- Set a review date
- Make someone responsible
- Check for changes
- Keep track
- Date your information
- Keep everyone updated

Need more information?

Contact Victoria Law Foundation

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