

News Release

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Minnesota Department of Revenue wins State Innovation Award for Plain Language Project

ST. PAUL – Recently the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota awarded the Minnesota Department of Revenue a State Innovation Award for our work on plain language. The State Government Innovation Awards recognize the great work of state government agencies and encourages innovation and service redesign in Minnesota. Revenue was one of 10 winners out of 36 and selected to have a video made about the project.

“This award recognizes our dedication to providing better government and excellent customer service through clear and simple communication,” said Revenue Deputy Commissioner Cynthia Bauerly. “We are seeing real results as we make our information easier to understand, and that benefits all Minnesotans.”

The award entry highlighted three plain language efforts.

1. We improved our call center by writing call prompts in plain language, decreasing the number of prompts callers have to listen to from six to two in some cases. Now nearly 94% of the 740,000 people who call us have their needs met on the first call.
2. For another project we condensed five complicated and confusing letters about audits into one letter. The new letter uses a question and answer format, with clear and understandable language, to answer readers’ most common questions. Based on usability testing results, the newly simplified letter is easier to read and understand. Using a single version also reduces the work required to maintain this information and ensures our communication is consistent.
3. A third project aims to help readers find clear payment information on our website. Previously we had five unique webpages that gave payment information and options. Each page was different and confusing. We consolidated the pages into one and edited the text using plain language. Condensing the pages helps users find the information

they need more quickly. Usability testing confirmed this. Very early results show users spend less time on the webpage, and now access the page using fewer clicks.

To learn more about the State Innovation Awards as well as the individual award winners and their innovations, visit sgja.umn.edu.

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