Web Content Writing Training

Program Requirement

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), one of the National Institutes of Health, is located in Research Triangle Park (Raleigh/Durham area), North Carolina. The mission of NIEHS is to discover how the environment affects people in order to promote healthier lives. Detailed information about the Institute can be found on the NIEHS website at www.niehs.nih.gov.

The Office of Communications and Public Liaison (OCPL) is the first source of news and information about NIEHS, and the Institute's important biomedical research and funding programs. OCPL handles website management, media requests, inquiries from the scientific community, and internal communication activities, among other things. More information about OCPL can be found at http://www.niehs.nih.gov/about/od/ocpl/index.cfm.

Currently, OCPL and other offices receive content intended for the NIEHS and NTP public and internal websites (http://www.niehs.nih.gov, http://ntp.niehs.nih.gov, http://kids.niehs.nih.gov, http://partners.niehs.nih.gov, http://www.ehponline.org, and others) from staff throughout the Institute. Much of this staff has little or no training in writing content for the Web, although some staff members have extensive experience in creating or reviewing scientific content, such as journal articles and grant applications.

Professional Web content writing training will benefit current and future content creators, by providing them with the basic tools and techniques required for clear, concise, usable, and accessible Web content.

Statement of Work

Curricula should be developed to teach up-to-date, professional Web content writing skills to approximately 40 NIEHS staff, in two back-to-back one-day workshops, with approximately 20 staff per class.

The course should be focused on plain and clear user-focused Web content writing, and be exercise driven, in order to provide as much hands-on experience in writing skills, tools, and techniques to assist staff in putting together a clear, concise Web page. Trainers must provide as much one-on-one coaching as possible, in a group setting, and provide feedback on writing exercises. A wide variety of examples of good and bad Web content samples should also be provided, along with clear explanations as to why each are considered good or bad.

The course should spend very little time on why it is important to be a good Web content writer or how good Web content writing can benefit everyone. Instead, instruction should be provided on how to:

- Write in plain language, easily understood by the public
- Determine the key and take-home messages
- Place data, graphics, and images to enhance the take-home message
- Write titles that will pull readers in
- Organize and prioritize information
- Prepare content for user scanning and chunking
- Develop multi-media content, for use on Web, Twitter, Facebook, etc.

The trainer should familiarize themselves with NIEHS and OCPL through the NIEHS website.

Workshop Structure

The curriculum should be designed for two skill levels:

- Refresher and advanced skills for current writing staff
- Basics for staff who have not had this type of training before

Each of the 2 classes will either be 1 full day or 2 half days (i.e., the afternoon of one day and morning of the next). Both classes will be back-to-back.

Subject Matter

NIEHS is interested in including infographics in both training sessions. However, more time and detail should be devoted to this topic in the advanced class. At a minimum, the following should be discussed in both classes:

- What is an infographic?
- How to select information for an infographic from a text-based source
- Building an infographic-based message
- Effective infographics (simple message, rich information)
- Infographics and social media (viral nature, shareability)

The intent of this segment would be to give staff the skills they need to pull out data that can be developed into an infographic – not to actually develop the graphic.

The course should not be about website design, Web coding, or search engine optimization. Should the proposed course design recommend the use of personas or Web style guides, NIEHS can provide internal website personas, and currently used style guides. The following additional topic areas, listed below, should be covered in the course.

Course Topics

- Page Structure
  - Reading online: user behaviors
  - Use of titles, heads, and subheads to help users locate information quickly
  - Making titles and headings meaningful to the user
  - Reorganizing individual paragraphs for faster access to the main ideas
  - Using lists
  - Using callouts
  - Using less words
  - Using appropriate graphics, charts, and tables
  - Moving tangential materials into linked pages

- Plain and User-focused Writing
  - Identifying goals for content
  - Restructuring sentences to reduce the cognitive burden on the reader
  - Shortening paragraphs
  - Unifying a paragraph around a central idea
  - Deleting fluff
  - Making text easy to scan

- o Composing Alt Text for 508-compliant images and graphs
- o "Don't make me guess what you mean"
- o Using fewer words, but still getting the point across
- o Putting scientific terminology into lay terms, without losing accuracy
- o Limiting the number of clauses per sentence
- o Avoiding ambiguities, passives, and negatives
- o Reading levels and low-literacy users

- Links
  - o Writing out the text of links so users know what the target page contains
  - o Craft links that appear within running text so they add to, rather than take away from, the idea
  - o Making clear what people will get if they click
  - o Repurposing print documents for the Web
  - o Section 508 and link text

MANDATORY CRITERIA

1. Must be available sometime in August, September, or October 2013.

2. Must be able to teach professional Web content writing course on site at NIEHS in North Carolina.

3. Must provide course outline, which includes the topics above.

4. Must provide at least 3 sample exercises that might be used in NIEHS Web content writing class.

5. Must provide at least two whitepapers, books, chapters or Web-based products that the trainer has authored, co-authored, or helped develop. Preference will be given to those published in the field of clear/plain writing or Web content writing.

6. Must provide a variety of examples of good and bad Web content.

7. Must have knowledge of NIEHS or become familiar with NIEHS through the website. Some familiarity with NIH and HHS website structure is also desirable.

8. Must have extensive teaching experience, preferably 5 years or more. Preference will be given to those whose teaching experience is within the last ten years and in Web content writing.

9. Must provide acceptable professional references with quote.

10. Must provide all training materials for class participants.

11. Travel costs must be included in the total price of the course.