

**Welcome!**

**Feel free to answer the questions on the wall.**

**Why you are here**

Use the stickers to tell us the top 2 reasons you came to this session on the wall chart.

**Good communication**

Tell us what makes “good” written communication in your opinion

**Where you are from**

Tell us where you are from in Illinois (or beyond) on the wall map.



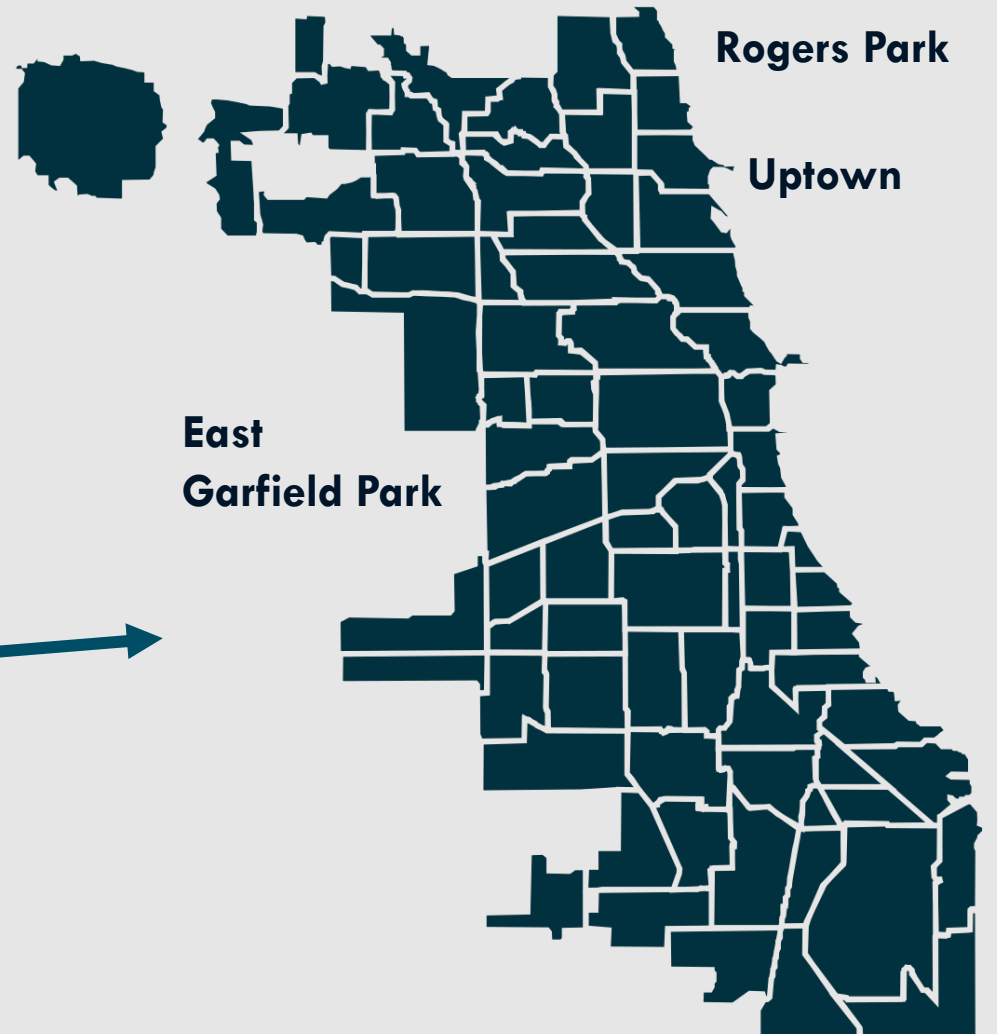
Housing Matters Conference 2023

# **Simplifying the Message: Designing Inclusive Communications**

Melanie Sampson, Clear Language Lab at Literacy Works

# About Melanie (she/her)

- **20+ years in nonprofit sector** in roles including administrator, teacher, volunteer coordinator, and other
- Earned an **MA in linguistics** and **certificate in plain language**
- Live on NW side of Chicago and have **worked in community-based settings across the city**





# About Literacy Works

## **Community Literacy**

Supports the adult literacy professionals and volunteers across Illinois to create an equitable, student-centered sector

## **Clear Language Lab**

Supports mission-driven entities across sectors in plain language training and support with a social justice lens

# Housing related project partners

- Chicago Fair Housing Alliance
- City of Chicago Commission on Human Rights
- Cook County Assessor's Office
- Corporation for Supportive Housing
- Housing Action Illinois
- Minnesota Homeownership Center
- Vermont Human Rights Commission



## Think about a time that...

- You had made a mistake because you did not understand what to do
- You thought you were clear but the person you were communicating with did not understand you
- You had trouble navigating a system because the process was not clear

## I heard about a lot of communication challenges in the field yesterday...

- Processes are not clear or very complicated and burdensome
- Processes do not lead to results
- Resources sometimes exist but others don't always know about them...
- Not informed by enough by community members with lived experience
- ???

**What do we think clear communication looks like?**





# But we still end up with content that is hard for us humans to make sense of!

## The 2021 ARO

The revised ARO was adopted by City Council in April 2021 and will take full effect on Oct. 1, 2021. The 2021 ARO expands off-site options that target Chicagoans in the greatest need for affordable rental housing, while also focusing on anti-displacement measures that allow long-time residents to remain in their communities and benefit from redevelopment. The revised ARO also encourages the production of more affordable and family-sized units, while also maintaining much-needed funding for current programs that support thousands of low-income renters.

Additionally, the revised ARO:

## Housing vouchers - how do they function?

The housing choice voucher program places the choice of housing in the hands of the individual family. A very family is selected by the PHA to participate is encouraged to consider several housing choices to secure the best for the family needs. A housing voucher holder is advised of the unit size for which it is eligible based on family composition.

The housing unit selected by the family must meet an acceptable level of health and safety before the PHA can unit. When the voucher holder finds a unit that it wishes to occupy and reaches an agreement with the landlord lease terms, the PHA must inspect the dwelling and determine that the rent requested is reasonable.

The PHA determines a payment standard that is the amount generally needed to rent a moderately-priced dwelling in the local housing market and that is used to calculate the amount of housing assistance a family will receive. The payment standard does not limit and does not affect the amount of rent a landlord may charge or the family may family which receives a housing voucher can select a unit with a rent that is below or above the payment standard. housing voucher family must pay 30% of its monthly adjusted gross income for rent and utilities, and if the unit greater than the payment standard the family is required to pay the additional amount. By law, whenever a family to a new unit where the rent exceeds the payment standard, the family may not pay more than 40 percent of its monthly income for rent.

## WRITTEN NOTIFICATION OF RIGHTS - POSTER

### Written Notice of Rights

**We must provide you with this written notice before you enroll in TEFAP or receive services from TEFAP, as required by 7 CFR part 16.**

Because TEFAP is supported in whole or in part by financial assistance from the Federal Government, we are required to let you know that --

- We may not discriminate against you on the basis of religion or religious belief, a refusal to hold a religious belief, or a refusal to attend or participate in a religious practice;
- We may not require you to attend or participate in any explicitly religious activities that are offered by us, and any participation by you in these activities must be purely voluntary;
- We must separate in time or location any privately funded explicitly religious activities from activities supported with USDA direct assistance;
- If you object to the religious character of our organization, we must make reasonable efforts to identify and refer you to an alternate provider to which you have no objection. We cannot guarantee, however, that in every instance, an alternate provider will be available; and

# Miscommunication happens! Why?

Assumptions that everyone has the same knowledge

Doing it the way it has always been done

Creating content that is too vague

Writing for wrong audience, wrong format, wrong purpose

Creating distrust

Maintaining the status quo and old systems

Trickle down effect from other levels

???

# Why are you here...

1. Someone told me come to this session.
2. My org needs to grow in this area
3. I want to convince other people to communicate more clearly and need resources
4. I want my org to connect our DEI values and communication efforts better
5. Something other reason

**No matter where you are starting, we are glad you are here...**

**I have never heard  
the term plain  
language before**

**I think I write  
clearly but I need to  
convince my org to  
change our  
approach**

**I want to convince  
community  
partners and govt  
officials to change  
approaches**

# Agenda

What is plain language?

1

How does it align with equity?

2

What strategies can we use?

3

What can we change right now?

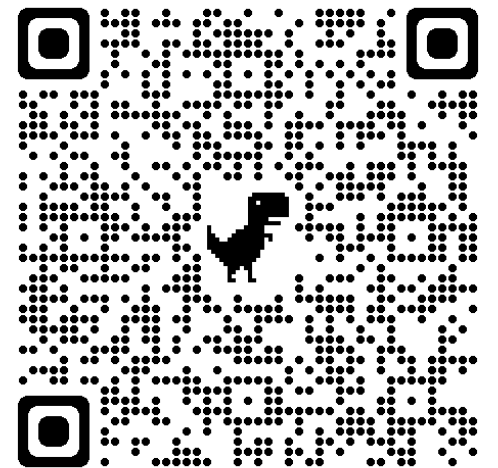
4

How can we explore further?

5

[Resource list](#)

if you want  
to check it  
out now!



The background features abstract geometric shapes. A large teal circle is on the left. A grey line starts from the left, curves down, and then right. A blue line starts from the bottom, curves up, and then right. A dark blue line is at the top right. Small teal circles are placed at the corners of the grey and blue lines.

**What is plain  
language?**

A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.

**International Plain Language Federation**

A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily **find** what they need, **understand** what they find, and **use** that information.

**International Plain Language Federation**



# Fundamentals to think about



# One missing piece can have a big ripple effect...

Designed for the wrong audience



**Bookville Services for Older Adults**

The Bookville Senior Services department offers basic support services to older residents here in Bookville. Bookville residents age 62 can obtain information and access to varied services through our office. We can provide assistance to those who need it and connect community members to key services that allow individuals to maintain their independence.

In addition to local funding, Bookville receives funding from federal, state, and local resources that support these services including Social Services Block Grants, Community Block Development Grants, and others. We also get a variety of funding from local organizations that helps supplement these funding streams.

Clear language, but hard to navigate



**PLEASE CALL US IF YOU ARE A YOUNG PERSON WHO HAS QUESTIONS ABOUT:**

<b>HOMELESSNESS</b> if you are experiencing homelessness or do not have a safe place to live	<b>FOSTER CARE</b> if you want help getting into foster care or getting AB 12 benefits	<b>GUARDIANSHIP</b> if you need help making someone your guardian
<b>MEDICAL</b> if you need access to medical or mental health services	<b>SCHOOL</b> if you want help with school (enrollment, discipline, special education)	<b>PUBLIC BENEFITS</b> if you were denied public benefits like CalFresh (food stamps) or General Assistance (cash aid)

**HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT IMMIGRATION, RESTRAINING ORDERS, AND RECORD SEALING? WHEN IN DOUBT, PLEASE GIVE US A CALL.**

Helpful design but overly complicated language



**SCAMS & FORECLOSURES: ANTI-DISPLACEMENT ASSISTANCE**

**JUNE 21, 2022**  
**5PM**

Register at [www.bit.ly/abclegal](http://www.bit.ly/abclegal) or email [abclegalaid@legalaid.org](mailto:abclegalaid@legalaid.org) for the ZOOM live link




# What plain language isn't...and is

It's not...

- ~~“dumbing down”~~ information
- watering down information to make it no longer useful
- condescending or childish
- Not one size fits all

It is...

- Tailoring content to our audience's needs
- respects the audience's time and energy
- About strategies, not hard “rules” or prescriptivist

The image features a minimalist, abstract graphic design. A large teal circle is positioned on the left side. A grey line starts from the top left, curves down and right, then continues horizontally across the bottom. A blue line starts from the bottom center, curves up and right, then continues horizontally across the top. Small teal circles are placed at the corners where the grey and blue lines meet. The text 'Why does plain language matter?' is centered in a bold, dark blue font.

**Why does plain language matter?**

# Communication as an equity issue

Why don't  
"they" get it?



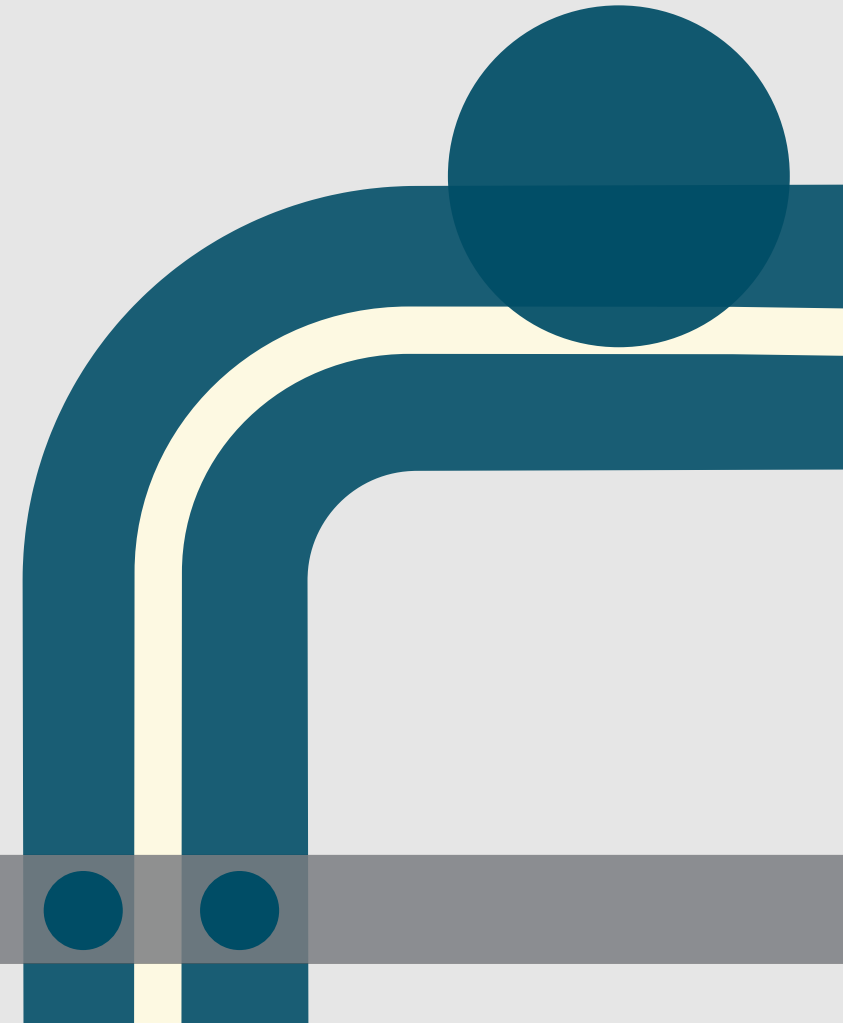
How can we center  
communities and share  
meaningful information  
in inclusive, accessible  
ways? How can we  
advocate for clearer  
communication  
processes?

# A few lenses that underlie our work...



# Universal design

What are some things you did to make yourself ready for this conference this morning?



# Maybe you...





# Examples of Universal Design in the world

- Can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people
- Not a special requirement but a fundamental element of good design
- A benefit for everyone!



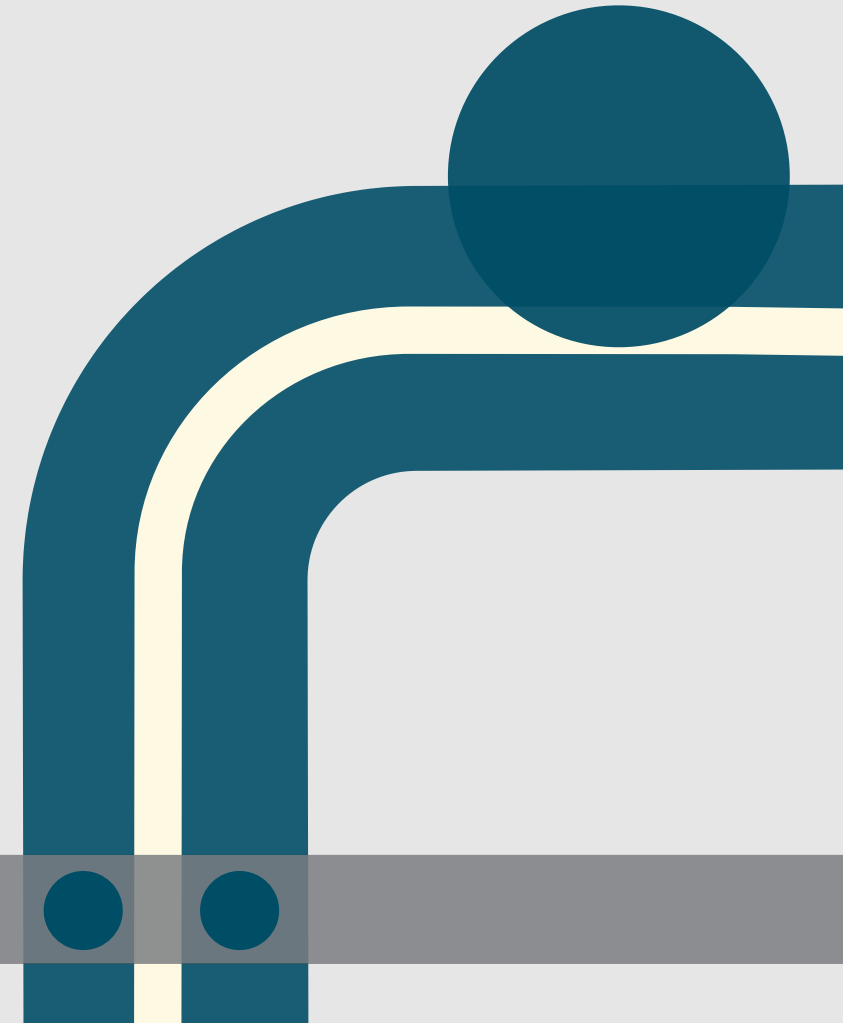
# What might you already be doing to make information you share more widely accessible?

- Using adequate font size
- Making sure there is enough contrast
- Using ample spacing
- Using alternative text
- Using gender neutral language
- ??

# Cultural humility

How do our identities  
influence content we create?

Isn't technical information,  
well, technical?



# Housing example



# 3 elements of cultural humility

**Life-long learning + reflection**

**Working to reduce power imbalances**

**Accountability in systems**

# Elements of a trauma informed practice

Safety

Transparent +  
Trustworthiness

Peer Support

Collaboration

Empowerment  
+ Choice

Cultural  
Humility

# What do these ideas look like when applied to writing?

Do people feel welcome in our spaces? Do they literally know where to go?

Safety

Transparent +  
Trustworthiness

Do people know how long processes take? Do we close the loop?

Peer Support

Collaboration

Do people know their choices? (Do they even have choices?)

Empowerment  
+ Choice

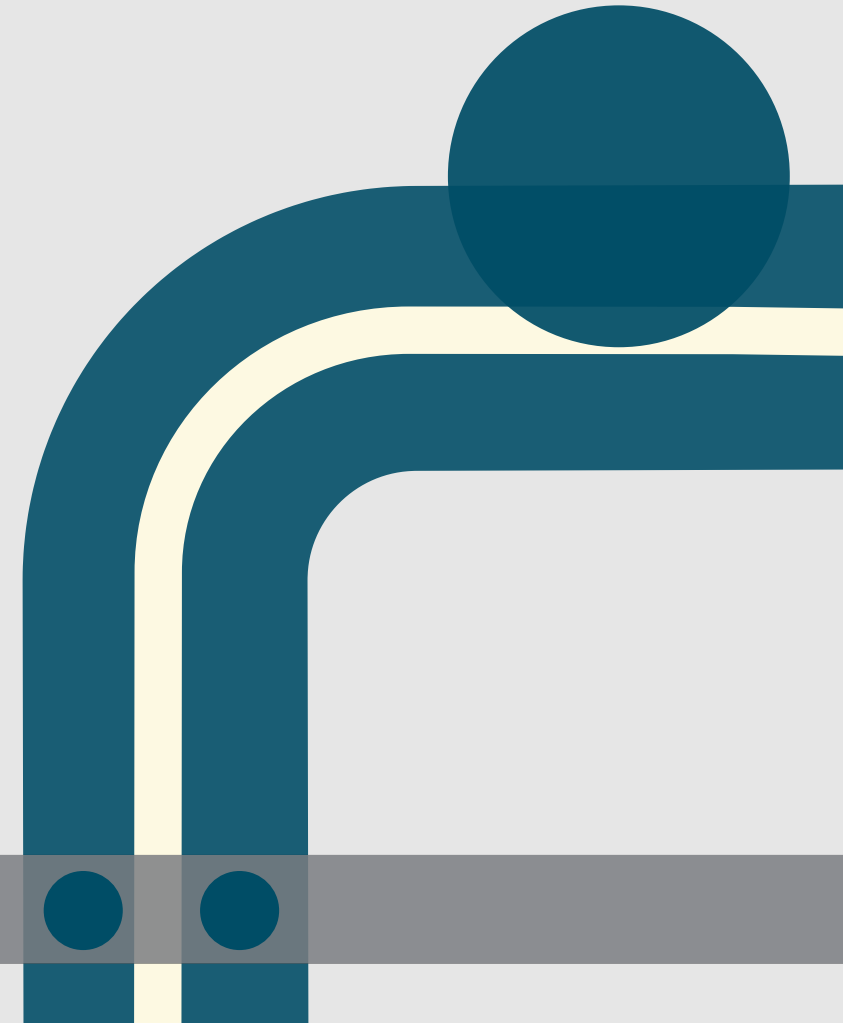
Cultural  
Humility

How do we center those with lived experience?


# Design justice

An approach to design that is led by marginalized communities and that aims explicitly to **challenge, rather than reproduce, structural inequalities**

From introduction to **Design Justice** by Sasha Constanza Chock





The image features a light grey background with abstract geometric shapes. On the left, a large teal circle is connected to a grey line that curves upwards and then downwards. A smaller teal circle is positioned on the upward curve of this grey line. At the bottom, a thick blue line curves upwards and then downwards, with a small teal circle on its downward curve. In the top right corner, a dark blue line forms an L-shape. The text is centered in the right half of the image.

**What strategies  
can we apply  
to our work?**

# Stuck? Get CRAFTY

Circumstances

Relationship

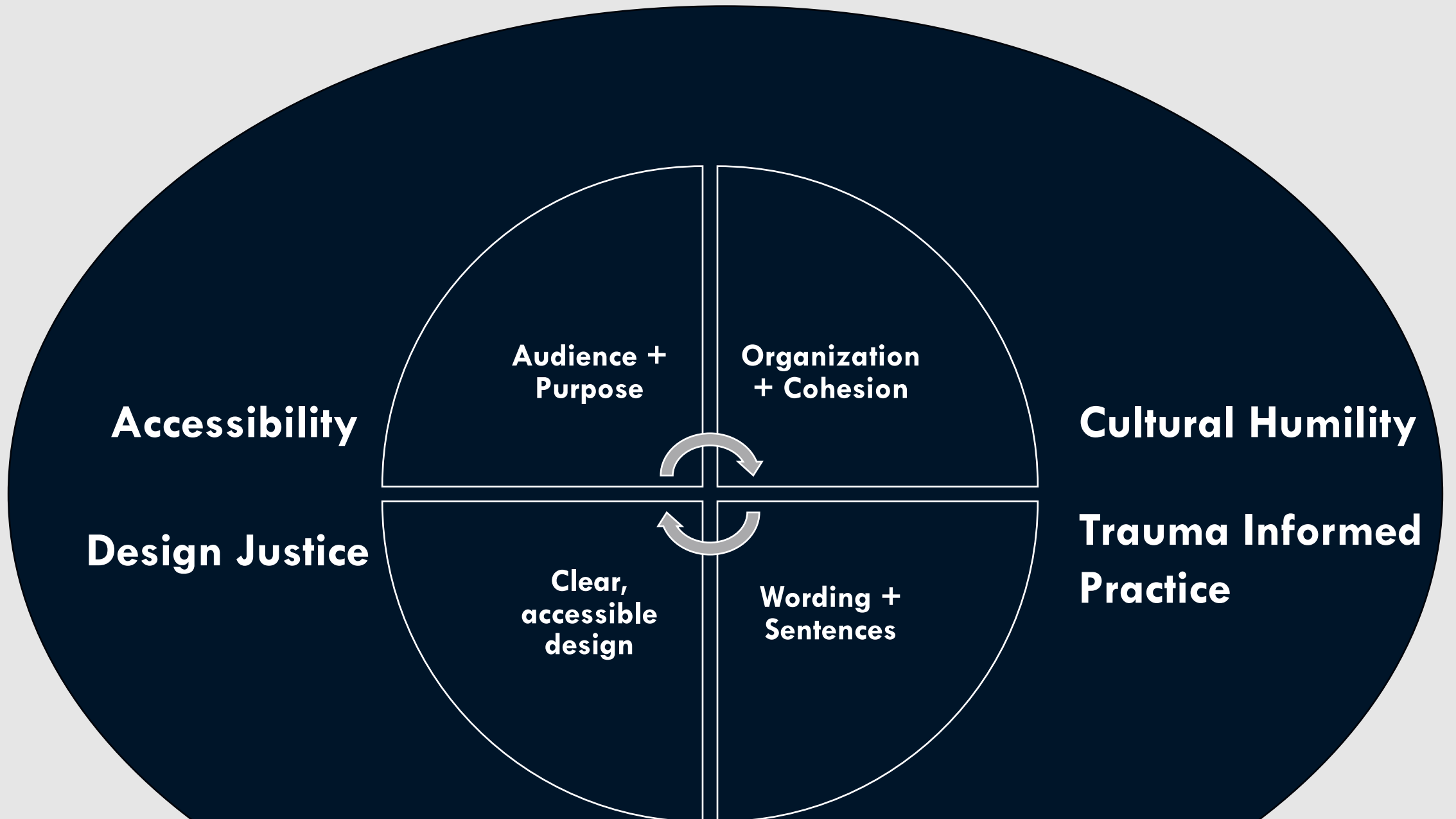
Audience

Format

Topic + Your Purpose

Is the audience family members of older adults? Older adults themselves? Social workers who work with older adults?

What do you want them to know or be able to do after?



# Example: report

1



2



## Audience + Purpose

- Went beyond topic and gave specific purpose and audience

## Organization + Layout

- Used wider representation of photos

## Example: press release

The eviction moratorium also provides protection against all evictions----- except Ellis Act or nuisance evictions based on violence, health safety nuisance----- based on termination notices that expire within 60 days after the eviction moratorium order ends. Currently the moratorium ends April 23, so the moratorium extends for 60 days thereafter to June 22. However, the eviction moratorium does not offer protection for termination notices issued before March 16 or expiring before April 23. Questions or need representation? Contact us so as soon as possible and before the notice expires, as you may have rights that are waived if you fail to assert them within 30 days after service of the notice.

- What vocabulary might be unfamiliar to a lot of folx?
- What questions might someone have about the eviction moratorium mentioned here?

# Example: web content

1

Bookville Housing Legal Center receives many requests for assistance. In order to most efficiently utilize its limited resources, guidelines have been established. They are based on the type of case, financial guidelines, as well as our resources.

2

We get many requests to help people with housing legal issues. To serve the community the best we can, **we have guidelines for the cases we can take on.**

We review:

- the type of case
- if applicants meet current income guidelines
- our current staffing

## Audience + Purpose

- Emphasized the WHY more

## Organization + Layout

- Used light bolding
- Used bullet points for list

## Wording

- Reduced wordiness
- Used friendlier tone

# Example: slides

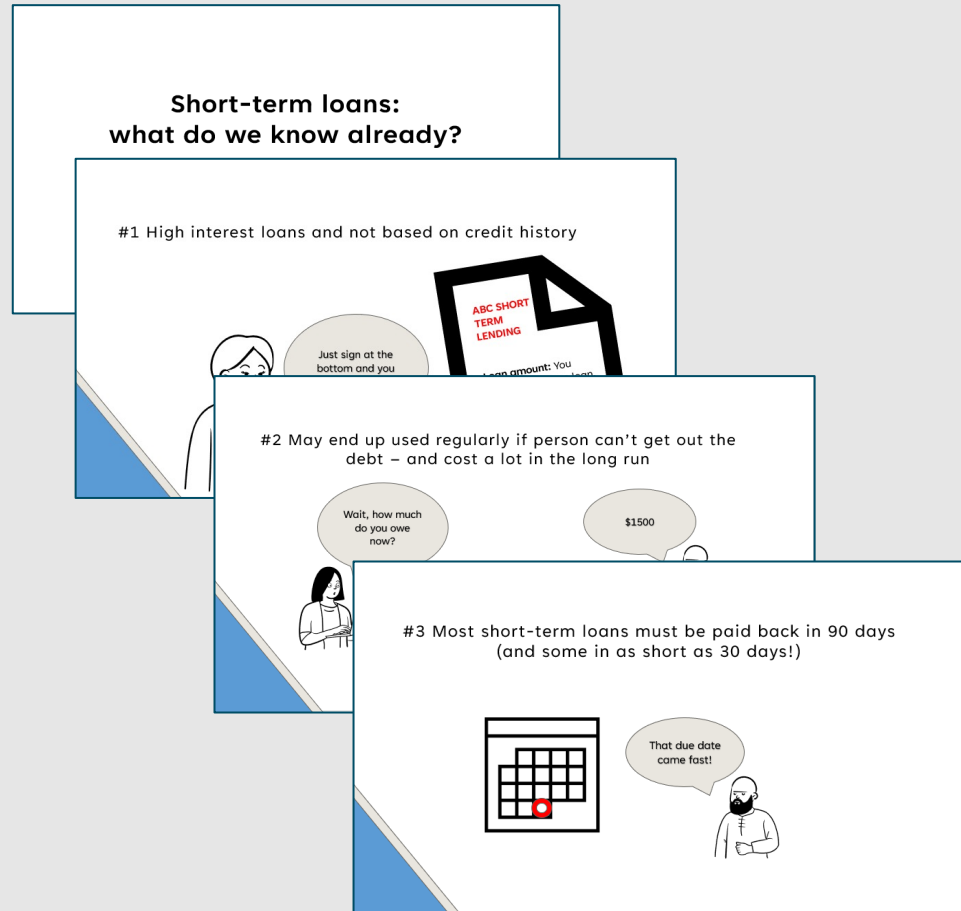
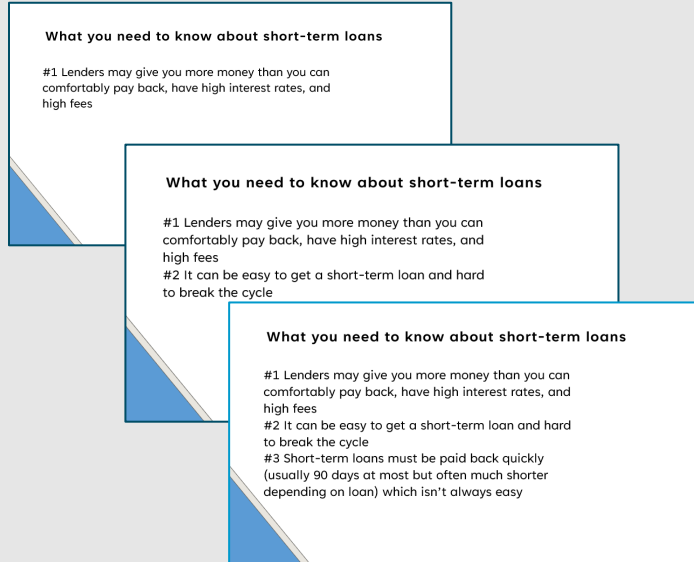
## TYPICAL FEATURES OF SHORT-TERM LOANS

- Three types: Deferred Deposit, High-Interest, Title
- These loans are not credit based, which means there is a higher risk that they won't be paid back. To off-set the risk and to make them profitable for lenders, the interest rates offered are extremely high.
- These loans are meant to be a short-term, one-time fix for an emergency, but they are often used to cover everyday, recurring expenses.
- The longest amount of time that borrowers have to repay the loan is 90 days, but the period is often shorter depending on the type and terms of the loan.

What might this slide be hard to digest in a presentation?

- A lot of info
- Can be hard to balance listening and trying to read too

# Example alternatives: slides



**Option: Use the animation feature to dole out text (be wary of getting too jazzy though!)**

**Option: Separate content across slides**

## Audience + Purpose

- Avoiding overwhelming reader or audience
- Accessed what audience knows

## Organization + Layout

- Scaffolded information
- Added visuals in #2

## Wording

- Reduced jargon



# A change to the law...and how we talked about it

## Minimum Wage

- Domestic Workers in Illinois must be paid the minimum wage if:
  - They work more than 8 hours a week for one or more employers.
- It does not matter how many employees work for your employer.
- In Illinois, domestic workers must be paid at least **\$8.25** per hour.
- Workers who work in **Chicago** at least 2 hours a week must be paid at least **\$11** per hour.
- Workers who work in **Cook County** but outside of Chicago, may be entitled to a higher minimum wage of at least **\$11**.

## What is minimum wage?

### Minimum wage

The lowest amount of money your boss can legally pay you to work



In some places, you must also work at least 8 hours a week.

# A different approach

- Broke down information into smaller chunks
- Made information relatable to audience life experience
- Drew on knowledge of audience

## How much should Alia make?

### Alia

- Nanny for a family in Chicago
- Gets paid \$96 a day when she works.

## How much should Alia make?

### Alia's story

She worked 16 hours on Saturday because the family had a special party.

## How much should Alia make?

### Alia's story

The family paid her \$96 for the day.

Is this ok?



# Example: forms

## SOCIAL

- Public Assistance    Immigrant    Homemaker
- Ex Offender    Homeless    Long Term Unemployed (27 weeks)
- Single Parent/Guardian    Child under 5 in the home

- Are we required to use this wording? Or do we need the info and can get it through rewording or conversation?
- Can we explain context if not?
- Can we advocate for change?

Why might this section of an adult education form feel confusing or just plain bad to fill out?

# Example: social media

 ABC Legal Aid



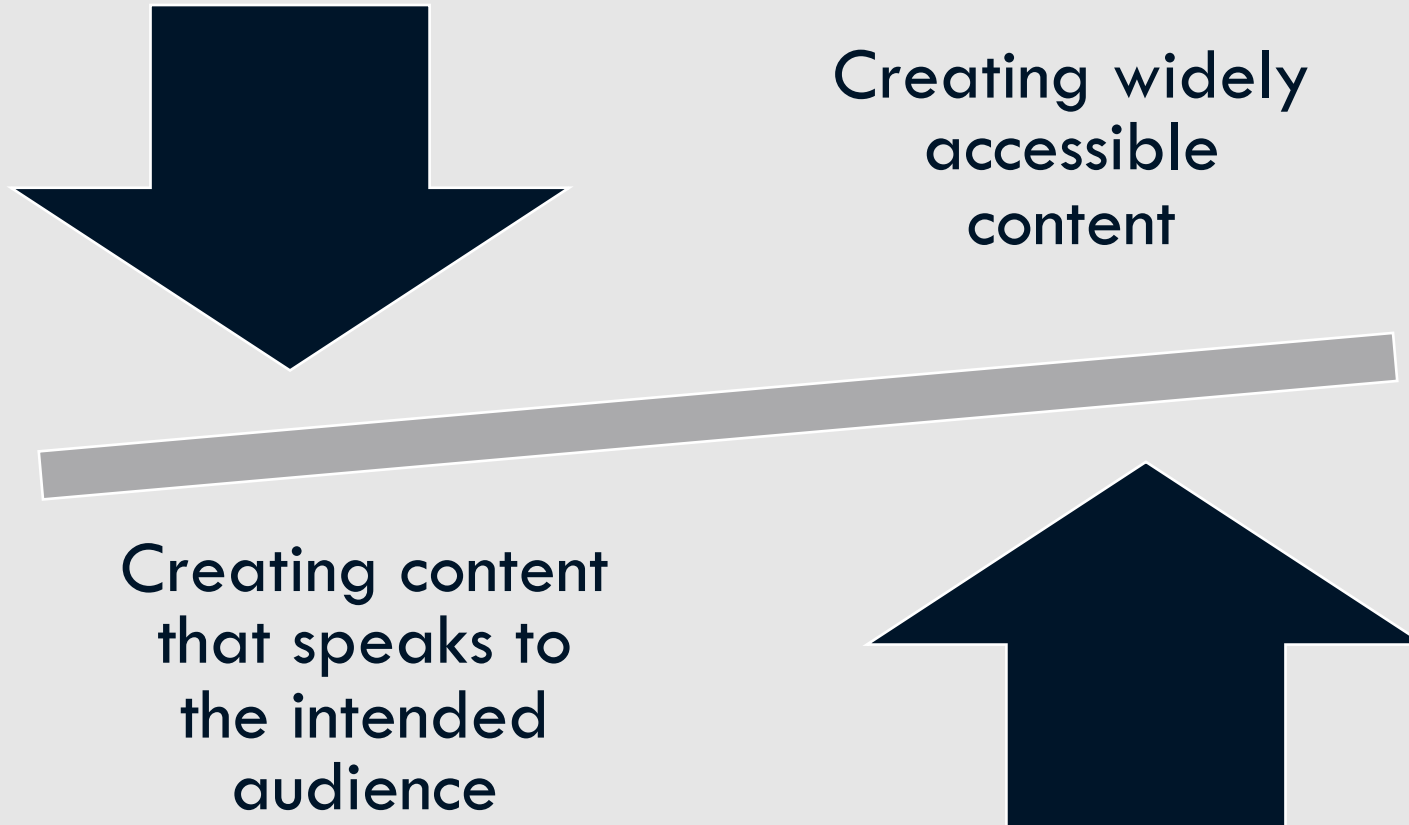
Elder Abuse and Financial Exploitation is a major problem in the Bookville Community. Join us for an upcoming panel discussion on 4/23 at 10am with a variety of experts in the field including the Bookville County Senior Center, the Law Offices of Charlie Bucket, and Dorothy Gale & Associates. They will discuss how rampant elder abuse is in our community, share resources, and provide actionable legal steps around elder abuse. This project is supported by a grant from the Bookville Community Foundation. Sign up at <https://www.abclegal.org>.




LEARN MORE

- Who should attend this event?
- What will they learn?
- What background information might be needed?

# It is a balancing act...



The image features a light grey background with several abstract geometric elements. On the left, there is a large teal circle. A grey line starts from the left edge, curves down and right, then turns down and left, ending in a small teal dot. Another grey line starts from the top left, curves down and right, then turns down and left, ending in a small teal dot. A thick blue line starts from the bottom left, curves up and right, then turns down and left, ending in a small teal dot. In the top right corner, there is a dark blue L-shaped line. The text is positioned in the center-right area of the image.

**How can we  
apply strategies  
to our own work?**

# How do we know what is working?

**Pain points:** where do people get stuck? Any ways to get that information or anecdotes?

**Surveys:** do you have any ways to learn what people think?

**Data:** do you have website or other data to give you insights about what people use (or don't use?)

**Humans:** do you have opportunities (formal or informal) to create or share content with others and see what they think?

**Collaboration:** are you able to problem solve with colleagues or create a learning community?

# Approach with curiosity and reflection

Let's debrief what worked and what we could do differently at the community fair.

We are getting a lot of calls about the event. Let's look at what questions they are asking.

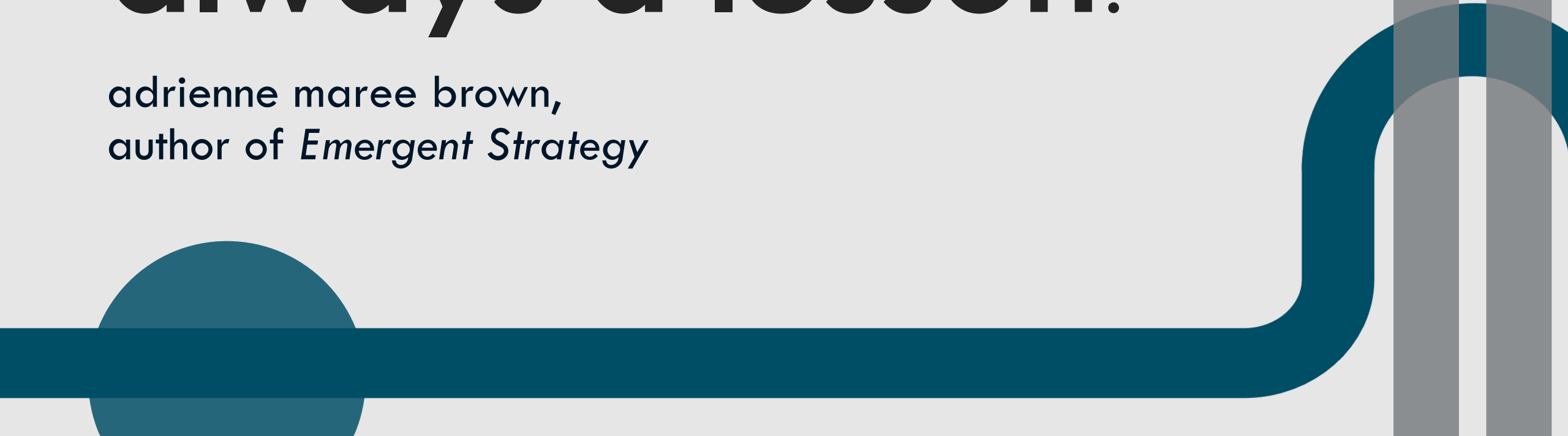
Let's note to send out the flyers to community partners a few weeks earlier next time.





**Never a failure,  
always a lesson.**

adrienne maree brown,  
author of *Emergent Strategy*



# Let's talk about it...

What is the  
change

Who needs to  
be involved

What  
challenges  
might come up

How will you  
know it made  
a difference

The image features a light gray background with several abstract geometric elements. On the left, a large teal circle is positioned. A thick gray line starts from the left edge, curves downwards and to the right, then continues horizontally. A smaller teal circle is located on the upper curve of this gray line. A thick blue line enters from the bottom, curves upwards and to the left, then continues horizontally, overlapping the gray line. A small teal circle is located on the right end of this blue line. In the top right corner, a dark blue L-shaped line is visible. The text "What is next?" is centered in a bold, dark blue font.

**What is next?**

# Free upcoming virtual events at CLL

## Digital Drop in

*Free digital tool and accessibility support meetup*

**When:** Tuesday, Nov 14  
10am to noon CST

## Plain Language Foundations

**Next topic:** plain language at work

**When:** Thursday, Nov 16  
2pm to 3:15pm CST

## Community of Practice

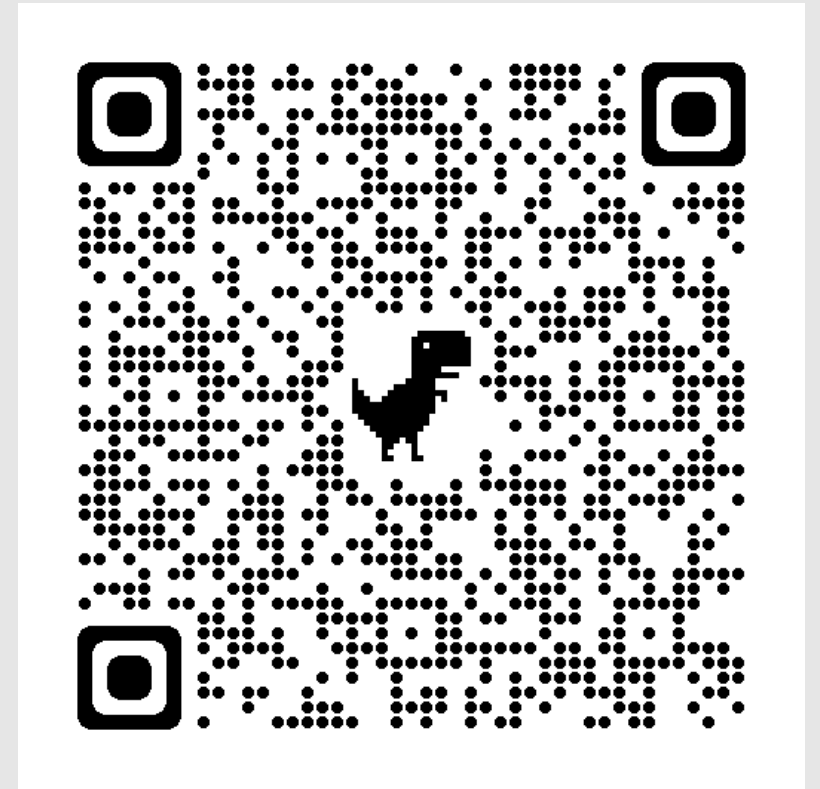
*Collaborative virtual space for all things plain language*

**When:** Thursday, Dec 21  
2pm to 3pm CST

We also have past webinars on inclusive communication and other themes on our website.

# Check out...

- [Resource list](#) →
- Website with case studies, past webinars, sign up info for events, and blog, The Lab Report



**Do you have something on your mind right now?**

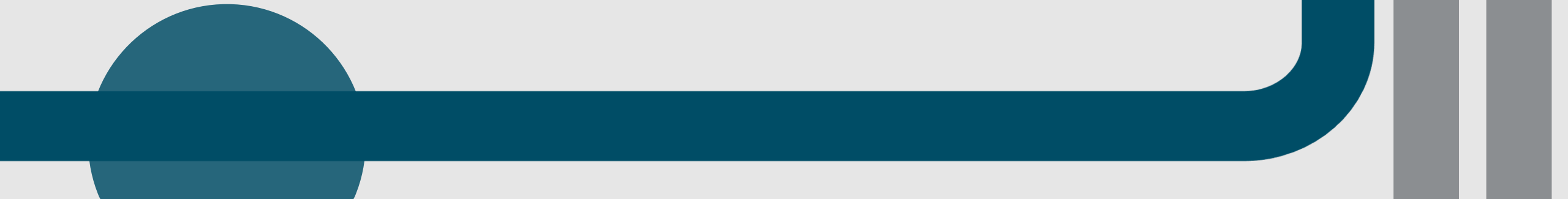


- Sign up if you would like to chat right after this session
- Take a card if you would like to talk another time!



**Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity.**

Charles Mingus,  
composer + musician



The background features abstract graphic elements. On the left, there are several thick, dark blue lines that intersect and curve, with a teal circle at one of the intersection points. On the right, a vertical dark blue line curves at the top and bottom, with a teal circle near the top. In the bottom right corner, there is a large, semi-transparent grey circle.

# Thank you!

Melanie Sampson

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[www.litworks.org](http://www.litworks.org)