

Reader-Friendly Training and Tools

Writing Training

Since 2005, Parametrix has trained over 250 individuals in Washington State through our writing training course. For this course, we've teamed with a college English professor to teach participants how to write clearly. The class is tailored to transportation specialists, and it includes material presented by our staff on visual presentation and document organization.

National Training

Parametrix staff routinely participate as speakers and panelists for local and national training sessions. Specifically our staff participates as a featured speaker and panelist for courses that are offered as part of Duke University's Environmental Leadership Program. We have led a training course for the National Association of Environmental Professionals. Additional trainings have been provided to a variety of audiences including the Transportation Research Board, Federal Transit Administration's National Highway Institute, and the National Transportation Public Affairs Workshop.

Reader-Friendly Tools

Parametrix has continued to work with WSDOT to develop tools to help make all of their environmental documents more reader-friendly. We led the development of WSDOT's Reader-Friendly Document Tool Kit and helped develop a statewide implementation and training program. The tool kit provides guidance to help WSDOT staff and their consultants make their documents more reader-friendly.

We also led the development of the Document Creator, a series of automated document templates created to make it easier for agency staff and their consultants to create well designed environmental documents using Microsoft Word. These are just a few of the innovative approaches Parametrix has helped develop to improve the quality of environmental documents.



Creating Reader-Friendly Documents



What is a reader-friendly document?

A reader-friendly document is a document that is written, organized, and displayed so your audience can understand it the first time they read it. A reader-friendly document is defined by the results - it is a document that is readily understood and reduces misconception and confusion.



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“Smashing presentation, excellent format, artwork — just a pleasure to look at, pull quotes — such a wonderful idea. I say an A++ for layout and presentation.”

– Charles LaRue, Caltrans



Why Create Reader-friendly Environmental and Engineering Documents?

Many environmental and engineering documents, such as environmental impact statements (EISs), transportation plans, facilities plans, and restoration plans have become too technical and lengthy for many people to read and understand. This is problematic, since most of these documents are created to support important decisions (including funding decisions) about changes to our communities – the places where we live, work, and play. This practice frustrates those not steeped in the jargon and procedures, causing misunderstandings and often fueling feelings of distrust and needless opposition.

Parametrix works with a wide variety of clients to help create reader-friendly documents to meet their needs and the needs of their targeted audiences. We’ve developed reader-friendly documents for some of the most complex and controversial projects in the western United States. In partnership with our clients, we’ve received both local and national recognition for our ground-breaking work to bring clarity to complicated processes and agency decision-making. Nationally, several features of our documents have been recognized as examples of “best practices”.

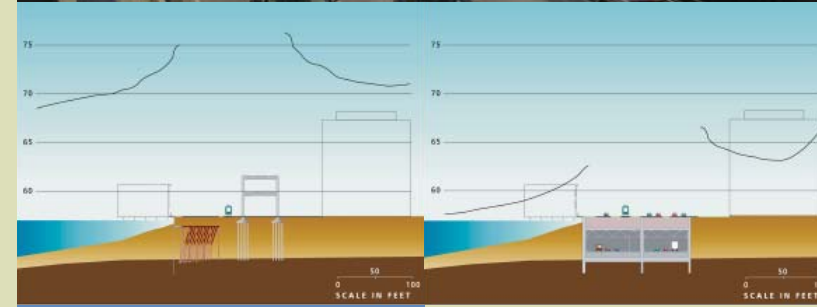
Our reader-friendly document approach focuses on following four key concepts:

- Tell a story
- Make it brief
- Engage the reader
- Make it visual

We’ve tailored and applied this approach to create reader-friendly environmental documents including:

- NEPA Environmental Assessments (EAs) and EISs
- Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) EISs
- Technical Reports
- Transportation and Facilities Plans
- Habitat Restoration Plans

Additionally, we’ve developed training materials and regularly lead training sessions to help organizations improve the quality of their environmental documents.



Parametrix

“Your agencies have made a determined effort to fundamentally revise the traditional format used for EISs, to make this EIS more readable, accessible and understandable to the public.”
– EPA Region 10

Thoughtfully designed graphics help explain technical concepts and compare effects of alternatives. Effective graphics help keep documents brief.

A Success Story

Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall Replacement Program

The replacement of the Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall is a critical project to the citizens of Washington State. The multi-billion dollar project poses complex environmental, social, and engineering challenges. To ensure a high level of stakeholder participation and understanding, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Parametrix pioneered new ground by creating a reader-friendly document approach for the program’s NEPA documents. This approach has been successful in engaging the public, as well as meeting the needs of technical and legal reviewers. For these reasons, WSDOT has adopted this approach for all of their environmental documents. Nationally, our Draft EIS has been awarded seven different awards for its excellent graphics presentation, clear writing, and ground breaking approach. Several features have been recognized as national examples of “best practices” in NEPA.

We have received positive feedback about our approach. Our departures from standard practice improved the document for all audiences, including the public, decision-makers, and regulatory reviewers. The Environmental Protection Agency reviewers in Region 10 gave this EIS their highest rating. Public commenters were able to focus on the substantive issues and choices presented by the project, and many appreciated the new approach.

The FHWA, American Council of Engineering Companies, and the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials are now working on improving the quality of environmental documents nationally, using this EIS as one of the main examples of how to improve document quality.

To view the EIS, visit: www.wsdot.wa.gov/Projects/Viaduct/

