Collaborative Writing Guidance

Overview

Technical writing in a social activity, in that writers work as team members. (Murdick and Bloemker)

The collaborative writing team normally performs four tasks. It plans the document, researches and writes the drafts, reviews the drafts of other team members, and revises drafts on the basis of these reviews. (Alred, Brusaw and Oliu)

Your primary teammates in the formative stages (pre-polling and pre-Agency review) of your CCSDS document-development process are your Working Group (WG) members and the CCSDS Supplemental Editor. It is at these earliest stages that the guidance presented here best applies. For additional information please refer to other documents in the Author’s Toolkit.

General Guidance on Collaborative Writing

The guidance here is by no means mandatory; rather, it is presented as a tool to help your WG get started on a creating a new document. The guidance is excerpted from The Handbook of Technical Writing (Alred, Brusaw and Oliu, 81-82):

— Designate one person as the team coordinator. [Your book’s primary document developer is your “Technical Editor.” He or she should have strong writing skills.]
— Collectively identify the audience, purpose, and scope of the project.
— Create a working outline of the document.
— Assign segments or tasks to each team member. [You might want to do this based on subject matter expertise, but do consider writing/language ability. Not everyone likes to write or is good at it.]
— Establish a schedule: due dates for drafts, revisions, and final documents. [It is a CCSDS requirement that the Collaborative Work Environment’s (CWE’s) Management Framework is used to identify due dates for every stage of the book. Hint: Try to make the dates realistic.] See figure 1 on the next page for a sample screen shot from the Framework.
— Agree on a standard reference guide for style and format. [Use the correct book template for whatever book it is you are writing to ensure formatting compliance and that mandatory wording is included. Also refer to the Author’s Toolkit job aids and checklists available in the CWE; they are designed to help you ensure compliance with section inclusion, mandatory language, and formatting.]
— Research and write drafts of document segments.
— Exchange segments for team member reviews.
— Revise segments as needed.
— Meet your established deadlines. [Yes, this is challenging, considering competing priorities, budget and time constraints, etc. If your schedule slips, please be sure to update the “Estimated Completion Dates” in the CWE’s Management Framework.]

Collaborating Across Cultures

Your CCSDS team mates will most likely come from other cultures. Below are some things to keep in mind:

“The challenge for all group members is to understand the ways in which cultural differences can affect group behavior. People from other cultures

• Might find it difficult to assert themselves in collaborative groups
• Might be unwilling to respond with a definite “no”
• Might be reluctant to admit when they are confused or to ask for clarification
• Might avoid criticizing others
• Might avoid initiating new tasks or performing creatively.
[...] you should remain open to encounters with people from other cultures without jumping to conclusions about what their actions might or might not mean.” (Markel, 67)

Figure 1: Sample Completed Project in the CWE Management Framework

Works Cited

