How to develop written policies and guidelines.

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All companies need policies and guidelines to direct how decisions are made and work is done. Well written business policies and procedures increase accountability and transparency, and are fundamental to quality assurance and quality improvement programmes.

By developing thorough policies and guidelines, you can help your staff to work more smoothly, efficiently and responsibly. This checklist will help you develop policies and guidelines for your business.

1.   Policies vs guidelines

Policies reflect the rules. Policy is supported by clear guidelines. These could be rules that you impose based on what you think is important in the operation of your business, or they could be based on external factors such as legislation.

Guidelines represent an implementation of policy. They ensure policies are carried out and/or enforced. They describe how to manage situations, set the

order in which things are to be done and determine who is responsible to perform each task.

2. Prepare and research

Before you start writing any policy, you need to make sure you have all the information. Bad or incomplete information will make for an inaccurate document. Think about why you need each policy or guideline, who will be affected by it and who will need to approve it.

Some questions to ask:

- Why do you need to have a new or revised policy or guideline?
- What is the problem or issue(s) that made you realise you need a policy or guideline?
- How will this help employees?
- Will there be any costs involved in implementing this policy or guideline?
- Are there any other related documents that you want to refer to or incorporate?
- Who will be impacted by this policy or guideline?

3. Structure

Use the same format for all documents to make it easy for people to find the information they need. Be sure to include the following:

- Header
- Purpose of the policy or guideline
- Definitions
- Policy statement

- The actual policy or guideline
- Guidelines
- Further information
- List of parties to whom this applies
- Responsible parties

4. What to include

Some basic information should be provided when writing policies and guidelines:

- A numbering system to help track and organise policies
- The date that the item was created or revised is recommended. This helps ensure that your policies and guidelines are current
- What is the policy or guideline? Describe it in clear language
- Why is the policy or guideline important?
- What is its purpose? (Should include reference to legislation, municipal regulations, business goals etc.)
- For whom is the document meant? To whom does it apply?
- When is it applicable?
- What is the procedure for enforcing or carrying out the policy or guideline?
- What are the assigned tasks or responsibilities?

5. Review and get final approval

Send the drafted document out for review. It should go to all appropriate reviewers, with a note explaining that this is a draft and that their comments are welcomed. If you receive comments that are confusing, unclear or contradictory, consider conducting a face-to-face meeting to review all the

comments. That way, you will ensure that everyone has heard all the suggested changes and has agreed on the revised wording.

Create a new document incorporating the agreed changes. Be sure to indicate what has changed from the first draft. Circulate the draft again until everyone agrees on the wording.

Finally, send the policy to the approver(s) for a final approval.

6. Communicate the policy or guideline to the relevant audience

Now that the document has been approved, it needs to be communicated to the rest of the organisation. Here are some questions to help you plan the process:

- How do you want to communicate this policy or guideline?
- What is the timing for this policy or guideline?.