

## Policy Development Basics

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### Why invest the time?

*Regardless of the size of your organization, written policies are essential. Some policies are required by law, such as Sexual Harassment. Well-written policies, consistently followed by staff help prevent lawsuits and definitely reduce the likelihood that such legal action will prevail. This issue covers the basics of sound policy development*

### How written policies help you

In the abstract, policies help to communicate the philosophies and standards you wish to live by, such as the ethical business practices. On a more practical level, policies provide guidance to board and staff regarding consistent service quality as well as compliance with legal or contractual requirements. If you use the Carver Policy Governance © model, policies help the board keep discussions at a strategic level by providing day-to-day guidance to the CEO and staff.

### Policy versus procedure

A policy is a statement of general goals or philosophical approach to an important aspect of services or administration. It defines the “what” of the issue – at a broad level. An example regarding ADA accessibility: “The ABC nonprofit is committed to ensuring equal access to all clients regardless of physical mobility and to maintain ADA compliance.” The “how” of procedures regarding ADA accessibility compliance under this policy might describe periodic building walk-throughs, client feedback mechanisms, and approval procedures for investment in building improvements addressing accessibility.

### Common barriers to good policy development

Lack of expertise regarding the purpose and use of written policies as well as the “how to” are common barriers. Leanly-staffed nonprofits focused on daily matters can let this important function slip to the bottom of the priority list.

### Board/staff roles

There are three common types of written policies required to address the areas of compliance:

board, programs, and human resource management. An experienced CEO can provide recommendations and advice on board and program policies. Most organizations use specialized support for HR matters. The most cost-effective approach to policy development is for an organization to provide well-written drafts for expert review. Sometimes board members can provide specialized expertise or policy drafts from their organizations. I have developed an inventory of 56 basic policies (attached) that would address most requirements for medium-sized organizations without special accreditation status. For smaller organizations, there are roughly 20 essential policies. Multi-service, accredited nonprofits will require more than 100 written policies depending upon the nature of the services they provide.

### Development steps for nonprofits

1. Identify the major groupings of policies to be written, such as: board, programs, and HR.
2. Identify all the potential policy titles that could apply to each grouping, combining like topics – typical HR policies would include: recruitment, staff conduct, staff supervision, employee benefits and termination. One way to determine when a policy is needed is to look at incidents where the lack of policy guidance has caused either employee or client complaints.
3. Research the legal, licensing and contractual requirements that govern the topics in each area.
4. Secure free policy samples from peer providers, the Internet, Board members and other sources.
5. Decide the policy format–title, effective dates and whether procedures will be included with the applicable policy statements.
6. Write policy drafts, edit and refine.
7. Select experts for review–consultant, employee with quality assurance expertise, or attorney.
8. Monitor regulation changes as well as programming changes in the organization that may affect policies.
9. Set aside a special board meeting to review and approve all new policies and schedule an annual board review for additions and refinements.