

Policy Writing Guide

Introduction

In order to ensure consistency in the formatting, content development, and approval of policies, the Policy Development and Management Policy was established. This guide will cover the following topics related to that and other University policies addressing policy management:

- Guidelines for writing policy
- Policy outline and formatting
- Policy approval workflow

Writing Policy

What is a policy?

Policies are clear, simple statements of how the University intends to conduct its business. They allow the University to identify requirements and define expected behaviors. They also provide a set of guiding principles to help with decision making.

Policies fall into three categories:

- Policies that enhance the mission of the University
- Policies that ensure compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations; or
- Policies that promote operational effectiveness and efficiencies and reduce institutional risk.

Policy vs. Procedures

Policies and procedures go hand-in-hand to clarify what needs to be done and how to do it. Procedures should always have an associated policy. Procedures describe how the policy will be put into action by outlining what steps must be taken, roles and responsibilities, and which forms or documents to use.

While policies have a defined template, the format for procedures can vary depending on the content. Sometimes the information can be covered with just a few bullet points, other times detailed step-by-step instructions are required. Procedures can also be organized as forms, checklists, or flowcharts.

In some cases, it may be necessary to combine policy and procedures in the same document, but most often it is best to keep the two separate. This gives the department more flexibility to change or update internal procedures as needed without the need to put them through the policy review workflow.

Policy Language

- Policies should be clear and concise and written in third person.
- Keep the language simple and the sentences short. Since the audience can vary, the best practice is to write for an 8th grade reading level.
- Words need to be selected carefully. Words such as *should* and *may* imply choice.
- Do not use information that may quickly become outdated such as employee names or names of software products, unless such information is specifically required. For example, certain regulations require an individual to be named as the contact for reporting.
- When using acronyms, spell out the words the first time, then indicate the acronym in parenthesis, e.g. Division of Finance and Operations (FO).

Approved Policy Template

The approved policy template is composed of the following sections.

Heading

Ensure that each of following fields are completed.

- **Policy Title:** This should be the official title of the policy. To ensure that policies are named consistently, the subject should come first with the word “Policy” should be at the end of title. For example, “Employee Attendance Policy” would be preferable to “Policy on Employee Attendance.”
- **Unit:** The Unit should be department responsible for the policy. Please provide a hyperlink to the departmental webpage.
- **Effective Date:** The Effective Date should reflect the date that policy first went into effect.
- **Revision Date:** The Revision Date should reflect the date of the most recent revision.
- **Contact:** Enter the name of the individual responsible for the policy. This will usually be a department head, director, or it could be a person with designated responsibility.
- **Title:** Enter the official title for the contact person.

Purpose

The information in this section answers the question as to why the policy exists. Key areas that may be addressed include: legal or regulatory reasons, description of conflict or problem the policy will resolve, and overall benefits. It is best to keep this section as simple and concise as possible.

Policy

This is the most important section of the policy. It is where the details of the policy will reside. It is acceptable to add sub-headings within the policy section to help organize the content.

Definitions

This optional section may be added to define terms that may not be readily understood by the general reader.

References

This optional section may be added to provide links to relevant procedures, related policies, and reference material.

Scope

To whom does this policy apply? The explanation in this section should be brief and could be limited to a single sentence listing the groups who are subject to the policy. Possible groups could include: students, faculty, staff, contractors, volunteers, or others.

Approval

Once the policy has been reviewed and approved, information will be added to document the approval.

Formatting for Optimal Accessibility

The University Policy Manager is available to help with accessibility formatting. Policy owners may also reach out to the [Technology Accessibility](#) department or the [Office of Compliance, Ethics, and Regulatory Affairs](#) for assistance.

The approved Policy Template has been developed to incorporate basic web accessibility principles to ensure that individuals using assistive technology (screen readers, magnifiers, braille devices, etc.) will be able to make use of the content. However, there are formatting steps that must be taken in the policy writing phase to promote optimal accessibility.

Heading Structure

It is important to use the heading structure available from text editor within ComplianceBridge. The headings will provide the navigational structure for the document. It is not acceptable to approximate headings by making regular text bold, italics, or changing the font size or style.

The following heading structure should be used.

- Heading 1: Reserved for the policy title only
- Heading 2: Used for main policy sections: Purpose, Policy, Definitions, References, Scope
- Heading 3: May be used to organize content in sub-sections within the main policy body.
- Heading 4: May be used when it is necessary to create headings within sub-sections.

Heading levels must always be used in a logical order without skipping levels.

Images

While images within a policy may be rare, they are sometimes necessary. It is important to note that there are steps that must be taken to make them useful for reader using assistive technology.

Alt-Text: All images including diagrams and icons should be assigned “Alt-Text”. This provides a description of the image for screen reader users. Alt-Text descriptions should be concise, but informative. It is not necessary to begin with “image of” or “photo of” as screen readers will provide that verbiage automatically.

Policy Tracking Form

A completed [Policy Tracking Form](#) must accompany all new or substantially revised policies submitted for review and approval. The form is used to collect the information that is necessary for Board Review under Board Rule 108, but it also provides policy owners with guidance on sources to be considered in the development process. It is best to provide a full but concise answer to each question.

Policy Information

- **Why is the new or revised policy being proposed?** This is where you will explain why the policy or revision is needed. Have legal requirements changed? Are you trying to address a common problem or provide clarification on an often-misunderstood issue?
- **If revising an existing policy, summarize the proposed changes.** If you are revising an existing policy, please track changes within the document. Use this section to give an overview of what has been changed.

Existing Policy Review

Board Rule 108 requires that similar policies at our sister institutions must be considered. In this section, you will indicate which policies at the other system campuses have been reviewed and explain how the proposed policy compares. Use the comments section to explain and justify any differences. Attach additional information if more space is needed.

External Reviewers

It is expected that the sponsoring department will solicit feedback from University Counsel and any affected departments or divisions. Use this section to explain who you consulted and provide a summary of feedback.

Additional Information

If there are other factors that should be considered in the review of the proposed policy, please provide an explanation here.

Approval Workflow

Policies are generally developed by a unit to address a need for a specific audience. Policies must be reviewed and approved according to the workflow described below. Any substantive revisions made during the review process will be returned for the approval of the originating department/unit.

Department/College/Unit Approval

The policy editor is responsible for ensuring the appropriate individuals within their department, college, or unit have reviewed and approved the policy before moving it on to higher levels. See the Compliance Bridge Quick Start Guide for details on how to send a policy draft for review to ensure that the version history and review feedback are captured appropriately.

Division/Campus/System Approval Process

After the policy editor has confirmed that the policy draft has been approved within the department, college, or unit, they must forward the draft to the University Policy Manager who will coordinate the remainder of the review and approval process.

The University Policy Manager will ensure that the policy draft is reviewed and approved by the following groups prior to publishing:

- Office of Counsel
- Office of the Vice President/Provost
- Policy Advisory Review Committee (PARC) – University-level policies only
- System Office

Upon approval, the finalized policy will be published to the public [UA Policy Webpage](#).

Communication

One of the most important pieces of policy management is ensuring that new and revised policies are communicated effectively. It is expected that the originating department will be responsible for ensuring that the appropriate individuals are notified. In developing a communication plan, the following avenues should be considered:

- Add it to the agenda to be covered in regular departmental/divisional meetings.
- Include a notice in divisional newsletters.
- Submit for inclusion in the “Inside UA” campus-wide news.
- Feature it on your departmental website.

Periodic Review

All policies must be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that they are accurate and kept up-to-date. Policy editors will be notified by email 90 days prior to the due date for annual review.

Tips:

- Check all links to make sure they are still valid.
- Verify that the contact and their title are accurate.
- Look for any procedural information that may have changed.