THE IMPACT NETWORK

BASIC GUIDE TO DRAFTING AN EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

An employee handbook for a nonprofit organization should cover a wide range of topics to ensure that staff and volunteers are well-informed about the organization's policies, procedures, and expectations. Here are some common topics that should be included:

1. Introduction

- **Welcome Message**: A letter from the executive director or board chairperson welcoming new employees.
- **Mission and Vision**: A statement of the organization's mission, vision, and core values.
- **History of the Organization**: A brief overview of the organization's history and key milestones.

2. Employment Policies

- **Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)**: Policies on nondiscrimination and equal opportunity.
- **Anti-Harassment and Anti-Discrimination**: Policies on preventing harassment and discrimination in the workplace.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**: Information on accommodations for employees with disabilities.
- **At-Will Employment**: A statement regarding the at-will employment relationship, if applicable.

3. Employment Practices

- **Hiring and Orientation**: The process for hiring, onboarding, and orientation of new employees.
- **Job Classifications**: Definitions of full-time, part-time, temporary, and volunteer roles.
- **Probationary Period**: Information about the probationary period for new employees, if applicable.
- **Performance Evaluations**: The process and frequency of employee performance reviews.

4. Compensation and Benefits

- **Pay Periods and Paydays**: Information on how and when employees are paid.
- **Overtime and Compensatory Time**: Policies on overtime pay and compensatory time.
- **Benefits Overview**: Description of available benefits, such as health insurance, retirement plans, and other perks.

- **Leave Policies**: Information on vacation, sick leave, family and medical leave, and other types of leave.

5. Workplace Policies

- **Attendance and Punctuality**: Expectations for attendance and punctuality.
- **Dress Code**: Guidelines for appropriate workplace attire.
- **Code of Conduct**: Expected behaviors and professional standards.
- **Conflict of Interest**: Policies to avoid conflicts of interest.
- **Confidentiality**: Policies on maintaining confidentiality of sensitive information.

6. Health and Safety

- **Workplace Safety**: Guidelines and procedures for maintaining a safe workplace.
- **Emergency Procedures**: Instructions for emergency situations, such as fire, medical emergencies, and natural disasters.
- **Workplace Violence**: Policies and procedures for preventing and addressing workplace violence.

7. Use of Organization Property

- **Use of Equipment and Resources**: Policies on the use of organizational equipment, vehicles, and other resources.
- **Technology and Internet Use**: Guidelines for using the organization's computers, email, internet, and social media.
- **Telecommuting**: Policies on remote work and telecommuting, if applicable.

8. Professional Development

- **Training and Development**: Opportunities for employee training and professional development.
- **Tuition Reimbursement**: Information on tuition reimbursement programs, if available.
- **Career Advancement**: Policies and procedures for promotions and career advancement.

9. Communication and Feedback

- **Open Door Policy**: Encouragement of open communication between staff and management.
- **Staff Meetings**: Frequency and expectations for staff meetings.
- **Grievance Procedures**: Processes for addressing employee grievances and complaints.
- **Suggestions and Feedback**: How employees can provide suggestions and feedback to improve the organization.

10. Disciplinary Actions and Termination

- **Disciplinary Procedures**: Steps for addressing performance or behavior issues.
- **Termination Policies**: Policies on voluntary and involuntary termination, including exit interviews and final pay.

11. Legal and Regulatory Compliance

- **Whistleblower Policy**: Protections for employees who report illegal or unethical behavior.
- **Ethical Conduct**: Standards for ethical behavior and compliance with laws and regulations.
- **Document Retention**: Policies on the retention and destruction of organizational documents.

12. Acknowledgment of Receipt

- **Employee Acknowledgment**: A form for employees to sign, acknowledging receipt and understanding of the handbook.

Including these topics in an employee handbook helps ensure that staff and volunteers understand the organization's expectations and policies, creating a more informed and cohesive work environment.

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TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Creating or revising an employee handbook for a nonprofit organization is a significant undertaking. Here are some tips to ensure the process is smooth and the final product is effective:

1. Understand Your Organization's Needs
Review existing policies and procedures to identify what works well and what needs improvement. Consider the unique aspects of your nonprofit, such as its mission, values, and operational requirements, to ensure the handbook aligns with these elements.

2. Involve Key Stakeholders
Involve employees, supervisors, and board members in the process to gather diverse perspectives and ensure the handbook meets the needs of all stakeholders. Consider forming a committee to oversee the drafting process. This group can provide valuable feedback and help ensure the handbook is comprehensive and well-rounded.

3. Research and Benchmark
Look at handbooks from similar organizations to gain insights and ideas. This can help you understand industry standards and best practices. Ensure your handbook complies with federal, state, and local employment laws. Consulting with a legal expert or HR professional can help ensure compliance.

4. Be Clear and Concise

Use clear and straightforward language to make the handbook easy to understand. Avoid jargon and overly complex sentences. Organize the handbook into clear sections and use headings, subheadings, and bullet points to make it easy to navigate.

5. Cover Essential Topics

Ensure the handbook covers all essential topics, including:

- Organizational overview (mission, vision, values)
- Employment policies (EEO, anti-harassment, ADA compliance, at-will employment)
- Employment practices (hiring, job classifications, performance evaluations)
- Compensation and benefits
- Workplace policies (attendance, dress code, code of conduct)
- Health and safety
- Use of organization property
- Professional development
- Communication and feedback

6. Ensure Consistency and Fairness

Standardize policies and procedures to ensure consistency across the organization. Ensure that policies promote fair and equitable treatment of all employees, and avoid any language that could be perceived as discriminatory.

7. Communicate Expectations Clearly

Clearly communicate the expected behaviors and responsibilities of employees. Outline the steps for addressing performance issues and misconduct, ensuring employees understand the consequences of not adhering to policies.

8. Make It Accessible

Choose a format that is easy to read and access, whether it's a printed booklet or a digital document. Ensure the handbook is accessible to all employees, including those with disabilities.

9. Keep It Up-to-Date

Schedule regular reviews of the handbook to ensure it remains current and relevant. Update policies as needed to reflect changes in laws, organizational practices, or industry standards. Solicit feedback from employees on the handbook's content and usefulness, and make revisions based on their input.

10. Implement and Train

Introduce the handbook during employee orientation and ensure all new hires receive a copy. Provide training sessions to explain key policies and procedures, ensuring employees understand their rights and responsibilities. Require employees to sign an acknowledgment form stating they have received, read, and understood the handbook.

11. Seek Professional Help

Consider consulting with HR professionals or legal experts to ensure the handbook is comprehensive and compliant with all relevant laws and regulations.

By following these tips, nonprofit organizations can create a thorough, clear, and effective employee handbook that supports their mission and enhances their workplace culture.