**An Introduction to Policy**

Policy is both a concept and a written instrument. When well designed into a written format, policy should aid in compliance, be easy to read, implement, understand, and serve as a guide to action. In the conceptual sense, policy is a governing principle that mandates and constrains action.

Written policy comes in many different variations and formats. Determining and utilizing a standardized format best for your needs will aid in consistent communication with staff and benefit organizational and operational effectiveness.

Policies guide direction and decision–making by describing what and why, while procedures address how, where, and when. Policy may or may not include procedures. Procedures may be a separate document with internal ties to specific policy (or policies).

Effective policy:

* Reaches the intended audience.
* Is readily accessible in a time of need.
* Provides clear information that is easy-to-read.
* Is organized in a standard and predictable format.
* Provides the right level of information to the individuals affected by the content.
* Is incorporated into daily practice.
* Considers attestations or quizzes to ensure reading or comprehension of new or revised policy among staff.

**Creating A Policy About Policies**

A good place to start is creating the rulebook for your policy and process. Create a policy defining and standardizing the style and process of Policy in your facility. This document should identify and list format, headings, font, margins, permitted (or not) abbreviations, reference format, addendums, attachments, etc. This is also a good place to determine the workflow, numbering and naming conventions, policy signature requirements, approval, creation, revision, review, and policy retirement and archive process.

You may also wish to determine a process for annual routine versus an expedited process for urgent policy revision, creation, or approval. Establishing a policy-writing guide will help those whose expertise lies outside of producing such documents and eventually integrate the standardized style determinations into all policies. Also a standardized Policy Worksheet will help those creating or revising policy to consider and address often overlooked aspects, resources, and contributors to the process. It can also be used to determine policy teams, assign duties, and track progress.

Additionally, as it pertains, consider creating a document prefix to readily identify the type of document. For example: POL (Policy), PRO (Procedure), FOR (Form), CHEC (Checklist), FLOW (Flow diagram), TABL (Table).

**General Tips When Writing Policy**

* Keep the verbiage general yet clear enough to be applied to anticipated circumstances.
* Keep the words as clear and concise as possible.
* Do not use words or information that may become quickly outdated such as employee names or specific names of equipment or software - unless it is pertinent to the policy or procedure.
* Select words carefully – words like may, shall, or should imply that something is not required or mandated.
* Use strong action words such as will, must, and are responsible for.
* Twelve Point Arial font is recommended with one-inch margins around the document.
* Policy should be written in the third person.
* First spell out acronyms before using them.

**Policy & Procedure Formats**

There is no one way to format policy. Your needs, resources, and process will influence the format template. Here are some ideas to consider. Not all of the topics listed below are intended to be used in any one format. Some topics are overlapping or redundant in nature and must be selected and / modified according to need.

**General Topic Descriptions**

Top Header – Depending upon if this is a Policy or Procedure document or a combination of both, this could include any or all of the following:

Issue date, effective and revision dates, policy number, replaces number, developed by, approved by, persons or departments affected by this policy, those positions for administering or enforcing the policy, related policies and/or procedures, keywords.

Policy Title – The title conveys the purpose of the policy in as few words as possible. The title must be specific to the location/department/discipline as pertinent. This is intended to capture the content of the policy without including the word policy

Scope – What this Policy is about.

Policy Statement - This provides the reason for the policy and what the policy hopes to accomplish. This may be for legal, patient safety, or regulatory reasons. What problem does this policy solve? Statements are one to a few sentences in length.

Purpose - This should be a statement which includes a basic explanation for the policy. The purpose of the policy should align with the strategic imperatives or mission of the organization.

Definitions - List unique terms that add to the readers understanding of the basic policy or procedures. Define unfamiliar or technical terms and define terms with special meaning. List in alphabetical order.

Procedure - Include steps to comply with the policy with sufficient detail that end users can readily understand how to comply with the mandates. Procedure should be listed in the order in which they’re carried out. Include where and how to document the procedure.

Forms and instructions - This provides a list of forms used pertaining to this policy. Organize these by form number or alphabetically by name

Appendices - Provide one or more documents to supplement the information provided in the policy and procedure. Examples may include job aids, forms, spreadsheets, etc.

Attachments – This may include job aids, forms, spreadsheets, etc.

Frequently asked questions -

References – APA format

**Examples of Formats:**

#1

Title

Purpose

Scope

Policy Detail

Roles and Responsibilities

Monitoring and evaluation

Definitions and abbreviations

Supporting documents

References

Appendix

#2

Purpose

Definitions

Policy

Procedure

Documentation

References

Attachments

#3

Purpose

Policy

Definitions

Responsibility

Overview

Procedure

References

**Questions to Ask When Creating and Managing Policy**

What is the goal or purpose of this policy?

What behavior are you trying to achieve?

What positive outcomes would you like to achieve?

How will you measure compliance?Whose input is needed?Is the policy user-friendly?

**Going Forward**

Consider creating an algorithm or diagram demonstrating process improvement that aligns Policy and Procedure with Best Practices, regulatory requirements, organizational strategic imperatives and mission, job descriptions, forms and documentation, patient centered care and safety, quality outcomes, patient satisfaction, etc.