

POLICY AND PRACTICE MANAGEMENT



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POLICY AND PRACTICE MANAGEMENT

Policies define the broad framework within which the organization operates.

This Resource Material includes:

- reasons for having clear policies;
- a list of typical policy areas for small CSOs, with sources of further information on specific issues;
- Basic guidelines are needed to ensure that policies and procedures are in place when required.

Why do policies exist?

A policy defines what an organization does and how it does it. Clear, workable policies are key to creating a stable organization that functions well. Examples of good such policies are an equal opportunities policy, where the organization's services and workplaces are open to the whole community; an admission policy, where people are allowed on the organization's premises at any time of the day; a referral policy, where the organization's services are only provided to people referred by the ASA, for example, a policy on the consumption of alcoholic beverages stipulates that anyone who has consumed alcohol is not allowed on the organization's premises.

The professional code sets out the basic guidelines or procedures for putting a specific policy into practice: how people are recruited to work or to receive services; equal opportunities for employees but also for clients; the minimum number of people required to provide a quality service; the security measures provided on the premises, including for both clients and people; special security measures for those working at night with clients; what is done with people who have a problem with alcohol and the like.

The Memorandum and Articles of Association (the constitution) is the main policy document outlining the organization's objectives, what it can and cannot do, whether it can have a business, and, if so, exactly what. An organization may have other policies, which may be formal or informal, written or unwritten.

Clear policies mean that the authority to make decisions and take action can be devolved down through the structures of the organization and that there are clear guidelines about what is and is not appropriate for the organization.

With clear policies and procedures, there is less likely to be a protracted debate or argument about what someone did (or should not have done) in a particular situation. There is more likely to be consistency, which is very important when new people join the organization or when it expands or moves to divided premises. Consistent application of organizational policies and procedures helps an organization's members, employees, or customers accept it as fair and consistent in its decisions and actions.

Work becomes more focused with agreed procedures, freeing up time for other purposes. Procedures do not have to be constantly replaced, and fewer mistakes are made.

In developing policies and procedures, it is particularly important to involve the people who will be directly affected and to ensure that those who will be indirectly affected know what is happening and have the opportunity to participate in the process if they wish. It should always be clear who will make the final decision. Those who make the final decision must take into account the views of those who have been consulted, especially those who will be directly affected by the policy. It should be noted that in such a process, not all views can be taken into account, nor can all those involved be satisfied.

The final decision on major policies is almost always made by the board or other governing body. Responsibility for agreeing with minor policies and procedures for implementing policies may be delegated to an executive committee, manager, or other staff.

There must be flexibility in following agreed policies and procedures. All policies should be reviewed periodically, and procedures should be adapted based on the organization's experience.

Warning

An organization must guard against the temptation to draw up detailed policies and procedures for absolutely everything. It is more important to establish general principles and basic procedures and for governing bodies to trust that people can adapt them successfully to different situations.

If it turns out that some procedures need to be more detailed, this can always be done at a later stage.

It is good for an organization to avoid the risk of a policy or procedure being created, filed away in cupboards or thick folders, or simply left on the organization manager's computer and never looked at by an employee. Policies and procedures are living documents. Every newly hired employee or elected member of the governing body should become familiar with them as part of their induction/job description. Every employee of the organization should have easy access to the documents. They also need to be reviewed periodically. Discussions of 'Policies and Practices' based on real situations or case studies can provide useful opportunities for paid staff and volunteers to discuss what a particular policy means and how it should be applied in different situations.

Typical policy areas

The policies needed by the organization will depend on the type of work it does, its scale, and the level of formality. A new, small, informal organization is unlikely to have many formally agreed policies, whereas a larger and more complex organization may have detailed policies and procedures for literally every area of its work.

This section includes typical policy areas for small and medium-sized CSOs. Instruction on a wide range of policy-related issues is offered by the organizations listed at the end of this paper.

Instructions and model policies or policies from other organizations are good starting points, but they should never be adopted without careful consideration and adaptation to the needs of the organization. What is perfectly appropriate for one organization may be quite inappropriate for another.

Objectives and priorities

The main objects of activity are the starting points for policies relating to objectives and priorities.

The board or other governing body usually agrees upon policies relating to specific and strategic objectives and priorities but may be based on recommendations from paid staff, volunteers, or members of the organization, as well as users. If the board is not the governing body, there should be absolute clarity about who makes the final decision.

Policy areas include:

- What the organization believes in: the spirit or values that underpin the work of the organization;
- how the organization views the environment in which it operates: a representation of the political, social, and economic state of the environment in which the organization operates;
- what the organization is doing: its priorities, what it wants to achieve, with whom it will and will not undertake joint projects, and what types of activity it will and will not undertake.

Participation and decision-making

The constitution may specify which types of decisions are to be made by the governing body, any members, executive committees, or associates, but it has no rules for day-to-day decision-making. So, policies are needed to clarify:

- Decision-making methods and procedures: who decides what, when and how, and who reports to whom;
- who else is authorized to make decisions, for example, if someone is absent from work or if there is no contact with the selected collaborator;
- what happens when there are disagreements on decisions;
- user involvement: how members or users are consulted or involved in decision-making.

Services, activities, and facilities

These policies will be established within the broad framework of the organization's goals and priorities. Some need to be formally agreed upon by the board or other governing body. Others will be set, formally or informally, by executive groups, managers, or other staff:

- working methods and procedures: who does what, when, and how; job boundaries; who reports to whom;
- user comments and complaints: how user comments are encouraged and how complaints are handled and processed;
- Child and adult protection: procedures for the protection of children and vulnerable adults if the organization works with these groups;
- opening hours: when the organization's services are available, whether the organization can be closed (for example, for maintenance or staff training) and who decides whether to close, what happens if an employee does not arrive on time for work;
- standards: how much work needs to be done and to what standards it is done, how quality and quantity is monitored, what happens if the work does not meet the required standards;
- Health and safety: premises requirements, paid staff, volunteers, users; dealing with breaches of rules or policy; special policies, e.g. protection against communicable diseases;

- data protection and confidentiality: what information is collected and how it can be used, who has access to user or member information, what happens in the event of a breach of confidentiality;
- disability access: how the organization provides services, activities, or facilities to people with mobility, speech, hearing, visual or other disabilities;
- Access for non-native speakers: policy on interpretation and translation;
- charging policy for activities, goods, services, or facilities;
- equipment: who can use it, safety standards, responsibility for maintenance and repair;
- computer, e-mail, and Internet use: who can use them, restrictions on use, protection of the computer from viruses or other problems, monitoring by the organization of e-mail and Internet use by employees, etc;
- Inventory: who can use it, procedures for tracking what is used, responsibility for replacements;
- vehicles: who can use them, responsibility for fuel and other costs, reimbursement of expenses for use of employees' own cars;
- External contacts: those who can negotiate or speak on behalf of the organization and those who can contact the media.

Equal Opportunities and Diversity

The organization should have an equal opportunities and diversity policy as well as a professional code outlining how it will implement non-discriminatory and positive policies in relation to:

- recruitment and selection of paid staff;
- recruitment and allocation of volunteers;
- conditions of employment;
- conditions of volunteer work;
- acceptance of members;
- inclusion of people on the board;
- presentation and advertising of the organization.

The policy should also consider non-discriminatory, positive activities and, where appropriate, conditions to meet special needs in relation to:

- user recruitment;
- requirements for the activities or services.

It should also consider:

- Dealing with racist, sexist, or other personally offensive actions by paid staff, volunteers, users, members, the board, and visitors.

Many related organizations, national bodies, and established local organizations have consistent, equal opportunities, diversity policies, and a professional code of practice. It is possible to adapt these to the needs of a particular organization.

It is important that the Equal Opportunity Policy meets the organization's ethical standards and legal requirements for non-discrimination.

Financial control

The Board or other governing body shall implement financial policies, the Executive Finance Committee, and/or the Finance Manager, in consultation with the officers responsible for financial matters. These include:

- financial decision-making: who makes which decisions;
- budgets: how they are drawn up, controls, how variances (expenditure or revenue over or under budget) are dealt with;
- expenditure: who can approve expenditure;
- payments and bank transfers: who can sign payment orders or authorize financial transactions;
- Cash: procedures for petty cash, safeguarding cash on the premises or in transit;
- financial reporting: documentation required, who has access to the financial statements;

- Reserves: what reserves the organization should hold, why reserves are held, and how they are invested;
- Gifts and payment for services: who keeps gifts or payments received from employees (e.g., payment for participation in a radio show or a gift given to an employee by a customer).

See Resource Material 23 for more information on financial policies and procedures.

Premises

The starting point for policies regarding leased or owned premises is how they are used.

Policies include:

- how the premises may be used and who may or may not use them;
- security: access to keys, security system codes, etc.;
- cleaning responsibility;
- health and safety requirements;
- procedures for booking common areas security.

Recruitment issues

The board develops hiring policies with another governing body or the executive personnel committee in consultation with paid and volunteer staff. If developed by the executive committee, they may need approval by the board or other governing body.

Details of many policies and hiring procedures will be included in the written conditions of employment (employment contract), equal opportunity policy, disciplinary and grievance procedures, and staff development policy. Personnel policies include:

- recruitment and selection procedures for staff and trainees, and checking that these procedures comply with the requirements of the legislation;
- new employee induction programs;
- trial period: probationary period, what happens if performance is unsatisfactory;
- pay: salary levels and increases, salary reviews, when they are paid, whether advances are allowed and how they are approved, overtime pay, method of payment - cash or transfer to the employee's account;
- reimbursement of expenses for employees and trainees: what can be claimed, how to claim reimbursement, documents required;
- working time: duration in hours, are meal breaks included, floating time procedures, is it free floating or does it include compulsory hours scheduled for work, absence, overtime, overtime compensation time, working from home;

- Sick absence, notice required for sick leave;
- Absence: what happens if an employee has regular absences or longer absences for reasons unrelated to illness;
- non-working days and leave: whether it is public holidays or other non-working periods, religious or cultural holidays, a period of notification and request for leave is required;
- maternity, paternity, adoption, care for parents or family members in need of care beyond the legal minimum: how long, who decides, what period of notice is required;
- procedures for requesting flexible working hours;
- Leave for special reasons: for how long, who decides;
- procedures for supervision, support, formal checks, or attestations;
- Access to training and other development opportunities;
- disciplinary procedures: what they consider oral and written warnings, appeals;
- complaints procedures;
- retirement and redundancy policies and procedures;
- confidentiality of information about employees, trainees, and volunteers.

Voluntary policies

In relation to the work they do, volunteers are usually required to comply with the same policies as paid staff on health and safety, data protection, confidentiality, child protection, good financial practice, etc. However, in matters relating to their role as volunteers, they must be clearly distinguished from paid staff. This is due to the different motivations of volunteers, their different legal statuses, and the fact that volunteers cannot be required to work or give notifications the way employees do.

Organizations such as TimeHeroes, CVS-Bulgaria, and the National Association of Volunteers in the Republic of Bulgaria (NADVB) work to develop volunteering.

Any organization that works with volunteers should have a volunteer policy that can include:

- volunteer recruitment and selection procedures;
- volunteer induction programs;
- reimbursement of volunteers' expenses: what can be claimed, how to claim, documents needed;
- Hours/time volunteers have agreed to work and what they need to do if they request days off, are sick, or decide to quit;
- an organization to supervise and support volunteers;
- training or other support needed for the job and how it will be provided;
- procedures in case a volunteer's performance is unsatisfactory or a volunteer is dissatisfied with some aspect of volunteering.

Difficult situations

Difficulties often arise due to a lack of clear policies for serious situations that arise infrequently. It is much easier if the organization has carried out a risk assessment (see Resource Material 15) and set targeted guidelines so that they do not have to be invented every time a problem arises. These include, for example:

- Use of alcohol or illegal drugs in the organization's office space;
- action in case of violence or threat;
- action in the case of racist, sexist, or offensive to the person, other manifestations, or abusive behavior;
- action in case of suspected theft by a person associated with the organization;
- Actions in case of burglary or theft.

There is no point in developing policies if no one knows where the relevant documents are and what they say, which is why every organization should have a policy and practice folder, a series of folders, or a set of folders looking at different types of policies. The folders can be created on paper, electronic media, or both.

Policy and practice folders may seem unnecessarily bureaucratic, but they can save an infinite amount of time when it comes to, „I remember we talked about this a few years ago, but I don't remember well what we decided.“ It's also helpful when new board members and staff join the organization. When the organization wants to improve its practice, it knows what is currently being done and can skip some initial stages.

Compilation of folders

Separate folders can be created for different groups (paid staff, volunteers, board members, users) or by work topic.

They can be folders for:

- Administrative procedures
- Memorandum of Association and related documents
- Privacy and data protection
- Development plans and priorities
- Equal opportunities
- Financial Procedures / Accounting Policy
- Health and Safety
- Meetings: procedures and guidelines (including terms of reference of executive committees)
- External authorities (media, police, etc.)
- Policies on personnel
- Premises and security
- Terms of service
- Recruitment and selection
- Trustees' policies
- Voluntary policies.

Collection of the information

Each policy and practice folder includes the following:

- The relevant formal policy document (such as the constitution, equal opportunities policy, health and safety policy, privacy and data protection policy, employment contracts, disciplinary and grievance procedures);
- Copies of all required minutes of general meetings, board meetings, etc., that are relevant to the policy (make sure each minute clearly states which meeting it is and the date);
- relevant procedural guidelines, for example, procedures for booking a community room or van;
- all documents that relate to a policy or procedure. These can be simple one-line notes: 'Please remember: all vouchers redeemable for small amounts must be accompanied by a receipt and signed on receipt of the money,' or they can be very detailed.

A designated person (supervisor, administrator, secretary, or someone else) should be responsible for putting all the documents in the folder(s) or documents and ensuring people get the documents they need. Everything in the P&P folders should be dated. If a document is still a draft, it should clearly say „Draft“ with the date; when the final version is approved, it should say „Approved by Board, Date“ or other governing body.

In the P&P folders, new material should be placed at the front so that, when arranged by date, the most recent document is at the top. Invalid documents should be removed or marked 'Canceled on ... date'. For material stored on a computer, the name of each file must contain the date. Old files must be deleted or archived.

In a multi-office organization, it may be appropriate to make copies of each relevant P&P folder. It may also be appropriate for each manager to have their own copy and other copies available to other staff, trainees, volunteers, and board members. All new staff and members should be made aware, early in their induction, of the existence of P&P folders and their contents. If appropriate, a member of the team can be given a personal copy or, with a designated member of staff, jointly look at some of the policies.

When a policy or formal procedure is agreed upon, it may be helpful to indicate in the top corner which P&P folder it should be ranked in. This increases the likelihood that it will end up where it should. Some organizations indicate in their minutes when a protocol should be included in a P&P folder.

P&P folders can also be uploaded to a computer, making it easy to update them. The structure should be the same as the paper version.

Yes, everything takes time, but in the end, it saves time and helps the organization function more efficiently and consistently.

List of Questions for Effective Policies and Procedures

- Are board members, staff, volunteers, and members aware of how decisions are made in the organization and who has the authority to make decisions or take action on specific issues?
- Does the organization have a policy and practice folder or some other method of maintaining easily accessible records of important decisions and procedures? If not, why not?
- Do board members and relevant staff know where the P&P folders are and what they contain? Are they regularly used? If not, why not?
- Are the P&P folders updated?
- Does the organization provide opportunities for paid staff and volunteers to discuss specific areas of policy and practice using real situations or fictional cases?