

THE ESSENTIAL NONPROFIT EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK TEMPLATE

A high quality employee handbook is vital to the health of your nonprofit organization.

It sets expectations for employees and defines important work guidelines that set teams up for success. A handbook can include information on everything from employee benefits to working conditions and confidentiality policies. It can also serve as a guide to help employees understand the ins and outs and dos and don'ts of your organization. Plain and simple, it keeps everyone informed and on the same page.

However, if you've ever embarked on the task of actually creating an employee handbook, you know it can be *far* from a simple task. Deciding what to include, what to leave out, and how to communicate important expectations can be complicated. If you'd like to create a new employee handbook or improve an existing one, this guide is for you. Read on, and you'll find a sample employee handbook table of contents with explanations of each item you should consider including in your own handbook.

If you're still struggling, don't hesitate to contact us.

We have years of experience creating employee handbooks for organizations ranging from 2 to 200 employees, and can help your organization too.

SECTION ONE: GENERAL EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

Although the use of the word "general" is here, this portion of your handbook is one of the most important. This is where you define the basic policies that explain how, when and where your employees are expected to work. We highly recommend that include the following information in this section:

1. At-Will Nature of Employment
2. Statement of Non-Discrimination
3. Sexual and Other Unlawful Harassment Policy
4. Disability Accommodation Policy
5. Business Ethics and Conduct Expectations
6. Ownership of Work Materials Policy

THE ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK TEMPLATE

SECTION ONE (CONTINUED)

7. Conflict of Interest Policy
8. Whistle Blower Policy
9. Access to Personnel Files Policy
10. Non-Disclosure (Confidentiality) Policy

All of these elements are important in their own way. Without a non-disclosure agreement, your employee could breach confidentiality and have no idea that they were not supposed to discuss a topic outside of work. Without a conflict of interest policy, you might have an employee seek out a business relationship with another organization that puts your own operation at risk, yet have no recourse as your policy was not spelled out. That's why it's important to take care in developing most, if not all, of the sections above as a foundation for your employee handbook.

SECTION TWO: EMPLOYMENT STATUS

This is another category that will be very important in your employee handbook. One of the most important roles this handbook plays is keeping open communication. We highly recommend that you include two sections:

1. Introductory Period: if you wish to have a "trial" period for new employees, define what that period will look like and how long it will last here
2. Employment Categories: what does it mean for someone to be defined as temporary, part-time, full-time, exempt, non-exempt, etc.?

SECTION THREE: RECRUITING AND HIRING

One of the most exciting aspects of running a nonprofit is growing and adding new members to the team. Your employee handbook should lay out the ins and outs of your employees' legal obligations during their employment at your organization as well as your process for recruiting and onboarding. At a minimum, you need to cover your policy on eligibility to work in the U.S. in your employee handbook. The following categories are also recommended, but not required:

1. Job Posting and Employee Referrals Process
2. Employment Applications Process
3. Employment Reference Checks Policy

THE ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK TEMPLATE

SECTION THREE (CONTINUED)

4. Policy on Employment of Relatives
5. Relocation Expense Policy
6. Process for Reemployment of Former Staff Members
7. Employment Offer Policy
8. Position Descriptions
9. Promotion Policy
10. Reclassification Policy
11. Transfer Policy

SECTION FOUR: COMPENSATION AND SALARY ADMINISTRATION

Payday is everyone's favorite day. Keep your staff on the same page about how their money will be dispersed and when.

At minimum, include the following items in this section:

1. Timesheet Policy
2. Overtime Policy
3. Pay Periods

These items are also recommended

1. Compensation Philosophy
2. Pay Deductions and Setoffs Policy
3. Direct Deposit Process
4. Personnel Data Changes Process
5. Administrative Pay Corrections Policy
6. Compensatory Time Off Policy
7. Pay Advance Policy

SECTION FIVE: GENERAL WORKPLACE POLICIES

What time should I show up for work?

What is the dress code? How many breaks can I take? Don't leave your employees guessing. In order to ensure the best work ethic and safe work environment, we highly recommend that you include the following sections in your employee handbook:

1. Working Hours
2. Attendance and punctuality expectations
3. Safety Protocols
4. Workplace Violence Prevention
5. Smoking in the Workplace
6. Drugs in the Workplace
7. Security Inspection Policy
8. Acceptance of Gifts, Gratuities, and Services Policy
9. Authorization to Sign Contracts & Agreements
10. Communication with the Press

These items can also be helpful:

1. Work Breaks Policy
2. Lactation Breaks Policy
3. Emergency Closings Policy
4. Flexible Work Arrangements
5. Personal Appearance/Dress Code

THE ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK TEMPLATE

SECTION FIVE (CONTINUED)

6. Open Door Policy
7. Housekeeping Policy
8. Visitors in the Workplace
9. Children in the Workplace
10. Staff Travel Recommendations
11. Corporate Credit Card Policy
12. Political Activity Policy
13. Solicitation Policy

SECTION SIX: EMPLOYEE BENEFIT PROGRAMS

Employees often value their benefits, both tangible and intangible, almost as much as their pay. After you put a benefits program in place that meets your employees' needs, it's important to lay out the specifics of that program for your employees in your handbook. We recommend including some or all of the following items in this section, depending on your specific benefits package:

1. Benefits Overview
2. Medical/Dental/Vision Benefits
3. Flexible Spending Accounts
4. Transit/Commuting Benefits
5. Life Insurance/Disability Benefits
6. EAP
7. Retirement Savings Plan
8. Statutory Benefits (Workers Compensation, Social Security, Unemployment)
9. Education Assistance
10. Benefits Continuation

SECTION SEVEN: LEAVE

Everyone needs a break every now and then. By creating guidelines of when it's appropriate to paid time off (PTO), vacation, or sick days, your employees will be better able to manage their leave time. We highly recommend that you include the following sections in your employee handbook:

1. Holidays
2. Vacation Policy
3. Sick Leave Policy
4. FMLA/State FMLA
5. Military Leave Policy
6. Jury Duty

The following items can also be helpful:

1. Personal Leave Policy
2. Bereavement Leave Policy
3. Parental Leave Policy
4. Medical Leave Policy
5. Pregnancy-Related Absences
6. Unpaid Leaves of Absence
7. Court Leave
8. Time Off to Vote
9. Other State-defined Mandated Leaves

THE ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK TEMPLATE

SECTION EIGHT: ORGANIZATIONAL PROPERTY AND TECHNOLOGY

Every organization is different as to whether they allow their employees to use their phone or computer at work, and whether they supply their employees with these tools.

Here are the essentials for this section of your employee handbook:

1. Document Retention Policy
2. Phone and Mail Systems Policy
3. Computer and Email Usage Policy
4. Social Media Policy
5. Smart Phone Issuance and Use While Driving

The following items can also be helpful in this section:

1. Personal Property
2. General Use of Equipment
3. Internet Usage Policy

DON'T FORGET...

Every organization is different, so it is important to closely tailor your handbook content to the unique needs and concerns of your employees.

SECTION NINE: EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND WORKPLACE CONDUCT

How do you expect your employees to behave while at work? What qualifies as misconduct? What kind of performance is considered grounds for a promotion, or a termination? How will employee performance be evaluated? Answer those questions and more in this section of your employee handbook.

These items are essential for this section:

1. Personal relationships within the workplace
2. Employee Conduct and Work Rules
3. Progressive Discipline Process
4. Problem Resolution Process

You may also consider adding the following items in this section:

1. Outside Employment Policy
2. Performance Evaluation Process
3. Employee Relations
4. Suggestion Program

THE ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK TEMPLATE

SECTION TEN: SEPARATION FROM EMPLOYMENT

For most employees, your organization will not be the last stop in their career. To avoid the messiness that can often come along with an employee transition, be sure to include the following items in this section:

1. Employment Separation
2. Return of Property

You may also consider including an item on references for current and former employees.

SECTION ELEVEN: EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM

If you're taking the time and care to create an employee handbook, you'll definitely want to be sure that everyone has read and processed it. By creating an employee acknowledgment form, you will (legally) be able to prove that if signed, the employee has read and acknowledges the policies implemented by your organization. For example, if there is a breach of these policies in any way, you will have this form as proof that the employee knew that they were violating policy.

One important thing to remember as you read this guide that there is no right or wrong way to organize your employee handbook. Each employee handbook will be different based on what your organization needs.

Additionally, many states mandate benefits or policies different from those at the Federal level. Ensure that your employee handbook considers state regulations as well as Federal, and that it is reviewed every 2-3 years to ensure compliance.

Not sure how to prepare an employee handbook for your organization or need help getting started? Visit us online at nonprofithr.com, email us at info@nonprofithr.com or call



About the Author - Sidney Abrams

Sidney Abrams, SPHR, leads Nonprofit HR's Consulting Practice with nearly 20 years of human resources leadership experience, and more than half of his time spent in the nonprofit sector. In his role as Managing Director, Sidney has led successful engagements with a wide variety of clients including the Illinois Education Association, Rebuilding Together, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Washington and Greenpeace.