

Tips for Reviewing Your Employee Manual or Handbook with a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Lens – First Level Review

If you have staff, you most likely have an employee manual. If you don't yet, you can start one using this tool. If you do, then it is time to refocus your lens. An employee manual or handbook articulates the organizational culture an employee can expect and also offers one stop for all the policies an individual might encounter during their employment.

Importantly, this manual must be the right size for the number of employees and complexity of your organization. It must also appropriately and adequately reflect the culture and intentions of your mission.

This tool is about reviewing your words, policies, and practices – those that exist and those that are missing through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. If done carefully, this can be a significant turning point in your commitment as an organization to a more inclusive workplace. There are many layers to this work that can take you to the heart of systemic injustice. How deep you go and how much you adapt, shift, or change is up to each organization. This is a tool of many levels. **Below is a beginning list of items you can look for to assess change. If you need help, please reach out to us.**

Tips on process:

- Gain board approval for policy review.
- Gather a core team of board and staff to spearhead the review. Ideally this team is diverse itself. If not, they are deeply interested and willing to dig deep, ask questions, listen, learn, and explore with others.
- Engage an HR expert and/or an attorney at the right spots to make sure you are following the laws and are staying in compliance with any accreditation or outside monitors.
- Engage the whole staff in review and feedback. Ask about blind spots or gaps and opportunities.
- Engage the finance committee or in other ways ensure the options for change are financially viable.
- Seek full board engagement during the review stages and full board approval at the end.
- Set a plan to review again to go deeper and/or to confirm your policies match your practice over time.

Initial areas to consider:

- Creating or enhancing the introduction to include your diversity statement or approach.
- Reflecting more than binary gender references or create gender neutral language throughout your manual.
- Reflecting citizenship or immigration status in the section on equal opportunity.
- Ensuring your disability provision cites the applicable sections of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Instituting an anti-bullying policy.
- Creating a workplace safety plan.
- Expanding maternity/paternity leave to family leave and include caring for children and parents regardless of marital or biological status.
- Expanding bereavement/emergency leave to include other non-person centered emergencies (i.e., house fire, etc.)
- Expanding bereavement/emergency leave to include committed relationships regardless of marital status.
- Creating a leave without pay policy that allows employees to maintain their insurance benefits if they pay the employee portion of the premium.
- Aligning the paid holiday schedule to culturally appropriate/relevant holidays that reflect your commitment to a diverse workforce.
- Creating a flexible paid holiday schedule to accommodate employees with children in school and school closures or in-service days.
- Expanding a jury duty policy to include witness leave when subpoenaed because we know this is a barrier for anyone experiencing personal violence.
- Separating your military leave policy from jury duty policy.
- Incorporating workplace wellness language consistent with family friendly practices of allowing for children to be in the workplace as appropriate and providing paid leave to care for sick children, parents, or themselves.

- Creating a practice to stay attuned to disability access and accommodations in the physical workplace and access to mission services (more than what is required by ADA).
- Creating a practice of gender neutrality in workplace signage, restrooms, and mission activities.
- Creating a practice of regularly and consistently acknowledging the indigenous land the workplace occupies.
- Offering partner health benefits not dependent on marital status.
- Implementing proven practices in eliminating the gender pay gap. See Foraker's report on the [Gender Pay Gap in the Nonprofit Sector](#), which is available under Learn the Issues on the Speak Up of our website.
- Offering paid time off (PTO) to vote in elections.
- Providing options for remote work (outside an emergency).

The Building Movement Project's [Race to Lead Revisited Report](https://racetolead.org/race-to-lead-revisited) (<https://racetolead.org/race-to-lead-revisited>) reminds us that an important step in our commitment to a diverse workforce and an equitable and welcoming culture is to review our policies and process through these lenses.

“This might include policies on equitable salary or improving antidiscrimination procedures. It is essential to consistently model and reinforce the organization's commitment to racial equality. For example, if a staff member makes comments that are discriminatory or derogatory, even inadvertently, an organization that is committed to its racial equity process must have a clear set of procedures in place to address the person making the comments, followed up by actionable consequences. A realignment of policies and practices is only effective if they are acted on consistently and universally.”

Please reach out to us if you need more assistance in reviewing your workplace policies and practices.