

Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium Ethics and Compliance

An overview of the stages in policy development.

Stages in policy development

The following steps summarize the key stages involved in developing policies:

1. Identify need

Policies can be developed to ensure ongoing processes are followed in an efficient and safe manner (health care, financial activities, human resources) or in anticipation of need (changing health care regulations, Joint Commission recommendations, etc.) Each organization needs to constantly assess its activities, responsibilities, and the external environment in order to identify the need for policies and procedures.

This involves development of policy positions in relation to external issues or developments which are pertinent to the organization's concerns. Engagement in the wider policy environment is often important to protect service users, beneficiaries, to demonstrate value to supporters or funders, or to protect the organization itself.

Internal policy development involves development of policies, practices, and procedures to govern the organization's operations. These help to ensure that the organization:

- a) Complies with regulatory responsibilities;
- b) Complies with legal responsibilities;
- c) Is able to demonstrate effective management and accountability;
- d) Provides clear guidelines for those involved in running activities; and
- e) Establishes clearly its beliefs, positions, or values, helping to ensure these are supported through its activities.

For example:

- a) financial management policies;
- b) volunteer policy;
- c) complaints policy;
- d) confidentiality policy;
- e) recruitment policies; and
- f) equal opportunities policy.

Remember, every policy decision should be designed to help the organization realize its mission and vision and help it to operate more effectively.

2. Identify who will take lead responsibility

Delegate responsibility to an individual, working group, or sub-committee according to the expertise required.

3. Gather information

Do you have any legal responsibilities in this area? Is your understanding accurate and up to date? Have other organizations tackled the same issue? Are there existing templates or examples you could draw on? Where will you go for guidance?

4. Draft policy

Drafting of the policy language should be crafted by those with experience in the intent and processes to be employed. Drafters must ensure the wording and length or complexity of the policy are appropriate to those who will be expected to follow it. Overly technical terms should be avoided. The policy and any accompanying procedures should be kept as concise as possible. Overly long and complex documents should be reviewed to see if they can be parceled out to ease understanding.

Policy Format

The formatting of policies and procedures varies widely. However, each organization should seek a standardize format to ease understanding, readability, and review. The format should include an easy-to-find process as well as detail who is responsible for the policy. Listing review and approval dates will also ease later review and revision.

5. Consult with appropriate stakeholders

Policies are most effective if those affected are consulted, are supportive, and have had the opportunity to consider and discuss the potential implications of the policy. Those ultimately responsible for managing the policy and at least a subset of those who will be affected by the policy should be consulted during the drafting phase. Special attention should be paid to those outside the intended department to sure there are no unintended consequences of a new policy or procedure.

6. Consider whether procedures are required to implement policies

While some organizations use the terms “policy” and “procedure” interchangeably, it is more appropriate to divide their use. “Policies” are typically intended to state the overall goal the organization wishes to achieve, and reasons for the policy. “Procedures” are then implanted to detail in what way those policies will be achieved.

Consider whether there is a need for clear guidance regarding how the policy will be implemented and by whom. (e.g. a policy regarding receiving complaints will require a set of procedures detailing how complaints will be handled). Who will be responsible for developing these procedures? Who will be responsible for managing the processes? When will this be done? What will be the processes for consultation, approval and implementation?

7. Additional levels of review

In many cases policies and procedures need to be reviewed by departments other than those directly affected. When addressing legal concerns, for example, drafters should also seek review from the organizations legal department or outside attorney counsel. Policies and procedures addressing health care regulation or privacy (HIPPA) must be reviewed by the organization’s compliance department. Some organizations may also have departments reviewing corporate and financial compliance. Safety, Risk, and Facilities are often needed, as well. It is essential to

bring in these departments early in the process, and certainly before any attempt at moving the product to the approval stage.

8. Finalize / approve policy

Final approval of policies and procedures will vary from organization to organization. Different approving committees may be necessary, depending on the source or type of policy being implemented. Larger organizations may require multiple levels of approval, depending upon the breadth of affect to the organization. Policies may have a higher authority approval than procedures.

This is a strategic issue which should be determined by the organization. Bear in mind that, ultimately, the organization is responsible for all policies and procedures within the organization, and will have to answer to regulatory and accreditation officials.

9. Implement

The organization will need to determine how they will implement the new policy or procedure, and how will the policy be communicated, and to whom. Is training required to support the implementation among staff? Should the organization produce a press release?

10. Monitor, review, revise

The organization must continue to monitor, review, and revise as necessary any new policy and procedure. It is common to find unintended consequences or unknown factors affecting the implementation of a new policy or procedure. The organization should be open to early modifications to ensure the most efficient use of the policy or procedure. What monitoring and reporting systems are in place to ensure that the policy is implemented and to assess usage and responses? On what basis and when will the policy be reviewed and revised (if necessary)?