

Simple Roadmap to Build and Maintain a Policy Manual

An up-to-date policy manual is an essential document for any certification program. It provides a clear framework for ensuring consistency, promotes efficiency, provides direction to staff members, and informs operational procedures, candidate information, and other relevant documents. Current policies also support fairness for candidates, standardization in operations, organizational credibility, and compliance with best practices and third-party accreditation standards.

Follow a simple roadmap to ensure your organization's Policy Manual is consistent with best practices and includes all the components necessary for supporting its activities while staying in compliance with accreditation requirements.

1 Set a timeline

Establishing a process and a timeline for creating and maintaining your policy manual by conducting periodic reviews is an essential first step to keep you on track and focused. Include significant dates and make time for important—yet often overlooked and time consuming—activities, such as editing, reviewing with volunteer leaders, and obtaining final Board approval. By committing to an overarching strategic process, you will ensure your finished policy manual is comprehensive, clear, and thorough.

2

Commence initial drafting or review

The initial draft should address key program areas, including governance and committees, quality assurance, confidentiality and conflict of interest, document management, exam development and maintenance, discipline and appeals, and security, among others.

3 Review and revise

Collaboration with others is essential during this phase of the process. Include others in your organization to offer strategic guidance as well as constructive feedback and suggestions regarding content to ensure clear, concise, and accurate language. Through each round of collected feedback, revise as necessary; you may anticipate several rounds of revisions in one policy manual.

4

Documentation management

A defined system for managing the policies is recommended, including the policy name, identification number, initial date of approval, body responsible for approval (e.g. Certification Board), and date of revisions. This provides a clear tracking system for policy updates.

5 Prepare final draft for board review and approval

Once a clean version has been prepared, ensure all dates, important names, page numbers, the table of contents formatted headers, and other document elements are consistent and correct. Send to your board or governing body responsible for approving the manual and offer a strict deadline for sending approval. If you are anticipating feedback from multiple individuals, make sure to build in time to make those changes. Your initial timeline should have been devised to account for feedback collection and Board revisions as necessary.

6

Develop operational procedures to support policy implementation and approval

Once approved and finalized, your work is not complete. Develop and follow a process for supporting policy implementation. This process should be outlined in your newly approved policy manual and likely includes specific opportunities throughout the year for reviewing and updating policies as necessary. This may include at the yearly in-person Board Meeting or on quarterly calls.

7

Schedule periodic review for revisions over time

Your organization's policy manual should be viewed as a living, dynamic document that is reviewed and updated to reflect current practice. As your organization makes needed changes, your policy manual should be updated to reflect those changes. As important, make sure you aren't saving these much-needed reviews for the last minute ahead of a major deadline, such as a re-accreditation due date. Not only will this reflect negatively on your organization, but it makes the reaccreditation process much more complicated and time consuming.

Tips:

- Recruiting the right people to spearhead drafting and review of policies saves time and produces the best results. For instance, we recommend a smaller group of leaders review policies and present them to the Board. Staff should also be involved to ensure the policies are realistic and feasible. Include vendors, where appropriate, such as psychometric consultants to review the policies related to exam development.
- Organize your policy manual so information is easy to find—this could include a table of contents, numbering system, etc.
- Digital versions should include hyperlinks so specific information can be easily accessed.
- Ensure staff and your board members have easy access to the current policy manual.
- Identify gaps in current policies on a routine basis and address those in a timely manner.
- Make use of helpful guides and references throughout, such as the ICE Handbook, NCCA Standards, ISO Standards & ANSI guidance documents, ABSNC Standards, ICE research reports on eligibility and continuing competence, and the ASAE web site, samples, publications.
- Keep personnel familiar with your organization's policy manual. Train current and new employees, and communicate all updates and changes to the manual to ensure everyone is fully informed of its policies at all times.