YOUR BOARD POLICY MANUAL: A NEVER-ENDING STORY

A CRITICAL PART OF THE GOVERNING BOARD’S ROLE, POLICIES MUST BE REVIEWED AND REVISED AS NEEDS CHANGE.

BY PAULA LAUER
“THIS PROCESS REINFORCED TO ME THAT THE BOARD’S ROLE IS TO CREATE POLICY, AND IT’S THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE EMPLOYEES TO CREATE AND IMPLEMENT PROCEDURE.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN DEVELOPING OR REVISING BOARD POLICY:

• Is the language of the policy clear?
• Does it comply with the law?
• Is it broadly directive, or is it narrowly prescriptive?
• Is it still relevant, based on the beliefs and values of the college?
• Does it conflict with any other policy?
• Are there policies we should have but do not?

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

• Good policy reflects the values of your institution.
• Develop a process for regular review and amendment of policy.
• Voices of internal constituents matter when developing policy.

“AS WE CREATE PROCEDURE WITHIN OUR DEPARTMENTS, WE NEED TO REFERENCE THE POLICY MANUAL.”

Creating a manual also allows for cross-pollination of ideas and perspectives. “It was interesting to see the college from multiple perspectives,” notes Anne Humphrey, an English instructor at MCC and faculty representative serving on the policy committee. “This increased everyone's grasp of responsibilities and priorities. For example, as a faculty member, I was always thinking about learning possibilities, but others focused on safety, legal issues and compliance, public relations, etc. It strengthened all of us and built better working rapport to talk through scenarios with all those considerations on the table.”
experiences with the policy that then influenced the policy review and led to further research.” Plus, any new policies tend to be adopted and followed by employees when they’ve had a role in their development. MCC’s committee includes faculty, staff, administrators, and union representation.

Make it make sense. Your employees will be more likely to support a policy that’s easy to follow and doesn’t get in the way of doing their jobs. It needs to be practical and not get in the way of innovation or even risk-taking.

Don’t be redundant. Whether you’re updating your manual or starting from scratch, be sure that a valid need exists for each policy. Is the issue already addressed in existing policies? Would an addition to an existing policy work better?

Know the difference between policy and procedure. “This experience was eye-opening,” Koronkiewicz said. “I had a tendency to want to be too specific and detailed, almost as if I was creating procedure. This process reinforced to me that the board’s role is to create policy, and it’s the responsibility of the employees to create and implement procedure.”

Consider your institution’s culture. The banking industry needs a policy for everything. At the other end of the spectrum are companies that have just a few policies to cover any legal requirements relevant to their industry. Most places fall somewhere between these two extremes. Make sure everyone understands where you fall on the spectrum and how the policy will fit your culture.

Leverage outside advice and references. In other words, “Make sure you have the right people in the room — subject matter experts — for specific discussions, particularly legal,” advises Stejskal. “It was also really helpful to keep copies of other local community colleges’ board policy manuals handy and refer to them for possible language — just to get started with something instead of starting from scratch.”

Make sure everyone has an equal voice at the table. “I was the last person to join the team, and it was evident from the first meeting that all voices were valued,” Koronkiewicz says. “This created an atmosphere that encouraged brainstorming and challenging one another in a professional manner.”

Paula Lauer is marketing/promotions specialist at McHenry County College in Crystal Lake, Illinois. She can be reached at plauer@mchenry.edu.

KEEPING THE BALL ROLLING: ONE COMMUNITY COLLEGE’S POLICY MANUAL PROCESS

McHenry County College’s Internal Policy Committee (IPC) meets twice a month to work through sections of their manual to determine what needs updating. At times, the committee breaks into groups to review a section that they might have more insight on — e.g., college operations, academics, board of trustees, or human resources.

Each policy is assigned its own Word document explaining if it’s new, if there are changes, if there are no changes, if it’s being moved to a different section of the manual, or if it is under consideration to be deleted.

The next step is attorney review. The attorney may suggest changes, including a citation number or reference to a specific law, or even recommend deleting a policy. Upon receipt of the attorney’s memo, the section is put together for Evaluation and Policies Committee (EPC) review. The EPC is made up of three college trustees.

The documents include:
1. An Excel spreadsheet overview with the current policy number and name. If there is a change to the policy, a brief description is added in the spreadsheet. The sheet also indicates when the committee reviewed the policy and whether it was approved as is, approved with changes, remains under review, or was completed. If a policy is under review, it is sent back to the IPC for additional work.
2. The attorney’s memo.
3. A memo to the EPC giving a brief overview, which may include changing the policy’s number or title.
4. The Word documents for each policy, which also identifies and explains any EPC changes.

At MCC’s EPC meetings, the IPC leader and support staff person attend with the college president, attorney, and, as needed, executive council. Additional members of the IPC also may attend. At times, a subject-matter expert may attend in case the EPC has specific questions related to the policy being reviewed.

The next step is to bring the section forward for the entire board of trustees to approve at the regular board meeting with a board report. The section is presented in a draft format with the changes in bold/red and any deleted text struck through.

It takes two board meetings for a section or policy to be approved unless there is a true emergency and a policy needs to be pushed through. Such an emergency happened after the attacks of September 11, 2001, when a change in the law affected students and employees being called to duty. “Military Leaves of Absence” was presented and approved by the board at the first reading.