



CENTRALINA
REGIONAL COUNCIL

SMALL TOWNS THRIVE

Personnel & Operations Policies Guidance Document



The Small Towns Thrive initiative helps communities build local capacity, create connections and address needs that are unique to smaller towns. The program has three areas of focus: education, peer learning and technical services, all aimed at empowering community staff and fostering efficient, effective and resilient governance.

Small Towns Thrive Guidance Document: Personnel & Operations Policies

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Key Principles for Policy Crafting	2
Best Practices for Policy Crafting	3
Summary Document Template.....	6
How Centralina Can Help	7
Additional Resources	7

Introduction

Local governments need strong workplace policies to support operational efficiency, ensure quality customer service and foster a culture of excellence. Good personnel and operations policies:

- Set expectations
- Help maintain order within the workplace
- Ensure fair and equal treatment
- Avoid legal and financial liability

What does this mean for small communities?

Policies provide a framework for making choices and ensure similar situations are treated in a similar manner. For communities that are smaller in size, there may be unique constraints that make the process of creating workplace policies more challenging, including:

- *Limited staff resources:* Fewer staff to dedicate to policy research, development and implementation.
- *Flexibility needs:* Smaller communities may need more flexibility in their policy to adapt to rapidly changing environments.
- *Communication challenges:* In smaller communities it may be more difficult to disseminate and enforce policies consistently.

The following principles provide a framework for developing and implementing both personnel and operations policies to help ensure order, fairness and alignment with community objectives.

Key Principles for Policy Crafting

State & Federal Policies

Adhere to State & Federal Regulations Every community must operate and abide by several state and federal regulations governing employment. These guidelines include labor laws, health and safety regulations, and anti-discrimination laws. It is recommended that you consult with an attorney or human resources professional familiar with employment law when navigating these regulations and while crafting your community's workplace policies.

State & Federal Regulations Affect Grant Readiness When applying for a state or federal grant, remember that your adherence to the federal and state regulations can affect your readiness for the grant application process. Many of these grants require that you have these policies in place to receive funding, as many communities saw in the requirements for receiving their American Rescue Plan Act funding allocations.

State Guidelines

North Carolina General Statute Chapter 160A, Article 7 NCGS Chapter 160A, Article 7 is the primary legislation that shapes and provides guidance for our municipalities. In this item alone, you can see what the guidelines are for the following topics:

- Organization of a municipal government
- Administration of a Council-Manager community functions
- Administration of a Mayor-Council community functions
- Mandates for required personnel and their duties, such as:
 - City Clerk
 - City Attorney
- Personnel policies:
 - Compensation
 - Retirement benefits
 - Adoption of personnel rules
 - Employee record retention
 - Employee political activity

This legislation is an essential component for every community to examine and work to incorporate into their own policies as it covers personnel practices. A link to the full text of this statute can be found in the Additional Resources section at the end of this document.

Federal Guidelines

U.S. Department of Labor Principal Statutes The U.S. Department of Labor is the primary resource for all federal policies that affect employees. The department's Summary of Major Labor Laws provides an overview of principal statutes related to workplace topics such as wages and hours, workplace safety and health, worker's compensation and medical leave. A link to this resource is included in the Additional Resources section of this document.

Best Practices for Policy Crafting

Identify the Need for a Policy

Avoid creating policies for every unforeseen event It is not necessary to have a policy to address every possible situation. Instead, policies should address an identified need. Consider the following questions:

- Are the guidelines on appropriate workplace behavior clear?
 - *Examples: Attendance policy; cellphone use policy; travel expense policy, codes of conduct*
- Are there legal protections in place for the organization?
 - *Example: Investigations policy*
- Are existing policies in compliance with government laws and regulations?
 - *Examples: Family and Medical Leave Act; COBRA*
- Are there consistent standards and rules in place to ensure appropriate discipline?
 - *Example: Progressive discipline*
- Are there consistent standards to ensure employees are treated fairly?
 - *Examples: Paid time off; benefits eligibility*

Determine Policy Content

Make sure new policies do not conflict with existing policies It is critical to check in with Finance staff and other relevant departments to ensure that there is alignment and consistency with your proposed policy changes. Avoid developing policies in a vacuum.

Use general, clear wording Avoid language that is binding or implies a contract. Instead, strive to use language that is clear and easy to understand. It is also important to use policy language that is flexible and avoids any wording that suggests rigid rules that must be followed word-for-word in all circumstances.

Focus on aligning with the law If your policies do not align with federal and state laws, then readjust and redraft them accordingly.

Benchmark similar policies from other communities The policies you are considering drafting have likely been considered or already implemented by other communities. Review their policies to assist with the drafting process. Some recommended resources for obtaining sample policies from peer communities include:

- UNC School of Government's listservs
- Public Sector Human Resources Association (PSHRA)
- Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM)

Gathering staff feedback While consulting with staff on developing policies can help get their buy-in, you run the risk of giving staff too much control over the policy which can quickly complicate the process. Instead, we recommend getting feedback on policies from your staff through basic questions, such as:

- Is the policy clear?
- What is missing from the policy?

Build Stakeholder Support

Supervisors as champions Your department heads and supervisors will both carry out and ensure adherence to the policies that you are drafting and implementing. It is important to communicate policy changes to them so they understand expectations and how best to apply the policy. When having these conversations, include the reasoning behind why the new policy or revision is needed, address the impact the policy will have on the department's work and address any potential thoughts or concerns they may have. These discussions may prompt some considerations for review. Make those necessary revisions at this point in the process before you have your legal counsel conduct its final review.

Communicate with Staff

Communication methods You know your staff better than anyone and so you will know what the best method is for communicating with them about policy changes. Take the time to expressly talk to them, inform them on where they can access these policies if they need to consult them, and to make sure that the policy is distributed to all staff. Some methods for communication are:

- A mass email
- A memo
- A brief PowerPoint presentation, followed by an email
- A staff meeting

When communicating with staff, work to ensure that employees have the opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the policy.

Provide an acknowledgement statement After you have communicated policy changes to your staff, include an acknowledgement statement for employees to sign indicating that they receive and understand the policy.

Review and Update the Policy

Know your community's process for updating policies Every local government has its own method for adopting policies. Some provide that ability directly to the department head, the Town Manager, the mayor or require a vote by the governing body. Whatever the process is, be familiar with it and plan accordingly. If you require your board's approval to change a policy, ensure the timing of this proposal is well-planned and on the agenda.

Review policies regularly State laws, federal laws, and local conditions can and do change. It is helpful to take the time to review these items and ensure that you are adhering to them and that they are integrated into your own workplace policy framework. Pay attention to announcements from professional resources such as the UNC School of Government's listserv and SHRM. Many human resources experts recommend reviewing policies annually.

Provide a summary of policy updates A summary document helps explain the changes to staff at all levels, illustrating any of the differences between previous policies and the new ones. In the next section, we have included an example of a summary document for your benefit and use.

Sample Summary Document

The following sample is intended to serve as a starting point when preparing a workplace policy update summary to share with staff and your governing body. All gray highlighted text serves as sample language or examples.

Personnel Policy Amendments

As part of the implementation of the 2024 Pay & Classification Study, we are proposing the following amendments to the Town’s personnel policies.

The proposed amendments clarify existing policy language and providing guidance to the organization in the following areas:

- Pay Plan
- Starting/hiring salaries
- Promotion
- Lateral Transfers
- Bonuses

The purpose of the clarifications and additions to the policies are to provide clear guidance to department heads and supervisors in making compensation recommendations, ensure consistency in approach across departments, and provide transparency.

Section	Notes	Added, Deleted, Updated, No Change
Acknowledgement Statements – Employee & Personnel File Copy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updated language, added “at-will” to the title and added language to the “by my signature” section 	Updated
At-Will Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not needed since already in acknowledgment statement 	Deleted
Responsibilities of the Board		No Change
Equal Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New protected classes/terms, updated from SHRM • Deleted similar policy language from Operations and Procedures Manual (“ops/procedures manual) 	Updated
Public Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved up from Employment Relationship Section • Reference to statute for full info 	Reorganized

How Centralina Can Help

Need guidance or a helping hand? Centralina's experience can help you understand and address workplace hires, new workplace policies, and help navigate interpersonal conflicts.

If you are just getting started, Centralina can help you think through new updates of your own operations and personnel policies to address your needs, whether that is a checklist of needed requirements, helping organize and facilitate an assessment center, or providing research on best human resource practices.

This document was created as part of Centralina Regional Council's Small Towns Thrive initiative.

See www.centralina.org for additional resources to support our communities.

*For additional information, please reach out to Kelly Weston,
Government Affairs and Member Engagement Administrator at kweston@centralina.org.*

Additional Resources

State & Federal Guidelines

- Summary of the Major Laws of the Department of Labor. [Link](#)
- North Carolina General Statute Chapter 160A, Article 7. [Link](#)
- North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources - General Records Schedule for Local Government Agencies. [Link](#)

Example Policies

- The Town of Rolesville Personnel Policy. [Link](#)

Networks

- The Public Sector Human Resource Association (PSHRA). [Link](#)
 - The North Carolina Chapter of PSHRA. [Link](#)
- The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). [Link](#)
 - The North Carolina Chapter of SHRM. [Link](#)
- UNC School of Government Listservs. [Link](#)