

University Policy Office Glossary and Style Book For Writing Policy Documents

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Glossary of Terms Used in Policy Development

Impact Statement: A brief, confidential document that proposes a new policy or major revisions to an existing policy. The document describes the background, justification, and the likely impact of the new or revised policy. It is presented by the responsible executive to a meeting of the Executive Policy Review Group (EPRG).

Interim Policy (Referred to as “Policy Statement and Draft Procedures”): A document issued in situations where a university policy must be established in a time period too short to permit the completion of the standard policy process delineated in University Policy 4.1, Formulation and Issuance of University Policies.

Policy Statement: Generally, two to four short sentences, the “Policy Statement” states the policy’s intent, who must follow the policy, when the policy applies, and any mandated actions or constraints. It does not describe procedures. This is usually the same policy statement that appears on the impact statement approved by the EPRG.

Principle: Similar to the “Policy Statement,” this section outlines the philosophical basis for the policy and states what new requirement or provision this policy establishes. This section allows for a fuller description of these issues than was possible in the “Policy Statement.”

Procedure: Minimal actions that apply across the university community to fulfill the policy’s principles, contained in a designated section of the policy document. Where the EPRG deems appropriate, these actions may be tailored to the unique administrative requirements of a unit, such as those of the Weill Cornell Medical College. This section does not include details, such as the responsible office’s behind-the-scenes protocol, nor actions that are optional or only desirable. This latter category of information may be provided in the Appendix section of the policy document.

Proposed Policy: A university policy in any stage of development, before issuance.

Responsible Executive: The unit head that creates, implements, and gains compliance for, or "sponsors," a university policy that falls under his or her jurisdiction. Depending on the scope of its subject matter, a policy may have more than one responsible executive.

Responsible Office: Under the direction of the Responsible Executive, the office that develops and administers a particular policy and procedures and will be accountable for the accuracy of its subject matter, its issuance, and timely updating.

University Policy: An official university directive that:

1. Mandates requirements of or provisions for members of the Cornell University community, and provides procedures for implementation
2. Has broad application throughout the university (including the Weill Cornell Medical College)
3. Enhances the university's mission, reduces institutional risk and/or promotes operational efficiency
4. Has been reviewed and approved by a committee of university executive officers, typically the Executive Policy Review Group (EPRG)
5. Is sponsored by at least one university executive
6. May help achieve compliance with any applicable laws and regulations

University-wide: Pertaining to one or more of the three entities that comprise Cornell University, namely endowed Ithaca, contract colleges, and the Weill Cornell Medical College.

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Writing Policies

The Policy Document

The University Policy Office (UPO) is responsible for maintaining the policy document template. One of the primary reasons for having only one office overseeing the writing of policies is to leverage best practice and to maintain consistency of documents to aid compliance. To maintain the necessary consistency, the UPO holds the policy document to specific standards to maintain the documents' integrity and professional appearance. Below are general rules about writing policies and information about composing policies in the university's policy template.

Policy Statement

The Policy Statement describes who should follow the policy and when policy applies. It summarizes what the people involved are required to do, but does not describe procedures. In addition, it may state major conditions or restrictions that apply. It is generally one to three sentences. Avoid the use of phrases like "as outlined in this policy" or "must follow this policy." This is a given, as the whole purpose of the policy is for it to be followed, so the phrase adds no value to the statement.

Reason for Policy

The Reason for Policy recognizes the legitimate interests of all parties, describes the problem or conflict the policy will resolve, and cites any legal or regulatory reasons for policy. It is generally two to four sentences.

Definitions

The first sentence of a definition should not be a complete sentence, but a fragment. In general, definitions for other parts of speech begin with the same part of speech, as exemplified below.

- The definition of a noun should begin with a noun (that may be separated by a modifier), such as, "Brander: An electric tool with interchangeable numbers."
- The definition of an adjective should begin with an adjective (that may be modified), such as, "Ordinary: Normal, in the course of university business."

Responsibilities

The responsibilities listed in a university policy must mirror responsibilities outlined in the policy. A responsibility always begins with a present tense verb (e.g., "Review documents"). Each action should be listed as a separate responsibility.

In General:

1. The policy office follows the *Chicago Manual of Style* writing standards
2. The best-written policies are written with the reader in mind. Simple, specific, and precise terminology must be used, and jargon should be avoided, if possible. A university policy must be well-understood by everyone in the community, including non-subject matter experts.
3. All policy documents are written in the third person. For example, "If the request is approved, the Office of the Treasurer will work with the unit to determine a bank, work directly with the chosen bank to establish the bank account." Or, "Units that have a unit bank account must establish appropriate controls for maintaining the accounts ..."
4. Use lists whenever possible and when it makes sense, but always after an introductory sentence or paragraph.
5. If someone does not really *have* to do anything, why is the policy in existence? Unless an action is not really required, the term "must" is to be used, rather than "should." Use of "should" may imply that the action is not really necessary.
6. Having a policy that cannot be enforced is worse than not having a policy at all. Therefore, do not use the word "ensure," because the university generally cannot ensure actions of its community members (trying to do so would be a compliance and monitoring nightmare). The words "to achieve" are useful in these instances.

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Using the University Policy Template

In most instances, once a policy has entered the editing stage, policy developers will be given a Microsoft Word version of the policy to mark up (with security applied to track changes). The University Policy Office is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the policy document and template, and keeping track of all versions of the draft policy. Therefore, please follow these rules when using the policy template to compose policies.

1. Do not rename files that are sent to you. The document numbering system is in place to assist us in keeping track of what document was created, and when.
2. Do not concern yourself with the formatting and layout of the template. The policy in the official template is shared in a protected document format so that (1) the policy writer can focus on the content instead of formatting, (2) the policy office can tell what changes were made and where, and (3) the text styles and formatting of the document are preserved.
3. Do not change headings in the document, such as "Responsibilities," "Principles," or "Procedures," unless discussed with the policy office.

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