



What Should be Included in Your Employee Handbook

A Suggested Outline

Compliance **HR**
Simplifying the Complexity of Employment Law

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What Should be Included in Your Employee Handbook

A comprehensive employee handbook has proven to be a critical compliance tool for employers. At a minimum, it should outline all of the employer's policies, procedures and benefits. It typically also describes an organization's culture, philosophy and values. A well-written handbook uses clear, unambiguous language to define workplace expectations and provide employees with the rules they need to know in order to be successful in the organization. Once you have made the decision to create, or update, your employee handbook the next step is to consider what information it should include.

The Benefits of an Employee Handbook

While it is not legally required, any organization that has employees should have an employee handbook. As we shared in Part I of this series, a good handbook will provide your organization with many benefits, including:

- Welcoming new employees and introducing them to your organization and its unique culture.
- Communicating the employer's expectations for workplace behavior and the consequences of not meeting those expectations.
- Sharing company policies with all your workers, will help to ensure they are enforced fairly and consistently by managers, which will lower the risk of lawsuits and other claims by employees.
- Providing an always-available resource for employees and managers on how to answer common questions, handle day-to-day issues, reporting violations and filing complaints.

The “Must Haves” to Include in Your Employee Handbook

The topics that every employee handbook should address include sexual and other harassment, anti-retaliation, disability and religious accommodations, employee privacy and equal employment opportunity, health and safety practices, and company policies on smoking and substance abuse, as well as drug testing and workplace violence.

While there is no universal template for what should be included in an employee handbook, there are a few “must haves.” The topics that every employee handbook should address include sexual and other harassment, anti-retaliation, disability and religious accommodations, employee privacy and equal employment opportunity, health and safety practices, and company policies on smoking and substance abuse, as well as drug testing and workplace violence. Most handbooks also cover payroll, compensation, holidays, attendance and leave policies (including vacation, sick leave, military, jury duty and parental leave).

A high-level “must have” list of the most important and most common policies would include:

- General employment policies and practices
- Anti-Discrimination policy
- Anti-harassment policy
- Discipline policy
- Health and safety policy
- Compensation policy
- Employee benefits policy
- Work conditions and hours
- Attendance and leave of absence policy
- Work performance
- Business policies and procedures
- Communication policies
- Non-disclosure policy
- IT policy

A Comprehensive Employee Handbook Outline

Employee handbooks are often as unique as each individual organization. The contents of your employee handbook will vary depending on your company size, industry, and culture. For example, a small software firm operating out of one office will likely have much less complexity and be more informal than a large professional services firm with a national or global footprint.

As a starting point, following is a more comprehensive employee handbook outline that you can edit to best fit your organization:

Employee handbooks are as unique as each organization.

1. Introduction and welcome to employees

- a. Welcome message from founder or CEO
- b. Purpose of the employee handbook
- c. History and background information on the company
- d. Introduction to company mission, values, purpose, and vision for the future
- e. Equal employment opportunity statement
- f. Conflict of interest statement
- g. Confidentiality agreement
- h. Contractual disclaimer and at-will statement (where allowed)
- i. Orientation: Organization structure, key contacts, office locations, etc.

2. Standards of conduct

- a. Remote/work-from-home policy
- b. Attendance
- c. Dress code
- d. Hours of work
- e. Substance-free workplace
- f. Taking disciplinary action

The complexity of your handbook is determined by your organization's location, industry, size, and formality.

3. Policies and procedures

- a. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodation
- b. Anti-discrimination
- c. Anti-harassment
- d. Meal and rest periods
- e. Overtime
- f. Timekeeping
- g. Personnel records
- h. Payroll schedule
- i. Payroll deductions
- j. Overtime policy
- k. Garnishments
- l. Performance reviews
- m. Salary and bonuses
- n. Promotions
- o. Transfers
- p. Termination: Reduction in force, layoff/recall
- q. Bulletin boards
- r. IT policy: Security, personal devices, company email, internet, systems, etc.
- s. Social media
- t. Travel and expense reimbursement

4. Benefits

- a. Benefits eligibility
- b. Company observed holidays
- c. Paid time off (PTO)
- d. Sick leave
- e. Disability leave

An employee handbook provides an opportunity to welcome new employees, emphasize corporate culture, set expectations for workplace behavior, and ensure legal compliance.

- f.** Personal leave
- g.** Bereavement leave
- h.** Family and medical leave
- i.** Jury duty
- j.** Military leave
- k.** Health insurance
- l.** Dental insurance
- m.** Vision insurance
- n.** Life insurance
- o.** Retirement and pension plans
- p.** Training
- q.** Educational assistance program
- r.** Service awards
- s.** Workers' compensation
- t.** Unemployment insurance

5. Safety

- a. Commitment of the company
- b. Employee and employer responsibility for safety
- c. Violence and weapons
 - a. Emergency procedures
 - b. Medical services
 - c. Personal protective equipment
 - d. OSHA requirements: Safety Rules, reporting accidents

6. Procedures

- a.** Hiring
- b.** Travel and expense
- c.** Performance reviews

- d. Promotions and transfers
- e. Conflict resolution
- f. Progressive discipline
- g. Exit process
- h. COBRA

7. Summary and acknowledgment

- a. The importance of the policies and procedures
- b. Employer right to change rules without notice
- c. Statement that the handbook does not create a contract
- d. Acknowledgment of receipt by employee

Conclusion

It is safe to say that every organization that has more than one employee will benefit from an employee handbook. Employment law experts agree that well-crafted handbooks will help to protect a business from litigation, while also serving as valuable reference tool for employees and their managers.

The suggested outline presented in this whitepaper will serve you well as a starting point in creating a tailored employee handbook for your organization.

About ComplianceHR

ComplianceHR is a SaaS company creating self-service tools that empower human resources professionals and employment law attorneys to address their critical HR compliance risks in the US.

Overview of PolicySmart

PolicySmart is an intuitive handbook compliance tool that provides employers with national and state specific templates, a unique compliance timeline, and so much more.

Your company's employee handbook is an invaluable tool that helps shape company culture, communicates operational policies, and minimizes the risk of employment-related legal liability. A well-written and legally compliant handbook is essential to keeping the HR process running smoothly, and most employers would agree that keeping up with federal, state, and local employment laws can seem overwhelming. Fueled by the subject matter expertise of Littler, the world's largest employment law firm and built on Neota's AI-powered platform,

PolicySmart allows users to easily create and maintain legally compliant handbooks that are cost effective, up-to-date, and delivered on-demand.

Register for a Demo

To learn more about ComplianceHR and PolicySmart, [register for a no obligation consultation](#) with a compliance expert. After you've met with our compliance consultant, you will receive a free, 14-day trial to use all of the Navigator Suite applications.