THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA | Division of Finance and Operations

Policy Writing Guide

Introduction

In order to ensure consistency in the formatting, content development, and approval of Finance and Operations Policies, the Policy on Policies for the Division of Finance and Operations was established. This guide will cover the following topics:

- Guidelines for writing policy
- Use of the approved policy template
- Formatting for accessibility
- Policy Approval Workflow

Writing Policy

What is a policy?

Policies are clear, simple statements of how the University intends to conduct its business. They allow the University to identify requirements and define expected behaviors. They also provide a set of guiding principles to help with decision making.

Policies fall into three categories:

- Policies that enhance the mission of the University
- Policies that ensure compliance with applicable laws, rules and regulations; or
- Policies that promote operational effectiveness and efficiencies and reduce institutional risk.

Policy vs. Procedures

Policies and procedures go hand-in-hand to clarify what needs to be done and how to do it. Procedures should always have an associated policy. Procedures describe how the policy will be put into action by outlining what steps must be taken, roles and responsibilities, and which forms or documents to use.

The format for procedures can vary depending on the content. Sometimes the information can be covered with just a few bullet points, other times detailed step-by-step instructions are required. Procedures can also be organized as forms, checklists, or flowcharts.

In some cases, it may be necessary to combine policy and procedures in the same document, but most often it is best to keep the two separate. This gives the department more flexibility to change or update internal procedures as needed without the need to put them through the policy review workflow.

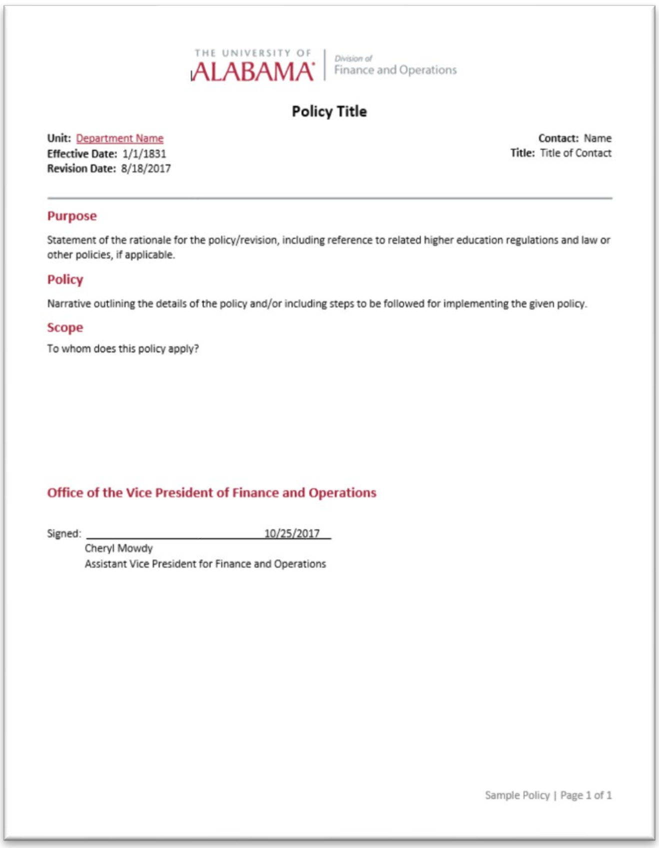
Policy Language

- Policies should be clear and concise and written in third person.
- Keep the language simple and the sentences short. Since the audience can vary, the best practice is to write for an 8th grade reading level.
- Words need to be selected carefully. Words such as *should* and *may* imply choice. The words *will* and *shall* indicate a future action.

- Do not use information that may quickly become outdated such as employee names or names of software products, unless such information is specifically required. For example, certain regulations require an individual to be named as the contact for reporting.
- When using acronyms, spell out the words the first time, then indicate the acronym in parenthesis, e.g. Division of Finance and Operations (FO).

Finance and Operations Policy Template

The current approved template is available on Finance and Operations Policy page of the Office of Compliance, Ethics, and Regulatory Affairs (CERA) website. Since the template may be updated from time to time, it is best to check the website for the newest version before proceeding. The template is composed of six sections.



THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA | Division of Finance and Operations

Policy Title

Unit: Department Name
Effective Date: 1/1/1831
Revision Date: 8/18/2017

Contact: Name
Title: Title of Contact

Purpose

Statement of the rationale for the policy/revision, including reference to related higher education regulations and law or other policies, if applicable.

Policy

Narrative outlining the details of the policy and/or including steps to be followed for implementing the given policy.

Scope

To whom does this policy apply?

Office of the Vice President of Finance and Operations

Signed: ______________________ 10/25/2017
Cheryl Mowdy
Assistant Vice President for Finance and Operations

Sample Policy | Page 1 of 1

Heading

Ensure that each of following fields are completed.

- **Policy Title:** This should be the official title of the policy. The word "Policy" should be part of the title.
- **Unit:** The Unit should be department responsible for the policy. Please provide a hyperlink to the departmental webpage.
- **Effective Date:** The Effective Date should reflect the date that policy first went into effect. If that date is unknown, please use July 31, 2013 as this was the date that the Policy on Policies went into effect.
- **Revision Date:** The Revision Date should reflect the date of the most recent revision.
- **Contact:** Enter the name of the individual responsible for the policy. This will usually be a department head, director, or it could be a person with designated responsibility.
- **Title:** Enter the official title for the contact person.

Purpose

The information in this section answers the question as to why the policy exists. Key areas that may be addressed include: legal or regulatory reasons, description of conflict or problem the policy will resolve, and overall benefits. If there is a state or federal law with which this policy is aligned, it may also be specifically referenced in this section.

Policy

This is the most important section of the policy. It is where the details of the policy will reside. It is acceptable to add sub-headings within the policy section to help organize the content.

Scope

To whom does this policy apply? The explanation in this section should be brief and could be limited to a single sentence listing the groups who are subject to the policy. Possible groups would include: students, faculty, staff, contractors, volunteers, or others.

Approval

Once the policy has been reviewed and approved, it will be signed in this section.

Footer

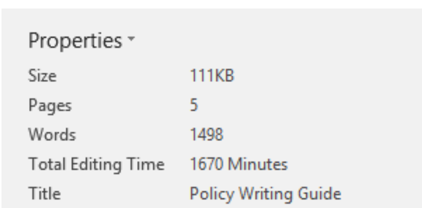
The policy template is set up to display the policy title and page number in the footer section. To update the footer, double click on the section. Once the edits have been completed, double click the body of the document to close the footer editing view.

Formatting for Optimal Accessibility

The approved Finance and Operations Policy Template has been developed to incorporate basic document accessibility principles to ensure that individuals using assistive technology (screen readers, magnifiers, braille devices, etc.) will be able to make use of the content. However, there are formatting steps that must be taken in the policy writing phase to promote optimal accessibility.

Policy Title

The title of the policy must be entered in the Title attribute in the document properties. To access the document properties, click the File tab. The properties information will be displayed on the right. Enter the full name of the policy in to the Title Field.



Heading Structure

It is important to use the heading structure available from the Styles section of the Word Tool bar. The headings will provide the navigational structure for the document. It is not acceptible to approximate headings by making regular text bold, italics, or changing the font size or style.

The following heading structure should be used for Finance and Operations policies.

- Heading 1: (Calibri, 16 pt., Bold) Policy title only
- Heading 2: (Calibri, 11 pt., Bold, Crimson) Major sections: Purpose, Policy, Scope
- Heading 3: (Garamond, 12 pt., Bold, Italic) Sub-sections within the Policy section. The sub-sections may be numbered, if desired.
- Normal: (Calibri, 11 pt.) Section content.

Images

While images within a policy may be rare, they are sometimes necessary. It is important to note that there are steps that must be taken to make them useful for reader using assistive technology.

Word Wrapping: Images should be formatted “in-line” with the rest of the text on the page. This ensures that screen readers will find them in a logical order.

1. Click on the image to see the Text Wrapping icon.

2. Click the Text Wrapping icon and choose “In Line with Text.”

Alt-Text: All images including diagrams and icons should be assigned “Alt-Text”. This provides a description of the image for screen reader users. Alt-Text descriptions should be concise, but informative. It is not necessary to begin with “image of” or “photo of” as screen readers will provide that verbiage automatically.

1. Right click on the image and choose “Edit Alt Text.”
2. Enter a description of the image in the “Description” box.

Policy Tracking Form

A completed Policy Tracking Form must accompany all new or substantively revised Finance and Operations policies submitted for review and approval. The form is used to collect the information that is necessary for Board Review under Board Rule 108. It is best to provide a full answer to each question.

Policy Information

- **Why is the new or revised policy being proposed?** This is where you will explain why the policy or revision is needed. Have legal requirements changed? Are you trying to address a common problem or provide clarification on an often-misunderstood issue?
- **If revising an existing policy, summarize the proposed changes.** If you are revising and existing policy, please track changes within the document. Use this section to give an overview of what has been changed.

Existing Policy Review

In this section, you will indicate which policies at the other system campuses have been reviewed and explain how the proposed policy compares. Use the comments section to explain and justify any differences. Attach additional information if more space is needed.

External Reviewers

It is expected that the sponsoring department will solicit feedback from University Counsel and the affected departments or divisions. Use this section to explain who you consulted and provide a summary of feedback.

Additional Information

If there are other factors that should be considered in the review of the proposed policy, please provide an explanation here.

Approval Workflow

Policies are generally developed by a unit to address a need for a specific audience. When the policy applies to other departments or other divisions of the University, it must be reviewed and approved according to the workflow described below. Any substantive revisions made during the review process will be returned for the approval of the originating department/unit.

Finance and Operations Approval Process

1. The department/unit responsible for the policy drafts the policy using the approved template available from the Finance and Operations Policies webpage, and submits it along with a completed Policy Tracking Form to the Institutional Compliance Coordinator in the Office of Compliance, Ethics, and Regulatory Affairs who serves as the Policy Manager for Finance and Operations.
2. The Policy Manager reviews the policy for formatting and potential conflicts with existing policies and coordinates with other departments who may be affected by the policy.
3. The policy is forwarded to the Office of the Vice President of Finance and Operations for review and signature.
4. If the revision is non-substantive, the signed version will be posted to the Finance and Operations Policies webpage and a link will be provided to the originating department/unit.

If the policy applies to other divisions, it will progress to the UA Policy Approval Process at this point. Otherwise, the policy will be forwarded for Board review per the requirements of Board Rule 108.

UA Policy Approval Process

The Policy Manager will shepherd the policy through the UA Review process outlined in the UA Policy Development and Management Policy.

- The policy and tracking form will be reviewed by the University's Chief Counsel.
- The policy and tracking form will be posted for review by the University's Policy Administration Review Committee (PARC) for a minimum of five days.
- The policy and tracking form will be reviewed by the President's designee for managing policies and forwarded to for review by the designees for the other System campuses and the Board designee.
- Upon approval, the policy will be converted to a PDF and posted to the UA and Finance and Operations Policies webpages, and a link will be provided to the originating department/unit.

Board Review Process

Once all necessary approvals have been obtained at the UA campus level, the Policy Manager will forward the policy draft and the tracking form to the UA Campus Policy Designee, who will pass the documents on for Board review. When the final approval has been given, the policy will be posted to the Finance and Operations Policy webpage. If the policy applies to other divisions, the link will also be added to the UA Policy webpage.

Annual Review

All policies originated by the Division of Finance and Operations must be reviewed at least annually to ensure that they are accurate and kept up-to-date. This process is coordinated by the Policy Manager.