

**Tip Sheet for Drafting YouthBuild Program Policy**

Clear program policies need to be developed to ensure grant compliance, legal compliance and equitable practices. Even more, policies need to be developed to provide consistency and structure for your program. Having clear written policies strengthen your program’s sustainability, ensures continuity during staff transitions and provides a useful tool for on-boarding new staff.

**Tip 1: If it is written in policy, it is expected that it will be followed every time. Be specific in the language of each policy, in order to distinguish between non-negotiable policies versus those where flexibility is needed.**

*For each policy, consider:*

- Is this an issue that is handled the same way in every circumstance?
- Is this a policy which is specifically mandated by your organization or grant provisions leaving no room for flexibility?

**YES**



**This is a Non-negotiable policy:**  
Use words such as “WILL” or “MUST”

*Examples of non-negotiable, “black and white” policy may include enrollment criteria or zero-tolerance for weapons on the premise.*



**NO or UNCLEAR**

- Is this a policy where circumstances matter?
- Is this a policy where you have discretion as a program over the outcome?
- Is this a policy where flexibility is going to be in the best interest of your participants and program?

**YES**



**This is a Flexible policy:**  
Use words such as “MAY”, “UP TO,” or “INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO”

*Examples of flexible policy may include the response to attendance issues or testing positive on a drug test during programming.*



**NO or UNCLEAR**

Spend more time with the team considering the intention and implications of the policy until you can definitely answer one set of questions above.

**Tip 2: Develop a YouthBuild-specific policy manual, which may pull from the larger agency or primary partners' policies but uniquely combines them for YouthBuild staff and program.**

- Ensure mandatory, regulatory or grant-required policies – for YouthBuild or key partners – are included or clearly referenced in the YouthBuild policy manual
- Cross reference where primary operating partners may have differing governing policies and determine which policy will govern YouthBuild operations (for example, attendance or personnel)
- Ensure staff from each partner providing direct service to YouthBuild is aware of and trained in the policy as it pertains to YouthBuild specifically

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**Tip 3: Develop policies concurrently with developing procedures, in order to ensure that the policy will be able to implemented consistently.**

*For each policy, consider:*

- **Who**
- **What**
- **When**
- **Why**
- **Where**
- **How**

Cannot answer one or more question



**Evaluate your policy more closely based on the following questions:**

- *Can it be implemented without knowing one of these things?*
- *Are more discussions or planning needed so that these questions can be answered?*
- *Does the policy need to be re-worded or adjusted?*
- *Is the policy too specific, and needs more flexibility?*
- *Is the policy needed or redundant?*

**Your policy is solid as written.**

*Develop your procedures based on those answers.*

**Tip 4: Ensure all staff are trained in policy, and understand when and how it applies to their job duties and expectations. Revisit annually, or more often as needed.**

- Include policy training as part of onboarding for new staff – not just handing them a policy manual.
  - Discuss the ways policy impacts their specific job duties, and ensure they know the associated procedures.
  - Revisit the policies during annual review of policies, ensuring everyone is trained in updates and has a voice in critiquing or improving policies to better serve young people and ensure consistent implementation.
  - Revisit specific policies that are, or have been, difficult to enforce or maintain consistently. These can be reviewed during supervisory meetings, team meetings or through shared communication methods.
  - Ensure all staff know where to access the policies.
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**Tip 5: Quality program implementation is responsive to the needs of participants and partners, leading to changes. These changes need to be captured in updated policy. Review and update policy annually. Make sure to include a date on each policy update, and provide updates for staff.**

Policies may change when:

- Programs change and improve with new trainings, best practices introduced, new funders or other learnings.
- Partners and funding sources may change, impacting critical areas of program delivery.
- Policy may have been a good idea at one time, but found to be ineffective or staff unable to implement with consistency.
- New issues arise, or context changes (think COVID) and policies are no longer applicable or a new one is needed.