

Northwest Territories Association of Communities Sample Community Government Policies and Procedures Manual - Introduction

Overview

The Northwest Territories Association of Communities (NWTAC), in collaboration with the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs and the School of Community Government, have contracted NorthWays Consulting of Yellowknife to develop the Sample Community Government Policies and Procedures Manual. The purpose of the manual is to provide sample policies and procedures that can be adopted and implemented by Community Governments.

Many Community Governments in the NWT are operating with limited and/or outdated policies. As a result many Community Governments may be at risk and may not be operating in a consistent and effective manner. The Sample Community Government Policies and Procedures Manual has been developed to provide Community Governments with a menu of policies and procedures in the following critical areas:

1. Governance
2. General Administration
3. Financial Administration
4. Human Resources
5. Leave Management
6. Compensation Management, and
7. Occupational Health and Safety.

Following is an explanation of what policies and procedures are, why they are important, how to implement them, and how to ensure the policies and procedures are updated on a regular basis.

Policies and Procedures

Policies are the standardized rules on how a Community Government will operate in specific situations. Procedures are the step-by-step guidelines describing how the policies are to be implemented. Well written policies and procedures clearly identify responsibilities and boundaries for Council and staff and help to eliminate mistakes in conducting day-to-day activities.

It is important to note that policies and procedures must comply with all forms of legislation and formal agreements. Policies and procedures cannot be adopted that are in contravention with Federal or Territorial Legislation, Municipal Bylaws, or formal agreements such as Collective Agreements. For example, a Community Government cannot create a policy that allows for discrimination in the workplace as this would be in contravention with the NWT Human Rights Act.

Importance of Policies and Procedures

Policies and procedures are critical for effective, efficient and legal governance, management and operations. Well-written policies and procedures are important for the following reasons:

Roles and Responsibilities and Job Limits

Policies and procedures establish clear roles and responsibilities for Council, managers and staff. Just as importantly, they set limits that establish the level of authority and control within the organization. This is critical in ensuring that Council and staff fulfill their obligations without making commitments that are beyond the authority or capacity of the Community Government.

Consistency and Operational Effectiveness

Policies and procedures ensure operational consistency in performing day-to-day operations which is critical to ensuring that all residents are treated in a similar and equitable manner and are provided with appropriate services.

Policies and procedures also significantly increase operational effectiveness as staff members are provided with clear guidelines on how to perform their jobs. This leads to much fewer mistakes and has been proven to improve morale as employees no longer have to guess at, or be uncertain on how to, proceed in performing everyday activities.

Managerial Effectiveness

Effective policies and procedures increase managerial effectiveness as managers and supervisors do not need to spend as much time directly supervising staff, responding to staff questions, or correcting mistakes that often occur if set policies and procedures are not in place.

Compliance

A primary function of policies and procedures is to ensure that Community Governments are in compliance with legislation, bylaws, formal agreements (such as Collective Agreements) and standardized operating procedures (such as Generally Accepted Accounting Principles). Policies and procedures also allow the Community Government to determine if the organization is in compliance, and if not, where the non-compliance has occurred.

Internal Controls

Policies and procedures clearly identify the types of internal controls that are required within the organization and how the internal controls are to be implemented. This significantly reduces errors and the opportunity for fraud.

Risk Management

Risk management has become a critical element for any organization. Community Governments must address risk management issues in a number of areas including governance, finance, human resources, operations and health and safety place in order to reduce the risk of death or injury as well as financial and legal liabilities. Policies and procedures are essential for managing risk in each of these areas.

Implementing the Sample Policies and Procedures

The NWTAC recommends that Community Governments follow these steps in implementing the Sample Policies and Procedures:

1. Select the Required Policies and Procedures

The first step is for the Senior Administrative Officer (SAO) and/or his/her representatives to identify which of the policies and procedures the Community Government requires. The Community Government may decide that not all of the sample policies and procedures required or that the current versions of policies and procedures are adequate and do not need to be replaced.

2. Review and Revise the Selected Policies and Procedures

Once the required policies and procedures have been selected, the SAO/representatives should review the sample policies and procedures to:

- a. Ensure the policies and procedures do not contravene any legislation or municipal bylaws
- b. The policies and procedures do not contravene any formal agreements or standardized practices (such as the College Agreement or GAAP)
- c. The policies and procedures are consistent with current policies and procedures or standard practices.

The SAO/representatives should revise the policies and procedures to meet current Community Government policies and procedures or standard practice, or revise the current policies and procedures and practices to meet the sample policies.

For example, most sample leave policies include a mandatory and an optional version. The mandatory versions are based on the requirements for leave as defined under the NWT Employment Standards Act and are the minimum allowed under the legislation. The optional versions provide space for the Community Government to include their own leave policies based on the Collective Agreement or standard practice within the community. The Community Government can decide to provide as much leave entitlements as they deem appropriate as long as the amount of leave does not contravene either legislation or formal agreements.

3. Ensure that Legal Counsel Reviews the Policies

Community Governments ***must ensure*** that Legal Counsel reviews and approves the policies and procedures to ensure they comply with current legislation. Community Governments that do not have the policies and procedures reviewed by Legal Counsel place themselves at risk and may not be eligible for insurance coverage in the event of a legal action from such areas as human resources, termination of employment, financial misconduct and/or health and safety incidents.

4. Prepare the Community Government Policies and Procedures Manual for Review by Council

The selected and revised policies and procedures should be compiled in a Community Government Policies and Procedures Manual. It is recommended that the Policies and Procedures Manual be presented to Council for their review and approval. Changes may be required at Council's direction. Again, any changes to the policies and procedures cannot contravene legislation, bylaws or formal agreements.

5. Review the Policies and Procedures with Staff

The final step is to review the policies and procedures with staff. A common mistake that organizations make is to develop a policies and procedures manual but not fully explain the policies and procedures to staff. As a result the policies and procedures are not fully and properly implemented placing the Community Government at significant risk.

Updating Policies and Procedures

The NWTAC recommends that Community Governments review and update their policies and procedures when legislation or formal agreements are changed. A full and formal review of policies and procedures should take place at least every three years.

The NWTAC would also like Community Government to provide updated policies or recommended changes to the sample policies and procedures by contacting the NWTAC directly at:

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