

## Public library personnel policy

VT Public Library HR quick read

4 MAY 2020

Creating a personnel policy can be a daunting task. But I've tried to make it a *little* less so. Nevertheless, if you are serious about writing one, it will take time and commitment.

First, **take time to read this** short two-page introduction. Then decide how far you want to go down the proverbial rabbit hole. But, first, essentials:

- Every library needs a personnel policy,
- Personnel policies should be clear and cover essential points,
- There are many examples available, including examples from Vermont libraries, and
- I suggest that an attorney who knows labor law review your work. If you are a municipal library, but have your own personnel policy, speak to your town administrator to clarify the legal support available through the town.

The **Vermont Department of Libraries** provides excellent guidance on writing policies in general<sup>1</sup>. The author lays out the reasoning behind policy-making and the importance of writing it well and accepting the fact that policy review should standard operating procedure, because, unlike fine wine, policies *don't* get better with age.

**Every library**, no matter how small or large, municipal or incorporated, **should have a personnel policy**. After all, what is our greatest resource at any library? It's the *people*. And personnel costs often account for the majority of annual expenses. Managing

people *well* is a commitment you make as a director, chair, or supervisor. Personnel policy will help you do a good job

because they will provide a transparent framework for important

topics like position descriptions, benefits, and conditions of work.

**A personnel policy doesn't have to be excessively long or complicated**, but it should address key personnel issues to provide organizational clarity and guidance. Your library may have a policy already in place. Rules and laws governing personnel change over time, so plan to review the policy on a regular basis. Also, Vermont's public libraries have many "varieties" of governance. Some public libraries are unionized, so the conditions of work are a matter of collective bargaining. Many municipal public libraries operate under the policies of the town. Other municipal libraries have their own policies set within the context of the town's policy. Incorporated libraries, as nonprofit corporations, require their own policies. You can find **a plethora of personnel policy guidance on the web**. For instance, the American Library Association<sup>2</sup> has a page devoted to policy links and examples, and links to resources for Kentucky<sup>3</sup> and Iowa state libraries give ample advice, as seen in Example A. I think another thorough source of "what to think about putting in a personnel policy" is found at the

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After all, what is our greatest resource at any library? It's the people.*

<sup>1</sup> <https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/PublicLibraries/Writing%20Policies%202016.pdf>

Writing Policies, by Amy Howlett, Library Development Consultant, Vermont Department of Libraries, January 2016. Accessed April 28, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ala.org/pla/resources/tools/directors-managers-administrators/policies>

American Library Association. Publications & Resources, Professional Tools, Policies. Accessed April 21, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> <https://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/librarypolicies/Pages/Personnel-Policies.aspx>

Sample Personnel Policies for Kentucky Public Libraries. Accessed April 17, 2020.

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National Federation of Independent Businesses' website, in an article titled *How to Write a Great Employee Handbook*. An excerpt of this is found in Example B.

**Personnel policy examples** from local Vermont libraries, Whiting and Charlotte, are found, by permission, on my UVM Extension website for public libraries. Each one is in MS Word format for easy download and editing. Please click here to be brought to the page:

<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/vermont-public-libraries-educational-program>

Choose "Human resource guidance" dropdown to access MS Word files.

If you would like advice or guidance in preparing your personnel policy, or in reviewing a policy that you think needs updating, please [email](#) or call me. My contact information is found on the last page.

Best regards,

Gary Deziel

UVM Extension

### Vermont Department of Libraries; personnel policy essentials.

The following is an excerpt from Amy Howlett's (Vermont Department of Libraries) 2016 guidance<sup>4</sup> on writing policies.

#### Personnel

"Whether incorporated or municipal, a public library's personnel policies should show cognizance of federal and state employment laws.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/PublicLibraries/Writing%20Policies%202016.pdf>

Writing Policies, by Amy Howlett, Library Development Consultant, Vermont Department of Libraries, January 2016. Accessed April 28, 2020.

1. Hours worked, breaks, overtime, weekends, nights
2. Leaves for vacation, sickness, jury duty, maternity, family medical emergencies, etc.
3. Job descriptions, performance evaluations, probation, , promotion, termination, retirement
4. Staff orientation, continuing education, professional organizations, meeting attendance
5. Grievance process (usually the only time support staff present at board meetings)
6. Payment of staff dues and expenses for travel to meetings, conferences, workshops
7. Fringe benefits, employee privileges
8. Conduct, attitude
9. Use of volunteers
10. Nondiscrimination
11. Municipal libraries should become familiar with the VLCT Municipal Employment Law Handbook at the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, [www.vlct.org](http://www.vlct.org)."

### Example A<sup>5</sup>.

#### Public library personnel policies

State of Iowa,

#### Library director recruitment, hiring, evaluation

This is a statement on how the board views the process of placing a new director as the head of the library. This statement could list places to advertise the open position, how the hiring committee will be

<sup>5</sup> From <https://www.statelibraryofiodowa.org/ld/k-p/new-lib-dir-man/personnel-mgmt/pers-policy>

State of Iowa, public library personnel policies. Accessed April 17, 2020.

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formed, if any one from the city will be involved, accepting applications, interviewing, offering the job and finally announcing the appointment. This section will also include how the director will be evaluated, describing the frequency and the evaluation process.

### **Staff recruitment, hiring, evaluation**

This statement will be similar to the director's recruitment, hiring and evaluation, except it should explicitly say that this is the responsibility of the library director.

### **Job descriptions**

The job descriptions themselves may be included in the policy or as an amendment or separate document. See the following section for a more detailed discussion of job descriptions.

### **Salary scales**

This section will list the salary scale of all library employees. When reviewing this policy the board will assess the salary scales and upgrade them if necessary. Oftentimes library staff like to compare their salary with a like-sized Iowa town. A better comparison would be among similar city positions. For example the library director's duties are similar in size and scope with the city clerk.

### **Job benefits**

This section will list the benefits available for each library position. Benefits can include medical and dental insurance, long and short-term disability leave, family leave, vacation leave, sick leave.

### **Harassment**

This section will provide a definition of harassment, information on sexual harassment, information on harassment based on race, creed, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin and disability. It will also include the complaint procedure and the consequences of harassment.

### **Continuing education—staff and board**

This is a statement on the board's philosophy regarding continuing education for the betterment of the staff and themselves. If the library is an accredited library the director must be certified within two years of hire. This section should explain how the director and staff will receive training and education. It should address whether the library can be closed on a day when it is necessary for the staff to attend training.

### **Disciplinary action and grievances**

This section will outline the conflict resolution process and procedures.

### **Employee Relations and Conduct**

This section will address such issues as safety, conflicts of interest and political activity. Other sections could include Absence without Leave, Education, Religious Holidays, Supplemental Employment, Personal Activities, Appearance/Grooming, Library owned computers and phones, Weapons, Public Relations and Workplace violence prevention.

### **Example B<sup>6</sup>.**

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<sup>6</sup> Modified from: National Federation of Independent Businesses  
How to Write a Great Employee Handbook  
Date: June 12, 2017

<https://www.nfib.com/content/resources/labor/how-to-write-a-great-employee-handbook/>  
Accessed April 17, 2020

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### Key Sections of an Employee Handbook

National Federation of Independent Businesses

#### Introduction & Welcome

Welcome new employees and write briefly about how the library began and who's in charge. Describe the library's mission and values. Outline how the policy is meant to inform new employees of your policies and procedures, and to establish expectations. The handbook isn't an all-inclusive document, but it offers a good overview of the work environment. You could be vulnerable to lawsuits if you don't provide statements regarding the non-contractual nature of the handbook or at-will employment. State that employment at your library is at-will. An at-will employment relationship can be terminated at any time, with or without reason or notice by either the employer or the employee.

#### Workplace Commitments

Include statements about equal employment opportunity and outline your library's policy prohibiting unlawful discrimination and harassment. Several laws enforced by the U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission prohibit workplace discrimination. Outline that your library won't tolerate discrimination or harassment based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, marital status, veteran status, or any other status protected by applicable law. This policy should also apply to all terms, conditions, and privileges of employment, including recruitment, hiring, placement, compensation, promotion, discipline, and termination.

#### Library Policies and Procedures

This section describes your policies for use of library property, privacy rules, drug use, and social media, among others. Outline explicitly what employees can and cannot do with library property, like equipment,

telephones, computers, and software. Other commitments and statements in this section could include a drug/alcohol-free environment policy, and an open-door policy (where employees are free to bring forward any concerns or problems they might have). You might also want to include policies or agreements on some of the following: confidentiality, dress code, training opportunities, et cetera.

#### Employment Classification

A section on employment classification and overtime rules is necessary. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) provides narrow rules for which employees qualify for overtime exempt status. Outline that your library assigns positions, determines wages, and compensates employees for overtime in accordance with state and local laws and the FLSA. Here you'll also need to include details on your library's part-time, full-time, or temporary status employees, and clearly outline the requirements for each classification and the benefits afforded.

#### Attendance Policies

Include clear details on your library's work hours and schedule, expectations and requirements for attendance, and outline any policies and information about locations, punctuality, and absenteeism. Be sure to include what's required to miss time at work, who employees need to communicate with (and when they need to do so) regarding scheduling time off, and the disciplinary action that might happen for unauthorized or chronic absenteeism. Remember that laws regarding break and meal periods differ by state, so consult with your state's agency or an employment attorney to ensure you provide required meal and break times.

#### Leave Policies

Carefully describe policies about leave, vacations, and anything involving time off work for employees (including eligibility details), especially those required by law.

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### Work Performance

In this section, detail how employee performance will be assessed and what you expect of employees for satisfactory job duties. Libraries that adhere to a performance review policy can avoid problems around handling “poor performance” terminations. Adding a simple timeline of when employees may expect a review is suggested. You might also want to include expectations about mutual respect, common courtesy.

### Discipline Policy

Clearly communicate expectations and penalties in this section. Decide how your library will react to different levels of problems in a way that also gives employees a chance to communicate grievances. This section should spell out a progression of actions leaders can take, including speaking to employees about minor issues, written warnings for continued problems, and termination.

### Employee Health and Safety

Outline all information regarding workplace safety, security, and emergency procedures. Include the name of your library’s accident contact and the location of safety posters or information.

### Employee Benefits

Include descriptions of employee benefits offered by your business. Outline any information about health insurance, a library retirement plan, workers’ compensation, and disability coverage.

### Termination Policies

In this section, acknowledge that personal situations arise that will require a voluntary termination of employment. Outline that you expect an employee to provide two weeks’ advance notice in writing and that this request does not alter an employee’s at-will relationship with the library. Clearly outline all details related to your library’s

termination policies, including final paychecks (in accordance with your state’s laws), what employees have to do (like turn in all required reports, paperwork, and library property), and whether an employee is required to participate in an exit interview. Much of this information will already be outlined in the discipline policy section(s).

Include information about how all rights and privileges of employment with the library terminate upon the date of separation that terminated employees must return all library property assigned to them, and that failure to do so may result in the withholding of their final paycheck.

### Acknowledgement of Receipt

You can’t enforce rules an employee didn’t read, so every handbook needs to include a clause, signed by the employee, stating they have received, read, and understood the handbook. This document should come at the end of the handbook and be included in the employee’s personnel file.

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