

Handbook Requirements 101

A handbook is a valuable communication resource for your company that can also limit your legal liability if crafted correctly. With ever-evolving laws and regulations affecting the workplace, it's wise to review your handbook once a year and update it as necessary to ensure your compliance with the latest requirements. As you look over your handbook, here are key must-haves to include.

1

Disclaimers: The first section of your handbook should include an at-will disclaimer and general disclaimer. You'll also want to include an acknowledgment of receipt at the end for employees to sign; be sure to give the employee a copy and keep one on file.

2

Equal Employment Opportunity Policy: Explain that your company is committed to equal opportunity in all aspects of employment and highlight any special programs to demonstrate your commitment.

3

Employee Classifications: Spell out the definitions of various classes of employees – regular, full-time, part-time and probationary/introductory – as well as what constitutes exempt and non-exempt status under the FLSA.

4

Benefits: Be sure to include a disclaimer about your right to amend or terminate any programs described. Then provide a general overview of your offerings, leaving room for flexibility and eligibility requirements. Include links or locations of master documents for additional details.

5

Hours of Work: To keep everyone on the same page, describe the company's regular business hours as well as how they may be impacted on special days or because of weather. If employees work shifts, describe how they are established and can be changed. You'll also want to explain any telecommuting/flex time policies.

6

Payroll Practices: Outline your pay periods and how you manage timekeeping/reporting. Also be sure to detail how additional compensation such as overtime and bonuses and commissions are handled. Lastly, describe both mandatory and voluntary paycheck deductions so there are no surprises.

7

Time Away From Work: Include your policies regarding punctuality and attendance as well as time away like vacation, personal and sick days. You should also describe any accommodations you make for disability or religious considerations.

8

Federal and State Statutes: Include all of the applicable statutes governing your business, including FMLA, COBRA, leave, pregnancy discrimination, small necessities leave, and domestic abuse leave.

9

Conduct: To ensure a safe and productive workplace, outline your rules regarding employee conduct, drugs and alcohol, confidentiality, dress and violence. And explain your disciplinary policy for violations.

10

Technology: Explain that employees should have no expectation of privacy and that all information composed, stored, sent, or received are property of the company and subject to inspection and review. Also outline acceptable use of technology, including email, the internet, and social media as well as policies regarding cell phones.

11

Termination: Describe the details for the end of the employee-employer relationship, including how final paychecks will be issued, whether you will conduct an exit interview, benefits like COBRA and future employee references.