Creating Policies

Description:

This tool provides guidelines and steps for creating policies.

How it can be used:

All health organizations use policies on a daily basis; however, they may be outdated or they may not be written down, or practices may be incorrectly understood to be policy. Use this tool to help you develop or update policies to help your organizational decision-making and set a strong foundation upon which to begin accreditation.

Policies provide a valuable function in all organizations. They help ensure that behaviours and decisions conform to the organization's expectations and legal requirements. And they are an essential element of accreditation.

Policies sometimes get a bad rap but simply put, policies guide the way people in your organization make decisions. In that way, you can see how valuable they are to creating a high performing organization.

Some things to consider before creating policies:

- **Ensure that your organization has a policy on policies.**
  It is important that policies fit within an organizational framework. The "meta policy" should include guidance on the types of situations that require a new policy, the format policies should use, and the process to be followed for approval.

- **Identify any overlap with existing policies.**
  Before you create a new policy, check if one already exists or if portions of it exist somewhere else. Perhaps you just need to revise an existing policy rather than creating a new one.

- **Don't develop the policy in a vacuum**.
  Although it can be faster to develop policies on your own, policies need to be developed with input from those that will be affected by them. Stakeholder perspectives also need to be heard.

- **Consider the need.**
  Ensure it is an organizational need, not a one-off situation. Always ask the question, "Why do we need this?" There has to be a clear problem or situation to be resolved to justify a policy.

- **Use clear language.**
  Policies have no value if they can't be understood. Use wording that can be understood by everyone. Use words like "will" rather than "should" to be clear and avoid interpretation. Use positions and job titles rather than the names of people. All contact emails should be related to roles rather than any specific individual. (A hint: Don't underline words for emphasis as they can be mistaken for hyperlinks if the policy is posted online.)

- **Include an "exceptions" clause.**
  Every policy will have an exception somewhere along the line. Saying that there are "no exceptions" isn't reasonable. It is better to outline any potential exceptions in the policy and then train managers to ensure they are applied fairly and consistently.

- **Define the policy maintenance process and responsibility.**
  When will the policy be reviewed and refreshed? Who is responsible for completing the review? (Remember, it is the office or title, not the name of a person).

- **Have a process for disseminating policy.**
  Make sure that all employees are aware that there is a new policy in place. Do employees have to sign that they have read new policies? Consider how policies are presented during the orientation process for new employees.

- **Ensure policies are accessible.**
  Every employee needs easy access to all the policies relevant to them. Consider having electronic versions available on the intranet and paper copies of the most recent version kept in binders in central locations.

- **Keep a 'catalogue' of older versions of policies.**
  It is helpful to track how policies have changed over time. It can also be helpful to explain why and how decisions were made in the past.

- **Be prepared to offer training.**
  Some organizations provide training for their staff on how to create effective policies. Also, depending on the policy, you may need to provide training on the content itself. For example, for a new social media policy, a two hour session on what responsible social media engagement looks like would be valuable. That way there won't be any question about how to apply the policy.

Creating the policy content
There are many different approaches to use when creating a policy (perhaps your organization uses a template). The important issue is that the main points are covered to ensure that the policy addresses all the required elements and is easy to understand and apply.

1. **Define the issue.**
   What is the policy about? Explain it clearly.

2. **Provide background**.
   Is there a specific reason this policy was created? What research was conducted to provide evidence for this policy? If relevant, include the analysis of options and alternatives.

3. **Describe the decision**.
   This describes the decision based on the research and analysis above. This is what your organization will use to apply the policy. Ensure the wording is clear and easy to understand (A policy is of no use if it isn't understandable).

4. **Outline to whom and where this policy pertains.**
   Describe how this policy is applied. Is it to be used across the whole organization or within a specific section? Provide evidence for any special circumstances.

5. **Describe the monitoring and evaluation.**
   How will this policy be monitored? Who is responsible for monitoring and reviewing for relevance? When will the policy be updated? Provide the date it was created and when it will be reviewed.