

Employee Handbook

How-to Guide for Employers

This document is intended as a reference guide to provide non-union businesses operating in Saskatchewan's Tourism & Hospitality industry with an overview of what should be included in an employee handbook. While efforts have been made to ensure that this document is as comprehensive as possible, it is important to recognize that policies, procedures, and structures will vary between businesses. Users are responsible for ensuring that their employee policies meet the needs of their organization and are compliant with current employment-related legislation.

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Introduction

What is An Employee Handbook?

An employee handbook is a document created by an employer to communicate employment and job-related information that employees must know including the company's values, policies, and guidelines. It can also be used as a compliance tool, especially if you do not have or intend to have a Policy Manual. Sometimes known as an "employee manual" or "staff handbook", employee handbooks are given to new hires after their acceptance of an offer letter, helping to set expectations of employees and proper workplace procedures, and can be used as a compliance tool.

Why is an Employee Handbook Important?

Starting a new position in a new company can often seem overwhelming, with new faces, information, and policies to learn. But, providing new hires with an employee handbook early on in their employment (think: first day) is a great way to make sure that the employee has all the necessary information and has a resource to constantly refer back to if they have any questions.

It is a valuable reference tool that gives employees information to help them understand employment expectations, handle issues, reference policies, and learn what's acceptable in the workplace. By providing an employee handbook, you can establish professionalism in the workplace and help create a dependable workforce.

What is the Difference Between an Employee Handbook and a Policy Manual?

Employee handbooks and policy manuals can seem similar, but they are two very different things. An employee handbook tells your employees what to expect and should be written in easy-to-understand language. A policy manual, on the other hand, is a document typically used by managers/supervisors, that supports an employee handbook and provides information and guidance on how to apply policies and procedures, and may include more technical information.

For example, if you have a tuition reimbursement program, in your employee handbook you will tell your employees you offer a tuition reimbursement program, but you don't need to outline the nitty gritty details in your handbook. You should save the practical information such as how to apply for tuition reimbursement, and what the program expectations are, in the policy manual.

The information in your employee handbook should match the information in your policies, but it should be a taster rather than the complete policy. That said, a Policy Manual is not required. And, in the absence of a policy manual, your employee handbook needs to include your business' policies in order to be compliant.

How to Use an Employee Handbook

Each new employee should be provided with a copy of your employee handbook upon hire to allow for an efficient and consistent onboarding. But, employee handbooks not only serve your new staff, they serve your old staff as well because they can be used as a reference tool. And, they provide a baseline for you as the employer for what you expect of employees. Ensuring policies, procedures and working practices are enforced fairly, thus eliminating confusion and misalignment within your team.

What to Include in an Employee Handbook

Employee handbooks typically include three categories of content:

1. **General information** including items such as your company's mission statement, core values, policy summaries and more.
2. **Cultural information** including items such as vacation time/ holidays, hours of work, appearance & grooming, rewards and recognition, etc.
3. **Business Specific information** including items such as company policies, disciplinary procedures, code of conduct, bullying and harassment, etc.

Every business will have different needs, but here is an overview of what you should include in a standard employee handbook:

- Welcome Message
- Company History
- Company Vision, mission and values
- Company policies/procedures
- Employee compensation and benefits information
- On the job information (dress code, smoking, etc.)
- Leaves
- Performance
- Career Development
- Health & Safety
- Security
- Employee Relations
- Employee Departure

For a checklist to help you build your Employee Handbook, please see Appendix A.

What Not to Include in an Employee Handbook

Just as important as what to include in an employee handbook is what not to include. Do not include blanket policies on criminal convictions, withholding final pay until company property is returned, refusing to pay unauthorized overtime/early punch-ins, requiring a doctor's note for every sick day, prohibiting lawful off-duty conduct, prohibiting employees from discussing their pay with coworkers, and English-language-only policies.

As a business owner with limited time, you'll also want to create a handbook that does not require constant updating. Don't put all the details in, allow yourself some flexibility. Best practice would be to review your handbook annually and if you make an update to a policy, you'll want to ensure the handbook reflects the change right away.

Creating Your Employee Handbook

Now that you know all about Employee Handbooks, it's time to pull things together. Whether you're create a new employee handbook or update an existing employee handbook for your business, the following sections will walk you through the key pieces of information to include and how to create the policies/procedures you need.

Step 1: Determine the Contents of your Employee Handbook

Take the time to plan the contents of your employee handbook before diving in. This will ensure you include all necessary materials to make your handbook effective. See below for examples on what to include (complete checklist included in Appendix A).

General Information	Cultural Information	Business Specific Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Welcome message•Company History•Vision•Mission•Values•Employment Equity•Privacy, Confidential Information & Intellectual Property•Probationary Period•Employee Signoff (signifying receipt and acknowledgement that the employee understands and will abide by the contents included)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Employment Status•Hours of Work•Overtime•Meals & Breaks•Attendance•Payroll Information•Tips & Gratuities•Time Sheets/Records•Group Benefits•Annual Vacation•Statutory Holidays•Appearance & Grooming•Cash Handling•Performance Review Process•Career Development•Employee Recognition Programs•Employee Events•Internal Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Code of Conduct•Health & Safety Policy•Health & Safety Orientation & Training•Health & Safety Committee or Joint Health & Safety Representative•Reporting Accidents, Injuries and other Safety related concerns•Respect in the Workplace/Bullying and Harassment•Fire Safety & Emergency Response•Safety & Security•Smoking Policy•Drug Free Workplace Policy•Leaves: Illness or Injury, Family Responsibility, Bereavement, Maternity/Parental, Other Unpaid Leaves, Time Off to Vote•Conflicts of Interest•Progressive Discipline•Employee Departure•Employment of Relatives•Social Media Use•Cell Phone Use•Company Equipment & Information Technology•Personal Devices

Step 2: Write Missing Policies/Procedures

In the process of creating your employee handbook, you might have realized that you haven't formalized your policies/procedures or that you still need to consider what some of your policies/procedures should be. Don't worry, many businesses don't think concretely about this until they have to explain them in writing. To write a company policy/procedure:

1. Identify the need for the policy – a company policy should act as a solution to an existing/past problem.
2. Determine the policy content and its goals – for example, if you're creating a policy to address an attendance problem, the end goal would be fewer employee absences.
3. Ensure your policy is compliant with BC employment standards – seek legal counsel if required.
4. Craft your policy, include:
 - Purpose statement
 - Policy details and explanation
 - Effective date
5. Communicate the policy to existing employees. Let them know:
 - What the policy entails
 - Why it was created
 - When it goes into effect
 - Who employees can come to with questions

Step 3: Compile your Information

Using the Employee Handbook template, add your business' information into the appropriate sections. Don't be afraid to add personality into your guide.

1. **Use a tone that matches your culture.** Your handbook's tone mirrors everyday work life at your company. A consultancy firm with strict professional standards will probably write its handbook in a professional, formal tone. Conversely, tech companies might use a more casual tone.
2. **Keep it short and simple.** Use as few words as possible and avoid jargon, technical terms and complicated words.
3. **Focus on the positives.** Even when you are indicating a prohibition (e.g., no smoking indoors) explain why it's important and how it adds value to your business. Keep your language welcoming and instructional, rather than authoritative.
4. **Speak to your audience.** Avoid using passive voice or addressing abstract entities (e.g., "the employee.") Use "you" and "we" to make your handbook more personable and accessible.
5. **Add humor when possible/if appropriate.** Your handbook isn't meant to be hilarious, but adding a few humorous lines (or pictures) will make it more pleasant to read.

Step 4: Ensure Government Compliance

Saskatchewan Employment Standards must be followed by every business. To ensure your compliance familiarize yourself with the key aspects of *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*. Including overtime, statutory holidays, vacation time, pay, termination, etc.

Information you include in your handbook and throughout your company policies need to comply with Saskatchewan employment standards, Saskatchewan Human Rights (discrimination, employment decisions, etc). Additional information you are required to be in compliance with can be found here on the [Saskatchewan Government website](#).

Step 5: Share your Finished Employee Handbook

It is important to ensure the employee handbook is easy to find for everyone. Post the handbook in various locations, email a copy to your staff, and/or keep hardcopies available – whatever works for your business. For new employees, provide a copy on or before their first day.

Conclusion

Employee handbooks are incredibly effective in maintaining a positive workplace culture and integrating newcomers into the team in an efficient and consistent manner. An employee handbook sets clear expectations for all employees to ensure everyone within the organization can remain on the same page. In doing so, employee handbooks help to establish a culture where issues can be dealt with fairly and consistently. Employee Handbooks are an effective tool you can use to provide key information about your business to new employees.

Additional Resources

For additional information and resources, [Tourism SK Onboarding Toolkit](#).

Appendix A: Build an Employee Handbook Checklist

Use the following checklist as a tool to help you build your employee handbook. Include all the relevant items from the list below.

General Information		
✓	Item	Description/Link
	Welcome Message	Small paragraph welcoming your new hire to the business
	Company History	Key facts new employees should know to help them better understand your culture
	Vision	Statement that describes your business' aspirational long-term goal
	Mission	Core purpose of your business
	Values	The standards and guidelines that drive your business operations
	Employment Equity	Statement regarding your business' equal treatment and opportunity for all employees and applicants
	Privacy, Confidential Information & Intellectual Property	Describe how you handle privacy, confidential information and intellectual property
	Probationary Period	
	Employee Signoff	Signifying receipt and acknowledgement that the employee understands and will abide by the contents included. If you will be using your Employee Handbook as your Policy Manual as well, ensure you include the acknowledgement for compliance purposes.
Cultural Information		
✓	Item	
	Employment Status	Full time, part time, seasonal or on call?
	Hours of Work	Business operating hours/when you require employees to arrive and end their shift
	Overtime	How you handle overtime. Refer to Saskatchewan Employment Standards as required.
	Meals & Breaks	When and how long employees get for meals and breaks. Refer to Saskatchewan Employment Standards as required.
	Attendance	What you require around attendance
	Payroll Information	When you process pay/pay frequency
	Tips & Gratuities	How tips and/or gratuities are distributed
	Time Sheets/Records	How employees submit hours worked to payroll
	Group Benefits	If applicable outline your benefits/include plan information direct from provider
	Annual Vacation	Annual Vacation - Province of Saskatchewan (saskatchewan.ca)

	Statutory Holidays	Statutory Holidays - Province of British Columbia (saskatchewan.ca)
	Appearance & Grooming	Is a uniform provided, do you have a dress code, etc.
	Cash Handling	How you accept, count, track and dispense payments received
	Performance Review Process	Performance Review Process – HR Toolkit
	Career Development	How you support your employees in learning and improving their skills for their current or future roles
	Employee Recognition Programs	Recognition & Rewards – HR Toolkit
	Employee Events	List/describe your employee events if applicable
	Internal Committees	List/describe your internal committees if applicable
Business Specific Information		
✓	Item	
	Code of Conduct	Template - Code of Conduct – HR Toolkit
	Health & Safety Policy	Developing a Health & Safety Program – WorkSafe Saskatchewan
	Health & Safety Orientation & Training	See resources in Onboarding Toolkit
	Health & Safety Committee or Joint Health & Safety Representative	Occupational Health Committees – Government of Saskatchewan
	Reporting Accidents, Injuries and other safety concerns	Reporting & Investigating Workplace Incidents –WorkSafe Saskatchewan
	Respect in the Workplace/Bullying and Harassment	Bullying & Harassment – Government of Saskatchewan
	Fire Safety & Emergency Response	Describe how you maintain fire safety and plan in case of emergency
	Safety & Security	Describe how you ensure the general safety of your employees
	Smoking Policy	Include policy if applicable. See policy template in Appendix B
	Drug Free Workplace Policy	Include policy if applicable. See policy template in Appendix B A Guide to Accommodating Substance Dependence – Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission
	Leaves: Illness or Injury, Family Responsibility, Bereavement, Maternity/Parental, Other Unpaid Leaves, Time Off to Vote	Job Protected Leaves of Absence – Province of Saskatchewan Time off work for Voting – Elections Saskatchewan
	Conflicts of Interest	Include policy if applicable. See policy template in Appendix B
	Progressive Discipline	See resources in Retention and Performance Management Toolkit
	Employee Departure	See resources in Departure Toolkit
	Employment of Relatives	Describe guidelines for employing relatives
	Social Media Use	Describe rules for use of social media
	Cell Phone Use	Describe rules/requirements around cell phone use (business provided vs. personal)

	Company Equipment & Information Technology	Describe proper use of company equipment
	Personal Devices	Describe rules/requirements around use of personal devices

Appendix B: Policy Example/Template

An example of a Policy has been provided below which can be used as a template when creating your own policies.

Working Alone or in Isolation Policy

Purpose

To provide measures to protect the health and safety of, and minimize risk to, any employee that works alone or at an isolated place of employment as defined in The Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, 2020 (Section 3-24).

Definition of Working Alone

Individuals are considered alone at work when they are on their own, they cannot be seen or heard by another employee, cannot expect a visit from another employee for some time and/or where assistance is not readily available when needed. Therefore, alone workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision.

This includes:

- Only individual working on the premises;
- Individual who works separately from others;
- Individual who works outside of normal business operating hours;
- Individuals carrying out work outside the worksite or in-home office; and
- Individuals working in premises that are not leased or managed by (Company Name).

Roles and Responsibilities

(Company Name) will communicate all expectations surrounding working alone. To help enforce this policy, management and employees are expected to adhere to the following:

Management will:

- Identify any risks associated with working alone at the worksite or off the worksite;
- Adequately train managers and supervisors on risk assessments and control measures for risk assessments;
- Ensure that any employee who works alone is aware of the company's procedures for working alone;
- Provide anyone who is working alone with a communication link to the office;
- Employees who are required to work alone for significant periods of time without direct supervision, supervisors will ensure that adequate support is provided; and
- Create a check in/buddy system for those who work alone.

Supervisors must:

- Communicate to employees the responsibility of supervisors for employees working alone;
- Communicate to employees their responsibilities for working alone; and
- Provide timely and appropriate instruction and training to employees who work alone or in insolation.

Employees must:

- Adhere to all working alone policy & procedure;
- Take reasonable care for their health and safety;
- Complete check in/buddy system when working alone;
- Assist the supervisor in completing the working alone risk assessment;
- Report any risks that are encountered with working alone.

All employees should be made aware of the working alone policy. Anyone who is or who potentially could be working alone shall receive information, instruction and relevant training in respect of all identified hazards, risks and associated risks ex: violence/aggression and driving.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessments must be carried out for and by all individuals whose working practice makes them vulnerable and recommendations should be made to eliminate or reduce risk as far as possible.

Risks of working alone:

- Safe entry and exit;
- Location ex: remoteness, transport, parking;
- Risk of violence;
- Safety of equipment for individual use;
- Channels of communication in an emergency;
- Site security;
- Travelling; and
- Level and adequacy of on/off site supervision.

Disciplinary Action

Employees found in violation of this policy may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Acknowledgement and Agreement

I, (Employee Name), acknowledge that I have read and understand the Working Alone Policy of (Company Name). I agree to adhere to this policy and understand that if I violate the rules set forth by this policy, I may face disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____