

Policy Development Guidelines

1. Purpose

The objective of this document is to provide guidelines and recommendations for the formulation, development and review of university-wide policies at Northeastern University. This document is a supplement to the University's [Policy on Policies](#). These recommendations and guidelines should be viewed as providing general direction, rather than specific prescriptions for action, unless specific actions are required by existing policies or regulations.

The development and periodic review of policies should originate with the Responsible Office. If more than one Responsible Office has significant responsibility for a policy area, both should consult and coordinate responsibilities for drafting and review of the policy.

The university policy process is applicable to policies that:

1. Endure across time and administrations, change infrequently and set the course for the foreseeable future;
2. Manifest and operationalize the university's mission, vision, values and principles;
3. Apply broadly across the institution;
4. Address compliance with applicable laws and regulations;
5. Promote operational efficiency; and/or
6. Manage institutional risk.

2. Definitions

The following definitions from the Policy on Policies apply to policy development.

A University Policy applies broadly across the University, or to major components of the University; enhances the university's mission; addresses issues of compliance with laws, regulations, and/or internal standards; promotes operational efficiencies; or reduces institutional risk. For example, the Code of Ethical Conduct, Policy on Appropriate Use of Computer and Network Resources, and Policy on Conflict of Interest and Commitment are all university policies.

A Unit-level Policy is one that applies only to a specific unit, or that is an internal operational policy for a specific division or department. Examples include, but are not limited to, parking

policies specific to the different campuses or properties of the university, or dress or access policies specific to different lab/research areas at the university. No unit of the university may adopt or maintain a Unit-level Policy that is inconsistent with, conflicts with, appears to or otherwise expands the obligations of the university beyond those set forth in official University Policies.

A Procedure sets forth identified steps for implementing a policy.

The Responsible Office/Department is the university office responsible for developing and administering a policy, which includes dissemination of the policy, development of procedures where appropriate, communications and training related to the policy, and timely revisions.

The Policy Template is the standard format that university policies must follow going forward. It includes a short, descriptive title, statement of the purpose and scope of the policy, any applicable definitions and exclusions, the policy enforcement, and contact information for questions or guidance on the policy.

3. **Policy Template**

- Title – A policy should be given a title to reflect its subject matter. The title of the policy should be written in plain language that would be understandable to the uninformed reader, for example: *Policy on Retirement Benefits and Privileges*, and *Policy on Computer Procurement*.
- Purpose and Scope – The purpose section of the policy must contain a brief explanation of the reason why the policy is required and the need it seeks to address. The scope statement should indicate to whom the policy will apply and what conduct or activity it covers. For example, a policy could apply to the university as a whole, or to a specified department, college or administrative unit within the university. A policy could also apply to specific persons, for example, only faculty, or only staff. It could apply to activities on any campus, but not off campus, and it might apply to activities only when undertaken for official university business purposes, not in one’s personal capacity.

“Purpose and Scope” Examples:

Northeastern University is committed to operating within the highest standards of integrity and ethics, and to fostering a culture of compliance with legal and regulatory requirements and university policies in all its activities. Faculty and staff have an obligation to perform their responsibilities in a manner that supports and advances the university’s mission, goals, and ethical standards. This policy applies to all Northeastern University faculty and staff. (Policy on Professional Standards and Business Conduct.)

In keeping with its mission to educate students for a life of fulfillment and accomplishment, and to create and translate knowledge to meet global and societal needs, Northeastern University is committed to the principles of open scholarly exchange of ideas and academic freedom, including broad access to research data and results. This policy applies to research conducted at Northeastern University by faculty, students, staff and visiting researchers. (Policy on Openness in Research)

Northeastern University is committed to providing a safe and secure environment in which to study, research, live, work and visit. Prohibitions on the possession and use of firearms and other dangerous weapons are essential to that goal, and required by law. This policy applies to all faculty, staff, students, and visitors, and to all activities undertaken on any Northeastern campus, or in areas that are leased or occupied for University activities. (Policy on Weapons on Campus)

- Definitions and Terms – Define terms that are used in the policy when their meaning is not commonly understood. Do not define terms that seem relevant, but that do not later appear in the policy.
- Policy Content – This section should contain the actual policy. It should not contain the procedures for implementation of the policy. Follow the guidelines for the drafting of a policy contained in paragraph 4.
- Additional Information – Policies are often supported by statutes, regulations, documented procedures or guidelines, but these are not normally included in the policy itself. If there are materials or documents that support the implementation of the policy, they can be named or linked to in the policy.
- Contact Information – List the office or title, not name of an individual, that can provide more information regarding the policy, with telephone number and/or e-mail address. If multiple contacts are appropriate, provide a brief statement of the circumstances under which each should be used (for example, “for technical assistance, contact X Department”).

4. Suggestions for drafting of a policy

In drafting a policy, follow the guidelines below:

- Use the policy template provided in the Policy on Policies.

- Any policy should be structured, drafted and presented in a way that makes the policy **understandable** and easy to read and interpret.
- The content of a policy should be **concise, to the point, action-orientated**, logical and coherently structured.
- **Use plain language.** A policy that is clear and easy to understand is less likely to result in disputes and also assists those involved in administering and enforcing the policy. The objective should be to produce a policy that is both easily read and understood and legally and practically effective in achieving the desired policy objectives. Avoid jargon, legalese and slang. Before using an acronym, write out the full name the first time, and then indicate the acronym in parenthesis, for example, “Human Resources Management (HRM).”
- Use the active instead of the passive voice, and avoid impersonal constructions. For example, don’t write “*Safety measures shall be considered,*” or “*approval must be obtained before starting the program.*” Instead, make clear who has the responsibility to act or do (or refrain from doing) the conduct or action being described: “*The hiring unit is responsible for verifying employment history,*” instead of, “*Employment history shall be verified before an offer is made.*”
- Indicate whether any matter or action prescribed in the policy is **mandatory or discretionary** by using the words “*must/shall*” or “*may/should*”.
- **Use Gender-neutral language** (“*chairperson*” rather than “*chairman*”).
- **Write in the third person** and use the present tense: “*All members of the university community are required to maintain the confidentiality of business and nonpublic university records and data entrusted to them.*”

If you have any questions, please send an email to policies@neu.edu.