

A Manual for Writing Policy

About this manual

This manual contains information and requirements about how the Department of Enterprise Services (DES) creates and manages its policies.



As used in this manual, the term “policy” broadly means and includes policies, associated standards, procedures and forms.

How to navigate within this manual

Inside the DES Policy Manual are hyperlinks to additional information. Hyperlinks are colored and underlined text or a graphic that you click with your mouse to jump to another document, a location in this document, or a page on insideDES (our internal intranet site) or the Internet (external World Wide Web). This is what a [hyperlink](#) looks like.

To return where you started after following a hyperlink, press the Alt and left arrow keys simultaneously and you will return to the hyperlinked word.

How to use this manual

This manual is divided into two main sections:

- Part 1 is for experienced policy writers or for those who want a quick overview of the DES policy process. Jump straight to [Quick Start](#) to learn more.
- [Part 2](#) contains complete policy process requirements and other information you may find helpful when writing policy.
- Use the [Contents](#) page to quickly find a specific topic area such as checklists and forms.

Questions?

For help with using and applying the DES Policy Manual, contact the agency Policy & Rules Manager by phone at (360) 407-9209 or email at policy@des.wa.gov.



This key symbol marks crucial concepts or requirements that should be fully understood by the reader.



Want to return to where you started after following a hyperlink? Press the Alt key and the left arrow key at the same time.

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PART 1 Quick Start

How do we create or update policies?



DES follows one basic process to create or update [Enterprise](#) or [Administrative](#) policies: We match the process to the complexity and risk of work needed to keep things as simple as possible.

A simple six-step policy development and governance structure is in place to guide policy development and adoption. Be sure to follow the agency's [Policy Principles](#) when developing policy.

This standard process brings visibility, structure, and consistency to agency policy needs.

Writing a New Policy

Here is the core six-step process:

1. Division Assistant Director or Deputy Director informs the Management Team and gains their support to start work. The program policy lead then coordinates development with Policy Manager. Note: In some situations, the Director directly informs the Policy Manager to start work.
2. Program reviews initial draft with Policy Manager or delegate.
3. Program tunes initial draft as needed, gains approval from their Assistant Director, and sends the draft to Policy Manager.
4. Policy Manager coordinates a Management Team discussion when appropriate. Program revises draft if needed and sends to Policy Manager.
5. Policy Manager provides a near final draft for HR. HR informs labor when appropriate.
6. Policy Manager prepares Director's (or delegate) signature package and coordinates rollout with the program and Communications.

Updating a Current Policy

1. Program policy lead consults with Policy Manager to determine if changes significantly change policy content and original intent. If so, follow the new policy process above.
2. Otherwise, program lead makes changes and sends to Policy Manager for review/feedback.
3. Policy Manager approves final draft and updates the [DES Policy Library](#).

Part 2 of this manual contains the complete policy process requirements and other information that you need when writing policy.

No matter how well manuals like this are written, there will always be questions. The **Policy Making Frequently Asked Questions** contains some common questions and their answers.

Part 2

**Policy development requirements and other information you need
to know**

PART 2 Policy requirements and other information you need to know

Policy Framework

Policies come from the Director's statutory authority to manage the agency. DES's policies ensure:

- **Strategic alignment** – Policies help make sure that what we do lines up with DES's mission, goals, and objectives.
- **Integrity** - Clearly written policies help people and groups understand agency values and become responsible for their actions.
- **Openness** – Policies help us better understand and make transparent what we do and why we do it.
- **Fairness and consistency** - Policies ensure all users are treated equally
- **Efficiency** - Laying out rules ahead of time saves time and money.
- **Safety and risk management** - Policies can prevent some problems from occurring at all or from growing.

Policy is put in place through a framework that provides:

- A means for determining the need for policy;
- A consistent, transparent, and inclusive development process;
- An identified authority for approving policy;
- A consistent policy format.

The Director may delegate policy approval authority to others.

Policy Types

 DES divides its policies into two types based on the scope of the policy:

Enterprise policy encompasses activities across the state. They take precedence over our Administrative policies. Enterprise policies may apply to state and local agencies, the general public, or businesses.

Administrative policy sets the requirements for the administrative operations of DES. Administrative policies

 **Enterprise policy may authorize supporting agency Administrative policy. Administrative policy is more restrictive than Enterprise policy and does not conflict with Enterprise policy requirements.**

can be agency wide or limited to activities solely within the internal operations of a Division or program.

What are Policies?

Policies

Policies are high-level management statements that provide direction for decision-making and actions. They are meant to be enduring statements of goals, objectives, beliefs, ethics, controls, and responsibilities.

Policies establish guiding principles, required standards, and/or appropriate procedures that are useful, wise, and beneficial.

 DES Policy is established and reviewed using the following criteria:

- Supports DES's Strategic Framework;
- Affects a substantial number of DES employees or DES communities (tenants, customers, visitors, contractors, facilities, etc.);
- Promotes consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness;
- Helps to mitigate or manage agency risk;
- Derives from the authority of the Director, including specific delegated authority to manage the agency, or comply with federal or state laws, rules, or regulations.

 **Try to avoid merging policy, standards and procedures in a single document.**

Each focuses on different aspects and has a different level of detail. A combined document can make finding information difficult for the reader. And, when it's time to update the document, the process may be needlessly time-consuming and confusing.

If policy is too detailed or lengthy, it can start turning into a procedure - describing the specifics of **how** to do something, not just **what** must be done.

 Policies have consequences. If there is no consequence for violating a policy, not using a required standard, or failing to follow a process; it should be a best practice or suggested process.

Standards

Policies provide general direction; standards establish specific required criteria and measures of comparison. Standards are measurable and describe the path to a desired outcome. There are two basic types of standards:

- 1) A **prescriptive standard** defines exactly what must be achieved with little or no flexibility.

Example: Street crossing signals shall have 100 amp-hour battery back-up.

- 2) A **performance standard** defines a result, but allows total flexibility on how that result is achieved.

Example: Street crossing signals shall have back-up power for a minimum of 12 hours of operation.



Standards typically need to be changed more often than policies because the manual procedures, organizational structures, business processes, and technologies referenced in standards change so rapidly. This is in contrast to policies, which are intended to last for many years.

Procedures and Guidelines or Manuals

Procedures, guidelines or manuals establish specific operational steps or methods that must be followed to achieve a certain objective or result in support of a policy. These describe the steps to follow to efficiently and effectively complete assigned tasks. As noted above, it describes **how** to do something, not just **what** must be done.

Guidelines or manuals may not apply to all agency employees. In some cases, guidelines or manuals may provide more detailed guidance for employees within a specific program or those outside of DES for carrying out agency requirements.

Develop procedures and guidelines or manuals with the user in mind so that it benefits the user. Writing clear procedures and guidelines or manuals helps the user easily identify steps to take and their correct order.

 As used in this manual, the term "policy" broadly means and includes policies, associated standards, procedures and associated forms.

Establishing Policy

All DES policies, standards or procedures are issued under the authority of the DES Director. The Director signs all new policies, standards or procedures *unless* the Director has issued a written delegation of policy authority.

 The Director can immediately establish a policy outside of the standard DES policy process through issuing a policy directive.

Roles and Responsibilities

DES Employees

- May propose to create, change or end a policy.
- Responsible for understanding and following DES policies.

 **DES employees are responsible for understanding and complying with DES policies.**

Director

- Approves all agency policies, standards, procedures and directives. Grants exceptions or exemptions to agency policy. May delegate all or part of the Director's statutory policy authority.

Deputy Director

- Advises and makes recommendations to the Director on policy matters.
- Reviews proposed policies under consideration for Director's approval.

Rules and Policy Manager

- Responsible for oversight of DES's policy program and governance.
- Provides advice and makes recommendations to agency management and staff on policy matters.
- Provides support and guidance throughout the agency policy process.

Policy Owner

- Typically a mid-management employee or higher. Is responsible for keeping the policy current and accurate.
- Administers the policy and its related standards, procedures, and forms.

The Management Team

- Made of Executive Office leadership and Division Assistant Directors.

- Advises the Director on policy matters.
- Reviews proposed policies as needed and serve as a forum to discuss policy matters and agency impacts.

The Basic Policy Processes

Policy Development and Implementation Process:

Determine need

1. Anyone - identifies a possible policy gap, either in an existing policy or a need for a new policy that meets DES's policy criteria.
2. The Policy Owner, with assistance from the Rules and Policy Manager, reviews existing policies to validate the gap or any overlap with existing policies.
3. Get approval. The Policy Owner discusses the request and receives approval from their Division Assistant Director, their Deputy Director or the DES Director.

Prepare a Policy Plan

4. The Policy Owner develops a business needs assessment to:
 - Determine if the purpose and goal of the proposed policy can be accomplished in a more efficient or cost effective way.
 - Determine if the value of the proposed policy is great enough to dedicate the resources needed for policy development *and* management.
 - Make sure that all relevant laws, rules, risks and stakeholders are considered.
5. The Policy Owner reviews the assessment with the Rules and Policy Manager to make sure that all of the information is provided and adjusts the assessment as needed.

Draft the policy

6. The Policy Owner completes an initial policy draft along with any supporting procedures, standards, and forms. This may take some time and will require collaboration with colleagues and/or stakeholders.
7. The Policy Owner and the Rules and Policy Manager review the initial policy draft and receive approval to proceed from the Division Assistant Director.
8. The policy draft is broadly shared when needed for employee, other government entities, or public comment. This is typically done by posting to the DES website, but may include other outreach activities. The Policy Owner and their Division Assistant Director review the comments. The Policy Owner incorporates input into the policy draft as needed.
9. Regarding agency wide or statewide policy - The Policy Owner develops a policy approval package with assistance from the Rules and Policy Manager and submits it with a near final policy draft to the Management Team for review. The Management Team reviews the draft and the Policy Owner incorporates input into the policy draft as needed.
10. The Rules and Policy Manager with HR coordinates informing labor.
11. The Rules and Policy Manager forwards a signature ready draft to the Director or designee for adoption, along with a Request for Policy Approval.
12. Administrative policy is revised as necessary to make sure it is in harmony with Enterprise policy.

Implement the policy

13. Upon Director approval, the Rules and Policy Manager updates DES's policy website.
 14. The Policy Owner identifies the target audiences (including labor) that need to know about the new policy.
 15. The Policy Owner works with the DES Communications Director and decides who to inform and how to inform those that need to know the new policy. If the new policy information requires training, the Policy Owner works with Personnel Services and makes sure that training opportunities and materials are available.
 16. The Policy Owner monitors compliance, measures effectiveness, and evaluates feedback.
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Format and Content of DES Policy

Standard, yet flexible policy and procedure formats ensure consistency from one written policy to another. The format allows some components to be used at the writer's discretion.

Tip – When writing policy, you may find it helpful to have copies of the [DES policy template](#) and the [DES procedure template](#) handy as you read through each of the policy components.

Required Policy Components

- [Purpose Statement](#)
- [Policy Authority](#)
- [Dates and Review Cycle](#)
- [Policy Owner](#)
- [Who Should Know This Policy](#)
- [Policy Statement](#)
- [History](#)



Optional components

- [Table of Contents](#)
- [Exceptions and Exclusions](#)
- [Definitions](#)
- [Related Information](#)
- [Supporting Standards or Procedures](#)
- [Official Language](#)

Purpose Statement - Why are we doing it?

- Legal or regulatory reasons;
- Description of conflict or problem the policy will resolve;
- Recognizes the legitimate interests of all parties;

- Overall benefits.

Who Should Know This Policy

- Those who are required to follow the policy;
- Those who must understand the policy to do their job;
- May sometimes list specific titles of people who are affected.

Exceptions and Exclusions

The process for which exceptions can be requested is also important. If no exceptions are allowed, this must be clearly stated. It should be noted that the conditions under which exceptions are issued should not be described, only the process. Typical examples of exceptions include:

- DES communities (internal or external to DES) that are excluded from the policy.
- Funding sources or job classifications that are excluded from the policy.

Policy Owner



The Policy Owner is the individual or group responsible for writing a policy as well as making sure the policy is current and accurate. Questions of interpretation, changes, or clarifications can then be communicated to the source, reducing the need for a formal amendment or replacement processes.

Policy Authority (Signature Block)



All policies must be signed by the Director, unless the Director has delegated that authority. With the express written consent of the Director, deputy directors with policy authority may re-delegate that authority to an employee as allowed by law.

Dates and Review Cycle

- Each policy has several important dates. All policies must have a set date on which they are adopted (approved) and effective (must be followed start date). Policies also have a sunset or expiration date.
- The review cycle helps keep our policies current. It is important for old policies to be updated, obsolete policies purged, and new requirements included. Policies that are kept current are more likely to be upheld and respected by the intended audience.

Exemptions to policy requirements are rare and must be approved by the Director

A callout box with a light blue background and a white border. It features a small orange key icon pointing to the right. The text inside the box reads: "Exemptions to policy requirements are rare and must be approved by the Director".

Table of Contents

A table of contents is helpful when the policy is lengthy or complex. The policy contents help the reader navigate between the various groups of information by listing the major sections of the policy.

Policy Statement - What are we doing?

The initial statement of a policy is the most important element of the document. It should be brief, clearly worded, and state clear expectations. A policy statement is most effective when it can, on its own, give the reader sufficient information to determine if the policy is applicable in a particular situation and to what or whom it applies.

Policy statements describe:

- The major responsibilities of any person or organization participating in this policy. These may include the reader, DES employees, other state agencies, or persons outside of DES.
- When the policy applies.
- Major conditions or restrictions.

Official Language

- Official Language is the actual language extracted from law, rule, contract, resolution, legal document, etc.
- Whenever a conflict exists between official language and summary language or explanations, the Official Language prevails.

Supporting Standards and Procedures

Standards and procedures are frequently needed to comply with the policy. Standards and procedures should:

- Use an introductory section for complex procedures or standards.
- Clearly identify options.
- Clearly identify cautions or warnings.
- Refer reader to:
 - Related documents.
 - Relevant appendix entries.
 - Relevant special situations.
- Notify the reader if the procedure is time-consuming.



A policy may have more than one supporting standard or procedure.

Definitions

Definitions are the unique terms that, by being defined, would add to the reader's understanding of the basic policy.

- Define unfamiliar or technical terms.
- Define terms with special meanings.
- List terms in alphabetical order.

Related Requirements and Information

This is information that is directly mentioned in the policy, supports the policy or authorizes it - related laws, rules, and DES or other state Enterprise policies.

Many times policies are directly related to other policies. Because changes to one policy may in turn affect other policies, clear references to other relevant policies assist DES in the maintenance of the overall policy structure.

Tip – Supporting information that contains lengthy or complex reference information that would disrupt the flow of other sections is typically placed in an appendix or exhibit to the policy. Supporting information may contain:

- Reference information that applies to a few people.
- Variable information.
- A flow chart of the entire process.
- Documents needed to complete the procedures.
- Documents that provide helpful, relevant information.
- Relevant programs, training courses.
- Frequently asked questions (FAQ). No matter how well some policies are written, there will always be questions. An FAQ lists the most common questions and their answers.

History

The history of a policy lists the changes in chronological order.

- List references to previous versions of this policy.
 - Describes key changes.
 - List any other policies that may be superseded.
 - Lists the original effective date.
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Policy Website and Structure

 DES's policy office maintains a [policy library](#) on the intranet for DES's internal Administrative policies and maintains DES's [Enterprise](#) policies on the [DES website](#).

APPENDIX – Templates & Forms

- [Policy Template](#)
- [Procedure Template](#)
- [FAQ Template](#)
- [Appendix Template](#)
- [Numbering Key for policies and other managed documents](#)
- [Policy Request for Director Approval](#)