



The Value of Employee Handbooks

Employee handbooks are invaluable to organizations of any size. Handbooks are the key management and employee communication tools that outline benefit offerings, performance management and compensation programs, and other work related practices. The most effective handbooks are user-friendly documents that:

- Establish the standards, values and expectations by which the organization operates to ensure optimal productivity;
- Create a set of management practices and standards to ensure consistent application and treatment of employees within and across departments and locations to minimize the occurrence and legal costs associated with cases of unlawful discrimination; and
- Demonstrate the organization's commitment to uphold applicable federal, state and local employment laws and regulations.

Most handbooks are summary versions of the organization's Policies and Procedures Manual, a more comprehensive set of management guidelines. Therefore, most are similarly organized and indexed to ensure consistent application of organizational policies and practices and include content (sections and policies) similar to the information listed below.

- General management policies and practices including but not limited to an explanation of the organization's management principles, values and goals; employment "at will" doctrine (if applicable); nondisclosures and protection of confidential/proprietary information; ethical standards and equipment and materials usage.
- Human resource policies and standards such as the corporate code of conduct; dress code; employee leave programs including employee rights under the Family & Medical Leave Act (if applicable); training and professional development programs, memberships and assistance and performance management and incentive programs.
- Administrative management policies including an explanation of the organization's standard work hours; alternate work hours; timekeeping and attendance requirements and expense reporting processes.
- Safety, security and facilities management policies including workplace safety and security practices; prevention of workplace violence; occupational safety and health considerations and emergency site evacuation procedures.

The most effective employee handbooks are dynamic documents that are regularly revised and updated to reflect the organization's changing workforce, its industry, economic conditions and the legal operating environments. In recent years, employers have experienced a significant number of changes and administrative challenges in federal employment legislation including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the new Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPPA) privacy requirements.

Not to mention, the noticeable increase in employment related court cases as a result of seemingly ordinary activities such as the Virginia court case against an employer based on its employee's involvement in a fatality that is assumed to be a result of her responding to a work related call on her cellular phone while operating a motor vehicle. As a result of this case and similar court cases in other states, many employers are developing policies prohibiting the use of cellular phones for work related purposes while operating a motor vehicle. The VA case provides just one example of why it is essential for organizations to continuously monitor, update and document the standards by which they manage their workforce. Modifying existing or instituting new workplace standards helps avoid or at least minimize the costs of employment related litigation. Therefore, annual revisions and updates become critical to assuring your Handbook continues to serve its primary goals of communicating clear expectations to your workforce and remains compliant with changing federal, state and local employment laws and regulations. Table 1, Federal Labor Laws by Number of Employees, lists the federal legislation applicable to employers of various sizes including those engaged in federal government contracts. In addition, many state employment laws hold organizations accountable to a variety of state-specific regulations and requirements. This ever changing employment law landscape whether at the federal, state or local levels makes it all the more important for you to document the standards by which you wish to manage your workforce to ensure optimal productivity and profitability and to minimize your chances of costly employment related litigation.

HiRe Expectations, Argy, Wiltse & Robinson's human resources and management consulting practice, develops cost effective workforce solutions that improve the productivity and profitability of your workforce and minimize the potential for employment-related litigation. Please contact, Michelle Geddes at mgeddes@HiRe-Expect.com or 703 770 6343 for advice or consultation on developing employee handbooks or other workforce tools. For additional information, visit our website at www.HiRe-Expect.com.

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Table 1
Federal Laws By Number of Employees¹

1-14 Employees	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Civil Rights Act 1964 ▪ Civil Rights Act 1991, Title IVV ▪ Consumer Credit Protection Act ▪ Employee Polygraph Protection Act ▪ Equal Pay Act ▪ Fair Credit Reporting Act ▪ Employee Retirement Income Security Act ▪ Federal Insurance Contributions Act ▪ Fair Labor Standards Act ▪ Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act ▪ Immigration Reform & Control Act ▪ Labor Management Relations Act ▪ National Labor Relations Act ▪ Occupational Safety & Health Act ▪ Uniform Guidelines of Employee Selection Procedures, ▪ Uniformed Services Employment & Reemployment Rights Act
11-14 Employees (Add)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Occupation Safety & Health Act
15-19 Employees (Add)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII ▪ Civil Rights Act of 1991 ▪ Americans with Disabilities Act, Title I
20-49 Employees (Add)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Age Discrimination in Employment Act ▪ Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act
50+ Employees (Add)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family & Medical Leave Act ▪ Federal government contractors are required to file the annual EEO-1 Report with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
100+ Employees (Add)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Worker Adjustment & Retraining Notification Act ▪ Non-federal government contractors are required to file the annual EEO-1 Report with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

Federal Contractors (Add)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Executive Orders 11246, 11375, and 11478▪ Vocational Rehabilitation Act▪ Drug-Free Workplace Act▪ Vietnam-Era Veterans Readjustment Act▪ Davis Bacon Act▪ Copeland Act▪ Walsh-Healy Act▪ Service Contract Act

¹Information used to create Table 1 extracted from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) website.