Quality Procedure Development: A Primer

What is a procedure?

- A written or unwritten expectation of behavior

What do procedures do? Why do we need them?

- Make clear the expectations of conduct
- Ensure decisions are consistent and fair
- Speed decision making – not every issue must be checked with others
- Encourage decisions to be well thought out
- Provide framework for decision making
- Provide a collective memory for the organization
- Provide some protection from lawsuits or other penalties if followed

When do we need to create a procedure?

- When a need is recognized that is likely to arise again
- When a potential issue is foreseen as being inevitable
- When a higher authority issues a procedure or law that your organization needs to interpret for your particular situation

When do we not need to create a procedure?

- When there is a small enough group that it can handle situations as they come and remember the decisions
- When only generally acceptable behavior, ethics, or common sense are expected and all involved agree with what that means
- When other procedures, laws, or other documents already cover the topic
- When there is a temporary or one-time situation that is unlikely to occur again

How should procedures be created?

1. Recognize need
2. Identify and obtain input from potential stakeholders and outside agencies
3. Draft procedure
4. Obtain feedback from stakeholders
5. Revise procedure, if needed
6. Enact procedure with appropriate education and publicity

7. Repeat step 4-6 on a periodic basis as appropriate for the procedure – some need reviewing more often than others

How should procedures NOT be created?

- In a snap reaction by an angry or disinterested person or group
- Without consideration of other people, other procedures, or potential consequences

What needs to be considered when drafting procedures?

- What are the end results desired from the procedure? How can they best be achieved?

  o Does the procedure need to be concise and directed narrowly on one issue, or should it be broader in scope?
  o If specific, are you willing to constantly revise it?
  o If broad, are you willing to constantly interpret it?
- To whom is the procedure directed: employees or patrons? Who will read the procedure?
  o The audience determines the language to use, publicity, etc.
- Who are the other stakeholders? Who will be impacted by this procedure?
- Are there other procedures, laws, contracts, or other authorities that speak to these issues?
- Who will be named in the procedure? Name vs. Title vs. Role
  o Personnel and titles change frequently, so often roles are best: "person responsible for collection development" rather than "the AD for Collection Development"
- Should exceptions to the procedure be allowed? If so, when and who can authorize?
- Will an appeal process be needed? If so, how will that work?
- How, by whom , and when will the procedure be announced and publicized?
  o Is a lag between announcing and implementing dictated by code or desirable?
  o How often will stakeholders be reminded of the procedure? Who will do this?
- Where will the procedure 'live' for quick access? Only online, in a handbook, on signs?
- Who will review the procedure for accuracy? How often will it be reviewed?

What are the characteristics of effective procedures?

- Cover issues over which the organization has the authority to regulate
- Are internally & externally consistent with other procedures
- Cover the probable, not the possible
- Contain a procedure statement that sets forth the overall goal of the procedure and its rationale
  o Helps guide the implementation and interpretation of the procedure
  o Reminds people why the procedure was enacted
- Have the input of stakeholders to cover all dimensions and create 'buy-in'
- Contain an exception clause, including who makes them and in what cases
- State the appeal process clearly, if applicable
- Use language appropriate to the intended audience
- Are well publicized and enacted at an appropriate time
- Are made readily available to reference as needed

- Are evaluated periodically and edited as needed

What are the dangers of procedures?

- Exalted as inerrant, equally applicable to all people at all times even when obvious exceptions should be made or it needs to be updated
- Forgotten about or ignored
- Have exceptions made so many times that they are undermined and useless
- Attempt to handle every possibility, rather than the probabilities
- Use incomprehensible legalese or jargon
- Written and enforced without consideration of stakeholders and potential consequences

Adapted by William Gee in 11/06 from an ECU HR presentation by Aaron Lucier.