

## WRITING GOOD POLICIES/COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

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### What things should good policies include?

The following are recommendations for policies are based on many years of experience.

#### Statement of intent:

this is a short section (1-3 paragraphs) at the beginning of a policy that should explain what this policy is trying to accomplish. It should be written in standard everyday language, as opposed to a more legal sounding section. This could include a short piece of general background for why this policy is being created, if that seems like it would be helpful. Assume that there is a possibility of a difference of opinion about how to interpret a specific point in the policy five years from now. At least half of the community will have joined after this policy was passed. How will they understand what was intended by this policy? That is the audience you should be thinking about when writing the statement of intent. It may seem obvious to everyone in the community now why this policy is being made and what it means, but fewer people will have the knowledge 5 or 10 years from now.

#### Title, date, the author(s)

(and teams, if there are any involved), and a filepath of where the proposal can be found on the network.

- Is your policy temporary? If so, it should have a clear expiry date, or conditions under which it will expire. Does your policy need to be reviewed after a certain period of time? If so, make sure you include this, and make sure that the manager or team that will be doing the review knows about it.
- Which team oversees the policy? Almost every policy should fit within a specific area of the community organisation. Does your policy require specific teams to make decisions when issues come up?

#### Organisation

- A reasonable form of organisation: Some policies outline steps to be taken in a process. It may be helpful to separate those steps into different numbers. If your policy is long, you may want to have different subheadings (like this document). If your policy is *very* long, you may want to consider an outline format. Shorter policies don't necessarily need these things, and a lot of these suggestions are a matter of style, but consider if such organisation will help your policy be better understood. Sometimes writing in a paragraph form will make your policy harder to follow.
- Which area is responsible for proposing amendments as needed to the policy?

#### Consequences of non-compliance

- Sometimes it is important to write consequences for non-compliance with the policy. Sometimes, this is what policies are almost entirely about. For most policies, it won't be necessary to have clear consequences listed, as we first assume everyone is going to follow our community agreements.

#### What things should good policies not include?

- References to specific people, unless that is essential to the policy. For example, instead of referring to the bikes manager by name as the decision maker in an updated bikes policy, simply refer to the "bikes manager" as the decision maker. It is important to clarify what position makes the decisions, as opposed to specific people.
- Anything that would have to be updated often. Policies should be documents that should only have to be amended when the policy itself is being reviewed in the above process. Instead, it is better to explain who is keeping track of what, and how one can get that information. For example, listing the current pets in the Pets Policy will likely mean that list will quickly become out of date, and it is unlikely someone will update that policy every time there is a change in pet population. It may be better to have a policy that makes it clear that the current Pets Manager keeps track of the pet population, with the policy only setting the outline of the pets process.