



Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board



Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board



Why Create Policies?





Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

Why Create Policies?

- More efficient internal operations - policies can spell out how the office should run, the types of communications that should occur among staff and between staff and directors, etc.
- Professional public image – i.e. Public Access to District Files. The public does have access to it. It looks professional to have a written policy that outlines the procedures and can be given to the public so it doesn't look like the District wasn't prepared for the request and is reacting by just making things up as they go along.



Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

Why Create Policies?

- Help with Orientation of new directors & staff - New directors and staff have a lot to learn about what the District is and what the District does. Having established policies that outline required training and related information they can refer to when needed can reduce their confusion and give them a greater understanding of the goals and character of the District
- Time savings - Thinking ahead about how specific situations and issues will be handled eliminates having to discuss and debate how to handle these situations and issues every time they come to the forefront.



Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

Why Create Policies?

- Legal requirements- Some laws require employers to adopt certain policies to guide the actions of their staff and management. Example: Non-Discrimination Policy and Policy against Sexual Harassment in the workplace.
- Contractual requirements
- Reduce the possibility of District being seen as arbitrary, biased or unfair- Having-and following-a policy when dealing with the public and with District employees shows that the District wants to be fair and consistent in how it conducts its business. Of course, in this case, following the Policy is just as important as having it.





Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

Why Create Policies?

- Capture Board decisions- District Boards often make “policy” decisions when they are dealing with an unexpected wrinkle or turn of events in a program.
- If the Board takes the time to analyze the situation and look at the best possible solution, their decision should be recorded. That way, if similar situations occur in the future, the District won't have to search back through months or years of minutes to find out how the District resolved the situation initially.



Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

Isn't Creating Policies Complicated?



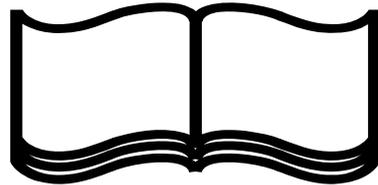
Most of the thought process can be guided by three questions:

- 1. What District situations, issues and programs do we need clear guidance and procedures?**
A: They will usually be the ones that involve (1.) interaction between people-whether it be internally involving those associated within the District or externally when dealing with the Public- (2.) the ability to do something (or not have to do something)- and (3.) money.



Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

Isn't Creating Policies Complicated?



2. **What legal or program requirements exist?**

A: These would be things like Employment Laws, the Ethics Act and guidelines in programs such as the nutrient management program or the nonpoint source pollution abatement program.

3. **What do we intend the outcome or purpose of this policy to be?**

A: Policies should be necessary and should be used to ensure fairness and consistency. They can also be helpful in situations where it is helpful to take out the human factor in a decision. An example might be decisions about who gets to go to requested training or meetings and the type & amount of expenses that will be reimbursed.





Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

What types of policies should Districts consider?

- Personnel- Districts with employees need to establish policies. Districts with District employees can look to the TSSWCB and to other Districts for examples of what's necessary and useful. Many policies are defined by state and federal law– such as overtime compensation.
- Use of vehicles, equipment, electronic communications- These types of policies are becoming more and more necessary as Districts grow. Policies to guide behavior in using District equipment and facilities may reduce the District's degree of fault if lawsuits with these items occur. The disregard of such policies can also establish a legal basis for terminating an employee's employment.
- Staff appearance and conduct- These Policies are important to the District's professional image. Again, the disregard of such policies can establish a legal basis for terminating an employee's employment.



Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

What types of policies should Districts consider?

- Board functioning- Examples of these policies would deal with Ethics, Open Meetings, Open Records, the Board's working relationship with the District employees, and even how the Board sets policy.
- Fiscal matters- These are important to every District. They can cover:
 - how bills are paid
 - how funds are handled
 - what bank accounts the District maintains
 - whether or not staff/directors can use credit cards
- Dealing with the public- These are also very important to every District. Their greatest impact may be felt when a District doesn't have a policy in place when they should. Example: District participation at a Board meeting when a controversial issue is being discussed. How that meeting will be conducted and how much input will be accepted from concerned citizens should be decided on—and made known to the public— before the discussion and debate begins.



Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

Some things to remember about creating policies

- Be proactive, not reactive- Don't wait to be sitting in the middle of a problem situation or issue before you think about how you want to deal with it.
- Policies should be written- Write it down specifically as a policy. Don't rely on people's memories or having to research minutes of past meetings to determine past decisions. Select a format you'll use for all of your policies.
- Policies must be officially adopted at District meetings- Districts are public entities and their decisions must be made in public.





Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

Some things to remember about creating policies

- Create & distribute a Policy Manual- Keep all of your official policies in one place makes them easy to refer to and easy to review. Copies should be provided to all directors and all staff.
- Have copies of policies available when appropriate- An example would be having copies of a Policy on Public Participation at District Meetings available at Board Meetings (and available for everyone attending).
- Have a Policy on Policies (maintenance & review)- Every District should decide how they want to handle policy creation. Not every decision a Board makes creates policy. A suggestion would be to propose a policy one month and then vote on it the next month. This would not only give directors time to think about the decision about to be made, but will also allow time for public input.
- Training on policies- Conducting periodic training on some policies related to law—for example Sexual Harassment in the Workplace—affects the liability of the employer in cases where the policy (or Law) is violated.





Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

Some things to remember about creating policies

- Have policies reviewed for legal accuracy- Be sure to have all policies reviewed to make sure they are not requiring or prohibiting something that would violate the law.
- Again – Coordinating with the TSSWCB about your policies would be a good practice. The TSSWCB has worked closely with legal counsel when creating policies.
- Whether a District Policy is based on a TSSWCB Policy or not - this review is worth the investment.





Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

Manual of Fiscal Operations

- Contains some samples of policies that will give you some ideas of the types of policies you may need in your District and what might be included in them
- Has been distributed to each conservation district office
- A copy of the manual and its sample policies is also available on the State Board website
- <http://www.tsswcb.state.tx.us./swcds/resources>



Texas State
Soil & Water
Conservation
Board

District Policies

- Introduction & basic information about policies
- Sample policies
- Policies on the Internet for easy review
- ** Reminder - Have policies reviewed for legal accuracy

