



# **Tompkins County Government Administrative Policy Manual**

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Updates**

*Tompkins County Administration and the Government Operations (GO) Committee has initiated a plan to revise the Tompkins County Administrative Policy Manual to reflect current County practices. Offered here is a brief FAQ which answers the most common questions County staff have about this important effort to make our Administrative Policy Manual an up-to-date functional management and reference tool.*

### **1. Why is there the need for a comprehensive Administrative Policy Manual update?**

Previously, there was no coordinated approach to updating sections of the [Administrative Policy Manual](#) or stated guidelines on how this should be done. The need for a coordinated approach is critical because the information contained in the Manual is used to support all departments and administrative units of the County. As of 2019, the Manual consists of eleven (11) core sections to include ninety-six (96) policies. The majority of the recorded policies (36%) originated more than fifteen (15) years ago. Roughly 73% of the policies have been revised at least once; however, revision dates range from 1988 to 2019, which is a significant span of thirty-one (31) years.

Inconsistencies in our policies need to be identified and resolved. Policies and procedures that are inaccurate or outdated jeopardize the overall quality of our operations. Because we rely on our policies and procedures for guiding our management, financial, and administrative decisions and actions, it is important that we have a plan and a process in place for routinely ensuring the accuracy and currency of the County's Administrative Policy Manual.

### **2. I just recently became aware of this. When did this update effort start and how was it communicated?**

The original efforts to start the Administrative Policy Manual updates were discussed back in 2007 when the Government Operations (GO) Committee adopted the goal to "administer the development of a plan, including guidelines and process, for routine review and/or updates to the County Administrative Policy Manual." The plan was approved and initiated in January 2008. However, the process never achieved the momentum necessary to implement action.

Over time, the importance of the update effort has been communicated in a number of ways, including presentations and routine updates at monthly department head meetings; communications from County Administration and routine report-outs to the Government Operations Committee. With a new perspective and positive momentum, County Administration now believes the policy and procedure revision goal is attainable with the cooperation of county departments and leadership.

### **3. How many policies and procedures are slated to be updated and in what timeframe?**

Currently all policies are scheduled to be reviewed prioritizing by date of last review. To date, fifty-eight (58) policies and/or procedures have been identified for immediate need for updating based on the following criteria:

- a.) no review or update made since the "Effective Date";
- b.) no review or update made within the past 15 years of the "Modified Date" date; or
- c.) a policy is changed because of labor contract negotiations, Federal, State, or Local laws.

It is anticipated that the Responsible Departments will proceed with the necessary content revisions, working throughout 2019-2021, with the tentative goal of having all updates completed and approved by the GO Committee and Legislature as of the end of 2021.

#### **4. Will all Departments be affected by the update exercise?**

Based on the criteria used to determine those policies and procedures in most need of revision, only seven (7) departments are involved directly: Clerk of the Legislature, County Clerk, County Administration, Facilities/Planning, Finance, Human Resources, and Information Technology Services. However, depending on the content that needs to be updated, these departments may need to reach out to other departments for guidance and feedback. So even though you may not be called upon to help prepare revised content, you may be called upon to review new content and document your feedback.

#### **5. If my department is a designated "Responsible Department" with a list of policies and procedures to be revised, what's the next step?**

County Administration will reach out to Responsible Departments as the policies and/or procedures they are responsible for come up for review by Administration. However, departments are welcome at any time to start a review of their policies prior to being contacted by Administration.

The guidance you need on how to modify the Administrative Policy Manual can be found in the recently updated [Administrative Policy 01-04](#).

This policy indicates the steps to take to establish new or modify existing policy and procedures. It also includes relevant definitions, as well as links to the forms you will use to create or modify policy and procedures. If you have questions regarding the process, please contact the *County Compliance Officer or County Compliance Program Coordinator at (607) 274-5551*.

#### **6. I don't know where to begin. How do I get help?**

If you have questions or need guidance, don't hesitate to call the *County Compliance Officer or County Compliance Program Coordinator at (607) 274-5551*. We will be happy to schedule a time to discuss this initiative with you and other members of your staff.

#### **7. How do I know if the policy I am reviewing actually needs to be a policy or if it should be a procedure?**

As defined in [Policy 01-04](#) (see above), a policy is "a Legislative statement of intention to guide political, management, financial, or administrative decisions and achieve rational outcome(s)." A procedure is defined as "a prescribed set of steps, actions, or activities generally needed to obtain consistent results."

A policy reflects a formal position taken by a legislative body, such as a resolution of the County Legislature or a state or local law. A procedure reflects activities dictated by sound administrative practice, but not based on legislative intent.

## **8. How many references do I need?**

Since a policy reflects a statement of legislative intent, in the case of a policy, at least one reference should be included. Multiple references should be cited if the policy arises from more than one legislative basis (for example, from both State and Local law.) You should cite as many references as apply.

## **9. What happens if the policy is just to follow State, Local or Civil Service law, how in-depth do I have to go?**

You should include information in sufficient depth to provide the reader an overview of the policy's general intent and must clearly state where the policy can be found, including any process steps related to the policy that are not listed elsewhere.

## **10. What if I don't have the time to revise the content of the policy or procedure but I do have time to reformat the existing language according to the new template, is that okay?**

The intent of this update effort is to have all content reviewed for accuracy and to ensure that the written policy or procedure reflects current practice. If any of the content of the old policy or procedure is incorrect, then the content must be updated. Also, if the current content does not mirror what we do or, conversely, is not stated clearly and with sufficient detail to guide and ensure good practice, then the content must be updated. If the content does not need updating, then it is expected that the policy or procedure be reformatted according to the new [Administrative Manual Template](#) and sent to County Administration with a note explaining why a content change was not needed at this time.

## **11. Given all of my other responsibilities, not to mention the unforeseen "priorities" that come my way, I don't have time to read through a bunch of policies. Is this really a necessity?**

Yes, it is necessary because many of the recorded policies (36%) originated more than fifteen (15) years ago, indicating that much of the information is over thirty (30) years old. It is recognized that this is one of those tasks that is easy to put off for more pressing needs; however, policies and procedures that are inaccurate or outdated jeopardize the overall quality of our operations. We hope you will agree that now is the time to contribute to making our Administrative Policy Manual an up-to-date, functional management and reference tool.