



Refreshing Your Employee Handbook: Best Practices for Policies, Structure, and More

October 23, 2025

Agenda

1

Updates and
Modern Leave
Policies

2

Handbook
Structure &
Best Practices

3

Beyond the
Handbook: Other
Maintenance Tips

A neglected handbook is a risky move

- Only 25% of companies review their handbook more than once per year
 - There were over 300 individual changes to the law in 2024 alone
- 1 in 5 teams said they couldn't remember the last time they updated their handbook or agreements
 - Successful claims against employers for compliance-related infractions cost an average of \$160,000 per case

2025 Key Handbook Updates

1

Captive Audience Meetings

Alaska

2

School Activities Leave

Indiana

3

Military Leave

Illinois

4

Protected Characteristics

Federal, Connecticut, Iowa, Washington, Elkins County (WV)

5

Sick Leave

Alaska, California, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, Washington

6

Emergency Services Leave

Montana

7

Lactation Accommodation

New Hampshire

8

Family and Medical Leave

Vermont

9

Pay Transparency

Massachusetts, New Jersey, Cleveland (OH), Vermont

When it comes to combining policies, you have **options**

Paid Time Off

- Combines different types of leave into a single bucket
- Simplifies leave management and tracking
- You must allow employees to take leave for all legally-required reasons provided for under each type of leave that your PTO policy incorporates

Same Leave Policies

- One-size-fits-all approach that applies the strictest state law to all employees
- Easier to maintain, but it can result in giving more leave than is necessary
- Typically shorter and easier for employees to read and understand than state-specific policies

Unlimited/Flexible Leave

- Like PTO, combines types of leave into a single bucket
- No cap on leave amounts
- Can *possibly* help avoid leave payout upon separation
- Leave requests can be denied but must be allowed for legally-required reasons

Using PTO to meet sick leave requirements

Amount

Accrual rate or frontloaded amount must be at least as generous as sick leave law requires

Carryover

Allow employees to carry over unused leave if the law requires it

Payout

Follow PTO rules, which have more payout requirements than sick leave laws

Replacing sick leave with PTO: Amounts

Accrual

- Employees earn leave at a certain rate per work hour
- Employees can only use leave after they have earned it

Frontloading

- Employees get a lump sum of leave at the beginning of the year
- This amount may need to be added to if leave is uncapped



Replacing sick leave with PTO: Carryover

Accrual

- Employees earn leave at a certain rate per work hour
- Commonly, that's 1 hour of leave per 30 hours worked
- Employees can only use leave after they have earned it

Frontloading

- Employees get a lump sum of leave at the beginning of the year
- Commonly, that's 40 hours
- This amount may need to be added to if leave is uncapped
- Leave is available immediately



Replacing sick leave with PTO: Payout

Accrual

- Employees only need to be paid out for the hours they have earned

Frontloading

- Employees must be paid for all their unused leave



Unlimited/Flexible PTO: a way to avoid tracking accrual, caps, carryover, and payout

- Must be truly unlimited
- Be careful denying leave under an unlimited policy
- Make clear that the policy can be used for vacation and sick leave
- Consider exceptions for long-term medical leaves of absence or parental leave



If you want your handbook to be a resource for your employees, you need to make it:

- Easy for employees to access
- Easy for employees to navigate
- Easy for employees to read and understand
- Set expectations and maintain culture
- Complaint with the law

If you want your handbook to establish employee expectations and maintain culture , you may need to include more than just required policies.

Consider including:

- Your mission statement
- Your values
- Policies that reflect those values

You may want to consider policies such as:

- Code of conduct
- Social media
- Outside employment
- Pets in the workplace
- Employee dating
- Dress Code

Do you want your employee handbook to help you comply with federal, state, and local employment laws?

If so, you need to know:

- How many employees you have
- Where each of your employees work
- What policies are required for each of those locations

Which state's laws govern your employment relationships?

Lawyer answer: It depends.

General rule: The law of the state where the employee works.

Follow ups: What if an employee lives in one state and works in another?

What if an employee works in multiple states?



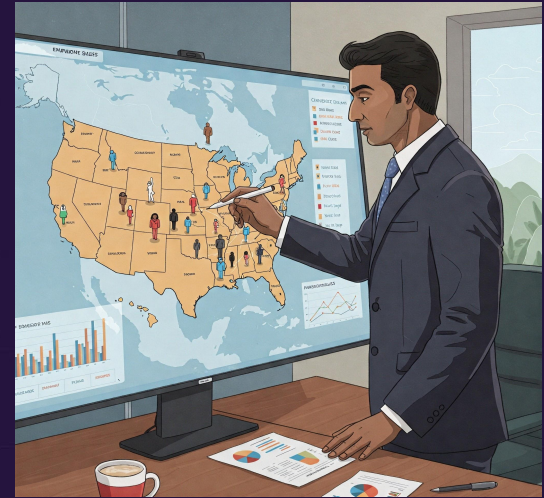
“Which employees do I count?”

Lawyer answer: It depends.

Some laws clearly define which employees to count—many laws don’t provide a definition.

Examples:

- Worldwide
- In the US
- In the State/Locality
- At a worksite
- Eligible/Covered Employees
- Full-time Employees



Different ways to structure an employee handbook

All-in-one

All of your policies for all of the states where you have employees in one handbook.

Core + Addenda

Core policies in main handbook with state differences in addenda.

Same Leave

Core policies set to comply with all of the states where you have employees.

Separate Handbooks

Separate handbook for each state where you have employees.

Different ways to structure an employee handbook, continued

All-in-one

Pros

- Easy to navigate and maintain

Cons

- Can get long if you have employees in multiple states
- Applies different rules to employees in different states, which can be administratively complex

Core + Addenda

Pros

- Allows for a shorter core handbook when employers have employees in lots of states
- Relatively easy to update when hiring an employee in a new state

Cons

- Employees may have to flip between core handbook and addenda and can compare benefits

Same Leave

Pros

- Can help keep handbook short and easy to maintain
- Treats employees in different states uniformly

Cons

- Likely requires giving some employees more benefits than they are entitled to under state law

Separate Handbooks

Pros

- Handbooks can be shorter and easier for employees to navigate
- Employees can't compare benefits across states

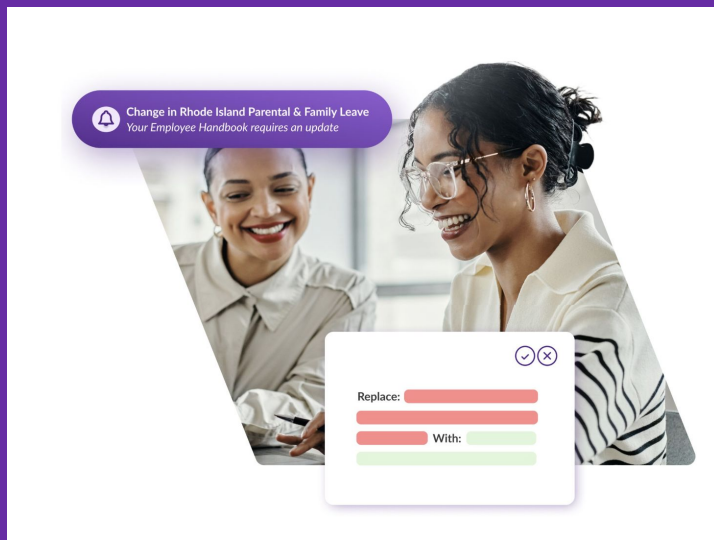
Cons

- It can be a larger administrative burden to maintain multiple handbooks

SixFifty Employee Handbook

Integrated State Policies - Example		Integrated State Policies - Example	
Internal Pay Transparency Policy Time Off Sick Leave Arizona Paid Sick Leave Colorado Paid Sick Leave Colorado Supplemental Paid Sick Leave... Massachusetts Sick Leave General Sick Leave Family and Medical Leave Federal Family and Medical Leave Act... Eligibility Eligible Reasons and Amount of Leave Intermittent Leave Calculating Leave Notice of Leave Certification of Leave Leave Is Unpaid Benefits During Leave Reinstatement Other Employment Non-Discrimination Colorado Paid Family and Medical Lea... Hawaii Unpaid Family Leave Massachusetts Unpaid Family and Me... Massachusetts Paid Family and Medic... Parental and Pregnancy Leave Hawaii Pregnancy Leave		Time Off This section explains when employees can take time off work. Sick Leave Arizona Paid Sick Leave Employees in Arizona accrue paid sick leave at a rate of one hour for every 30 hours worked, up to a total of 40 hours per year. Employees may use up to 40 hours per year of paid sick leave for the following reasons: • Mental or physical illness, injury, or health condition of the employee or their family member, including for medical diagnosis, care, or treatment, or preventative care; • The employee's place of business has been closed by order of a public official due to a public health emergency or an employee needs to care for a child whose school or place of care has been closed by order of a public official due to a public health emergency, or care for oneself or a family member when it has been determined by the health authorities having jurisdiction or by a health care provider that the employee's or family member's presence in the community may jeopardize the health of others because of his or her exposure to a communicable disease, whether or not the employee or family member has actually contracted the communicable disease; • If the employee, or their family member, are a victim of domestic violence, sexual violence, abuse, or stalking, time off to obtain: ◦ Medical attention needed to recover from physical or psychological injury or disability caused by domestic violence, sexual violence, abuse or stalking; ◦ Services from a domestic violence or sexual violence program or victim services organization; ◦ Psychological or other counseling; ◦ Relocation or taking steps to secure an existing home due to the domestic violence, sexual violence, abuse or stalking; or ◦ Legal services, including preparing for or participating in any civil or criminal legal proceeding related to or resulting from the domestic violence, sexual violence, abuse or stalking; or • Other reasons provided under applicable law. Under this policy, "family member" means, regardless of age, a biological, adopted or foster child, stepchild or legal ward, a child of a domestic partner, a child to whom an employee stands in loco parentis, or an individual to whom the employee stood in loco parentis when the	
Hawaii Pregnancy Leave Massachusetts Parental Leave Bereavement Leave Colorado Bereavement Leave Massachusetts Bereavement Lea... General Bereavement Leave Organ, Bone Marrow, and Blood Dono... Hawaii Organ, Bone Marrow, or Perip... General Medical Donation Leave Domestic Violence Leave Colorado Domestic Violence, Sexual A... Hawaii Domestic Violence and Sexual... Massachusetts Domestic Violence Lea... General Domestic Violence Leave Crime Victim Leave Alabama Crime Victim Leave Arizona Crime Victim Leave Colorado Crime Victim Leave Mississippi Crime Victim Leave General Crime Victim Leave Military Service Leave General Applicability Employee Eligibility Leave Entitlements Military Family Leave Procedure Benefits Reinstatement		Hawaii Pregnancy Leave Hawaii employees may take unpaid time off for a reasonable period due to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. A reasonable period will be determined by the employee's physician, with regard to their physical condition and the job requirements. Dunder-Mifflin may request a doctor's certificate estimating the length of leave and the estimated commencement and termination dates of leave required. Upon returning from leave, employees will be reinstated to their original job or to a position of comparable status and pay, without loss of accumulated service credits and privileges. Dunder-Mifflin may request, prior to the employee's return, a medical certificate from their physician attesting to the employee's physical condition and approving them to return to work. Massachusetts Parental Leave <i>This policy applies only when Dunder-Mifflin has six or more employees.</i> For employees who have completed the Group's initial probationary period (not to exceed three months) or, if not subject to any such probationary period, they have been employed full-time by Dunder-Mifflin for three consecutive months, Dunder-Mifflin provides Massachusetts employees with up to eight weeks of unpaid time off for giving birth or for the placement of a child under 18 (or under 23 if the child is mentally or physically disabled) for adoption. Parental leave will run concurrently with any other leave an employee is eligible for—like FMLA (if applicable) or Massachusetts Paid Family and Medical Leave—to the extent not prohibited by law. Employees may use any available paid leave while on parental leave, in which case paid leave and leave under this policy will run at the same time. Employees must provide at least two weeks' notice of a request for leave, which should include the dates the employee expects to begin and return from leave. If two weeks' notice is not possible for reasons beyond the employee's control, they should provide as much advance notice as possible. Employees suffering from a pregnancy-related disability who require reasonable accommodation (which may include leave) should contact Hec at hec@sixfifty.com to discuss a reasonable accommodation. Employees may be required to submit medical certification of their disability. Employees on parental leave are still eligible to receive vacation time, sick leave, bonuses, advancement, seniority, length of service credit, benefits, and plans or programs for which they were eligible prior to the leave. However, the leave will not be included in the computation of the benefits, rights, and advantages. The Group will not pay for the cost of any benefits, plans, or programs during the parental leave unless Dunder-Mifflin provides it to all employees who are on a leave of absence. Employees' jobs will be held for them in accordance with applicable law while they are on leave under this policy. Upon returning from leave, employees will be restored to their same or like position with the same status, pay, seniority, and leave they had prior to the leave. If an employee is on pregnancy-related disability leave, they must submit a doctor's certification stating that they are medically able to return to their normal duties. An employee's continued absence from work beyond the disability leave period (as determined by the employee's physician) and exhaustion of all other available leave may be deemed a	

SixFifty lets you put handbook updates on easy mode.



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Tips for Drafting Effective Policies

- Use common words that are easy to understand.
 - Avoid legal terms and unnecessarily complicated language.
- Keep your sentences short and simple.
 - Make sure that it's easy to identify the subject and verb of each sentence.
 - Break long sentences into multiple short sentences.
- Avoid unnecessary repetition.
- Organize your policies in ways that help people find answers to their questions.



Example of Policy Formatting

- At SixFifty, our new employee handbook engine generates policies in a question and answer format.
- The format is designed to make it easy for readers to find answers to their questions.
- We use similar questions across similar policies.

Paid Time Off

Ryan's Rhubarb believes that taking time away from work is essential to staying healthy, happy, and productive. This policy is designed to give employees the flexibility to take the time they need—whether it's for rest, travel, personal matters, family commitments, or just to recharge. We trust employees to use leave in a way that works best for them and their team, and we encourage employees to plan ahead so they can fully enjoy their time away.

Taking care of oneself outside of work helps employees bring their best self to work—and we're committed to supporting that balance.

Who can take this leave?

all employees are eligible to accrue leave under this policy.

How much leave do employees get?

Eligible employees accrue 1 hour of paid time off for every hours worked. Employees can use any available paid time off.

Will unused leave be carried over to the next year?

Employees can carry over all unused paid time off to the next year.

Will unused leave be paid out at the time of separation?

Unused paid time off will be paid out at the time of separation.

When do employees need to provide notice?

Employees should give their supervisor at least 30 days' advance notice before they take paid time off. Approval of leave requests is based on the Company's needs and other employees' requests for paid time off and leave of absence. All requests must be approved in writing by the employee's supervisor.

How soon after starting work can employees use this leave?

Employees can start taking paid time off 1 month after starting work, subject to the employee's work schedule and the needs of the Company.

Updating Your Employee Handbook

- How often do you need to update your employee handbook?
- The lawyer's answer to every question: It depends!
- **Best practice:** Review your employee handbook every month for possible updates.
 - Consider changes to laws, your organization's footprint, and your employee count.
 - You may not need to make changes every month.
 - A little time each month can save you a lot of time down the road.

Research					Calendar View	Ask AI	Interactive Maps
Jurisdiction	Topic	Subtopic	Notice Date	Effective Date			
Minnesota	Leave	Family and Medical Leave - Paid	9/24/25	11/1/25			
Minnesota's paid family and medical leave program will take effect January 1, 2026, but employers must start providing certain notices to employees by November 1, 2025. The state has released helpful information and a FAQ page for employers in advance of the program...							
Minnesota	Leave	Family and Medical Leave - Paid	10/20/25	11/1/25			
We previously notified you of updates to Minnesota's Paid Family and Medical Leave law. This is a reminder that employers are responsible for providing notices of the program to their employees. By November 1, 2025, employers must post up a poster that informs empl...							
Massachusetts	Recruitment	Pay Transparency	10/21/25	10/29/25			
As we previously reported, Massachusetts' new wage transparency requirements take effect for employers with 25 or more employees in the state on October 29, 2025. These employers must provide wage ranges to applicants on all job postings, to employees who are o...							
Massachusetts	Recruitment	Pay Transparency	1/31/25	10/29/25			
Last year, Massachusetts Governor Healy signed Bill H.4890, implementing new wage transparency requirements, which take effect on different dates depending on employer size. Beginning February 1, 2025, employers with 100 or more employees in Massachusetts m...							
Massachusetts	Recruitment	Pay Transparency	9/24/25	10/29/25			
As we previously reported, Massachusetts' new wage transparency requirements take effect for employers with 25 or more employees in the state on October 29, 2025. These employers must provide wage ranges to applicants on all job postings, to employees who are o...							
Ohio, Cleveland	Wage and Hour	Pay Transparency	6/2/25	10/27/25			
On May 9, 2025, the Cleveland City Council published the City Record containing updates to the City code. Under Ordinance No. 104.2025, employers with 15 or more employees in Cleveland must include the pay range for open positions in all job postings. Employers at...							
Ohio, Cleveland	Recruitment	Pay Transparency	9/22/25	10/27/25			
We previously updated you on Cleveland's new pay transparency law. This is a reminder that the law takes effect October 27, 2025.							
West Virginia, Elkins	Equal Employment Opportunity	Protected Characteristics	10/22/25	10/16/25			
On October 16, 2025, the Elkins City Council passed an ordinance to prohibit discrimination because of a person's real or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, marital status, familial status, or veteran status. ...							
California	Leave	Sick Leave	10/7/25	10/7/25			
On October 1, 2025 the California Governor signed Assembly Bill No. 456 which, effective immediately, expanded California's state-wide sick leave to be usable for the same purposes as the state's domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking leave law. The new use is...							

Signatures and Acknowledgements

- When do you need to send your employee handbook to employees for signature or acknowledgement?
- An Employee Handbook **is not** a contract.
- Different approaches:
 - Send out for acknowledgement every time there is a significant change
 - Make employees aware of changes as they occur and send out for acknowledgment once a year
 - Make employee aware of changes as they occur but only get acknowledgments when employees start



Thanks for joining!

What questions do you have?

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