



# Employee Handbooks: Modernizing Your Policies & Simplifying Compliance

*January 22, 2026*

# “What do you want your employee handbook to accomplish?”

Here are some common answers:

- “We want a tool for creating and maintaining our organization’s culture and values.”
- “We want a way to establish expectations for our employees.”
- “We want an effective resource for our employees.”
- “We want to ensure we’re complying with federal, state, and local employment laws.”

# Agenda

**1**

Handbooks and  
Company Culture

**2**

Handbook as a  
Resource for  
Employees

**3**

Handbook as a  
Compliance Tool

# Employee Handbook: Tools for Maintaining Culture and Setting Employee Expectations

- Mission Statement
- Statement of Values
- Content of Required Policies
- Choice of Optional Policies
- Employee Handbook Format

# What a Mission Statement & Statement of Values Might Look Like

## **Mission Statement**

Our mission is to make the law more accessible for organizations and individuals. We are a force for positive change in our industry and our communities, dedicated to expanding inclusiveness and access to justice.

## **Values**

SixFifty's values fall into three categories: (1) values to our customers, (2) values to our coworkers, and (3) values to ourselves.

### **Values to our customers**

*Be empathetic:* We need to understand our customers: what they consider success, what they consider failure, what worries them, and what excites them. Our goal is to help our customers succeed. To do that, we need to put ourselves in their shoes and see the world from their perspective.

*Be invested:* We need to care about our customers' problems as if they were our own. When a new law passes that burdens businesses, we should treat those issues as our own. Our job is to make the law easier to navigate to relieve people of stress and strain.

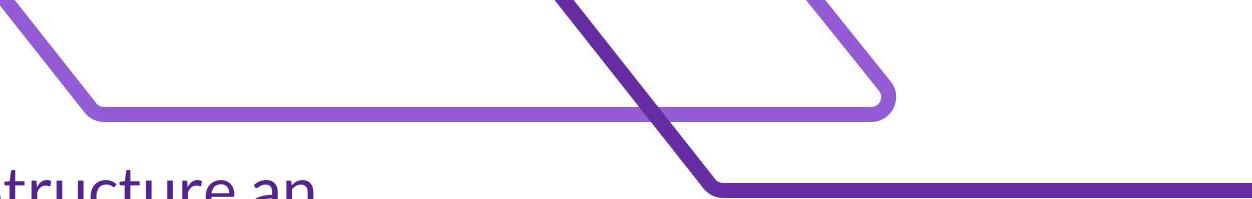
*Be a doer:* When a problem arises in the law, we don't wait for others to solve it. We want to be the first responders. We need to move fast and efficiently. In a time of need, it's better to move quickly but imperfectly than to not move at all.

# Setting Expectations and Maintaining Culture Through Optional Policies

You may want to consider policies such as:

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





# 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.

## Same Leave

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

## Core + Addenda

Core policies in main handbook with state differences in addenda.

## Separate Handbooks

Separate handbook for each state where you have employees.

# Different Ways to Structure an Employee Handbook

All-in-one	Core + Addenda	Same Leave	Separate Handbooks
<p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Easy to navigate and maintain</li></ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can get long if you have employees in multiple states</li><li>• Applies different rules to employees in different states, which can be administratively complex</li></ul>	<p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allows for a shorter core handbook when employers have employees in lots of states</li><li>• Relatively easy to update when hiring an employee in a new state</li></ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Employees may have to flip between core handbook and addenda and can compare benefits</li></ul>	<p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can help keep handbook short and easy to maintain</li><li>• Treats employees in different states uniformly</li></ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Likely requires giving some employees more benefits than they are entitled to under state law</li></ul>	<p><b>Pros</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Handbooks can be shorter and easier for employees to navigate</li><li>• Employees can't compare benefits across states</li></ul> <p><b>Cons</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• It can be a larger administrative burden to maintain multiple handbooks</li></ul>

# Poll question:

How is your employee handbook formatted?



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

- Compliant with the law
- Setting expectations and maintaining culture
- Easy for employees to read and understand
- Easy for employees to navigate
- Easy for employees to access

# Requirements for Handbooks

**Handbooks aren't required, but if you choose to have one, it must meet certain requirements**

- **South Carolina:** Handbooks must have an all uppercase and underline disclaimer and signed acknowledgment on the first page saying that the handbook is not a contract
- **Colorado:** Annual COMPS Order must be included in handbook and must also be acknowledged if your handbook requires an acknowledgement
- **Delaware & New York:** Handbooks must include a notice and acknowledgment of electronic monitoring
- **Michigan, Oklahoma, and Wyoming:** Require a Vacation/PTO forfeiture notice for you policy to be effective in some scenarios (if leave isn't rolled over or paid out at separation)
- **FMLA, Leave Policies, Accommodations Policies, more:** Policies required by federal or state law to be included in your handbook

# Optional Policies

## SixFifty Optional Policies

- Affinity Group Policy
- Anti-Bribery and Anti-Corruption Policy
- Arbitration Policy
- At-Will Employment Policy
- Background Check Policy
- COBRA Policy
- Cell Phone Policy
- Code of Conduct Policy
- Business Expense Policy
- Company Property Policy
- Confidentiality and Trade Secrets Policy
- Desk Hoteling Policy
- Direct Deposit Policy
- Dress Code Policy
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse Policy
- Electronic Devices While Driving Policy
- Employee Benefits Policy
- Employee Classification Policy
- Employee Dating Policy
- Employee References Policy
- Employment of Relatives Policy
- Exit Interview Policy
- Gifts Policy
- Health and Safety Policy
- Home Office Reimbursement Policy
- Job Duties Policy
- Key or Access Card Policy
- Holidays
- Cannabis Policy
- Off-Duty Use of Facilities
- Outside Employment Policy
- Overtime Policy
- Paid Time Off
- Payment of Wages Policy
- Payroll Deductions Policy
- Performance Review Policy
- Personnel Files Policy
- Pets in the Workplace Policy
- Progressive Discipline Policy
- Public Relations Policy
- Punctuality and Attendance Policy
- Record Retention Policy
- Remote Working Policy
- Salary Pay Policy
- Smoking Policy
- Social Media Policy
- Solicitation and Distribution of Literature Policy
- Technology Systems Policy
- Temporary Relocation Policy
- Timekeeping Policy
- Video Conferencing Policy
- Weapons in the Workplace
- Workers' Compensation Policy
- Workplace Violence Policy
- Workplace Visitor Policy
- Workweek and Work Schedules Policy

- Set expectations and maintain culture by selecting which optional policies you value
- Countless policies to pick from
- Find the right balance of information and usability

# Policies as How-to-Guides

Your policies can serve as user manuals for things like how to:

- Request leave
- Report a tech problem
- Update personal information
- Report work-related safety issues
- Report discrimination or harassment
- Request reimbursement

# Create a Handbook That your Employees Can Actually Understand

## Language

- Simple, easy-to-understand language
- Avoid legalese
- Avoid repetition
- What languages do your employees speak?

## Tone

- May be different for different employers (bank with 400 employees vs. tech startup with 6 employees)
- Formal vs. casual
- Employee vs. employer-friendly

## Organization

- Make it easy for employees to find their way around the handbook
- TOC with page numbers or clickable links
- Descriptive sections (leave, employee conduct, workplace rules, fair employment practices, wages, scheduling)

# Handbook Fail: Too Simple

- Easy to draft but difficult to manage
- Requires extra effort to answer employee questions
- Provides flexibility which can lead to inconsistent, unfair, or discriminatory enforcement

## **Reimbursement Policy**

Employees can be reimbursed for business expenses

# Handbook Fail: Too “Lawyer Style”

## **Reimbursement Policy**

Pursuant to the stipulations hereinabove mentioned, any and all personnel seeking the indemnification of pecuniary outlays incurred during the execution of designated professional obligations must first ensure that such expenditures have been pre-authorized via the execution of Form 11-B(2), notwithstanding any prior verbal manifestations to the contrary. Said documentation must be submitted in triplicate to the Office of Fiscal Oversight no later than the third business day following the conclusion of the fiscal quarter in which the liability was originally manifested, provided that the expenditure does not fall under the exclusionary categories as defined in Appendix G, Paragraph 4. Failure to provide original, non-digitized, chronological substantiation of the transaction—specifically including but not limited to itemized receipts displaying the merchant’s unique tax identification number—shall constitute a waiver of the employee’s right to seek remittance. Furthermore, the Company reserves the unilateral and non-negotiable prerogative to pro-rate, defer, or nullify any claim for reimbursement if the aggregate total of the department’s discretionary budget is deemed to be in a state of precarious fluctuation as determined by the Chief Financial Officer’s quarterly assessment of liquid assets. No exceptions to these requirements shall be entertained, and non-compliance will result in the immediate forfeiture of the claim in perpetuity.

# Want an Easy to Navigate Handbook? Try a Q&A Policy Format

- SixFifty's new employee handbook engine generates policies in a question and answer format
- Breaks up complicated policies
- Makes it easy for readers to find answers to their questions
- Using similar headings between policies makes the entire handbook easier to read

## **Paid Time Off**

Adam's Apples 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?**

Employees who have worked at the company for 6 months 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 30 hours worked, up to a total of 40 per year. 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, up to a total cap of 60 hours (the "Total Cap").

### **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 have 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 Business'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 Business.



## Have a Handbook That Your Employees Can Easily Find

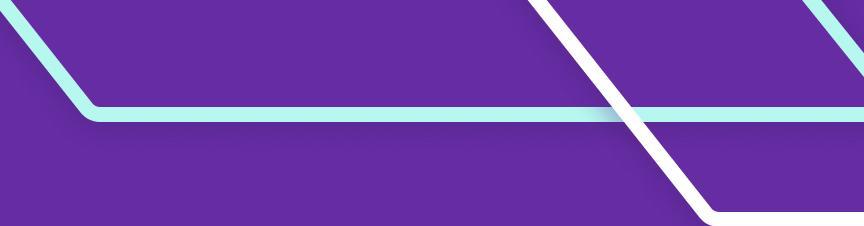
- It is a best practice to provide new employees with a copy
- Physically print it out for in-person employees
- Make the file accessible on your company intranet or work messaging platform
- Host your docs online with integrated acknowledgments and updates (SixFifty Live Docs)

# A Neglected Handbook is a Risky Move

- Only 25% of companies review their handbook more than once per year
  - There were over 120 legal updates with a January 1, 2026 effective date alone
  - Consider smaller updates, more often—an automated handbook tool helps
- 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

# 2026 Key Handbook Updates

1	Meal and Rest Breaks	Minnesota
2	Domestic Violence Leave	California, Washington
3	Military Leave	New Hampshire
4	Protected Characteristics	Illinois
5	Sick Leave	Connecticut, Oregon, Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh), Washington
6	Workplace Safety	Illinois, Washington
7	Lactation Accommodation	Illinois
8	Family and Medical Leave	Colorado, Delaware, Federal, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Washington
9	Organ, Bone Marrow, Blood Donation	Illinois, Rhode Island
10	Parental Leave	New Hampshire



## 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

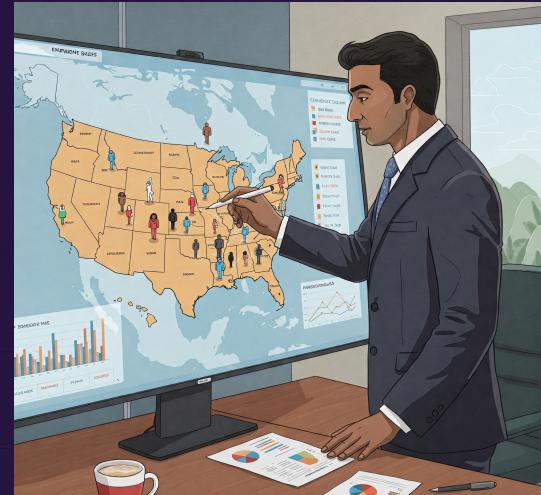
# “Which employees do I count?”

**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



# “Which state's laws govern my 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?

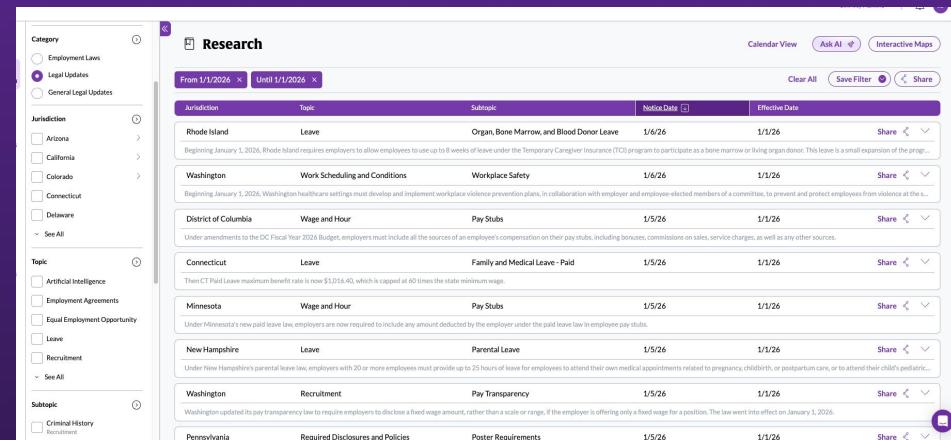


# Using PTO to Meet Sick Leave Requirements

Amount	Carryover	Payout
Accrual rate or front loaded amount must be at least as generous as sick leave law requires	Allow employees to carry over unused leave if the law requires it	Follow PTO rules, which have more payout requirements than sick leave laws

# 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 .



The screenshot shows a legal research interface with a sidebar and a main content area. The sidebar on the left contains sections for 'Category' (Employment Laws, Legal Updates, General Legal Updates), 'Jurisdiction' (Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, See All), 'Topic' (Artificial Intelligence, Employment Agreements, Equal Employment Opportunity, Leave, Recruitment, See All), and 'Subtopic' (Criminal History, Nonretaliation). The main content area is titled 'Research' and shows a table of updates. The table has columns for 'Jurisdiction', 'Topic', 'Subtopic', 'Notice Date', and 'Effective Date'. The table includes rows for Rhode Island (Leave, Organ, Bone Marrow, and Blood Donor Leave, 1/6/26, 1/1/26), Washington (Work Scheduling and Conditions, Workplace Safety, 1/6/26, 1/1/26), District of Columbia (Wage and Hour, Pay Stubs, 1/5/26, 1/1/26), Connecticut (Leave, Family and Medical Leave - Paid, 1/5/26, 1/1/26), Minnesota (Wage and Hour, Pay Stubs, 1/5/26, 1/1/26), New Hampshire (Leave, Parental Leave, 1/5/26, 1/1/26), Washington (Recruitment, Pay Transparency, 1/5/26, 1/1/26), and Pennsylvania (Required Disclosures and Policies, Poster Requirements, 1/5/26, 1/1/26). The interface includes buttons for 'Calendar View', 'Ask AI', 'Interactive Maps', 'Clear All', 'Save Filter', and 'Share'.

Jurisdiction	Topic	Subtopic	Notice Date	Effective Date
Rhode Island	Leave	Organ, Bone Marrow, and Blood Donor Leave	1/6/26	1/1/26
Washington	Work Scheduling and Conditions	Workplace Safety	1/6/26	1/1/26
District of Columbia	Wage and Hour	Pay Stubs	1/5/26	1/1/26
Connecticut	Leave	Family and Medical Leave - Paid	1/5/26	1/1/26
Minnesota	Wage and Hour	Pay Stubs	1/5/26	1/1/26
New Hampshire	Leave	Parental Leave	1/5/26	1/1/26
Washington	Recruitment	Pay Transparency	1/5/26	1/1/26
Pennsylvania	Required Disclosures and Policies	Poster Requirements	1/5/26	1/1/26

# Signatures and Acknowledgments

- When do you need to send your employee handbook to employees for signature or acknowledgment?
  - Guess the answer.
- An Employee Handbook **is not** a contract.
- Different approaches:
  - Send out for acknowledgment 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 they start



SixFifty customers report **saving over 15 hours per month on manual compliance tasks** by using SixFifty's automated handbook and compliance tools

## Thank you for watching!

What questions do you have?



Scan the QR code above or visit  
[sixfifty.com/request-a-demo](https://sixfifty.com/request-a-demo)