Is it a Policy, Procedure, or Guideline?

One of the most important aspects to consider when developing a policy library is determining which content should be included, and which content should not. It is easy to confuse policy with other types of policy-like documents, such as procedures and guidelines. Read on to learn about the differences between the three.

Policy

A policy is a **general written document that establishes a standard by which the institution manages its affairs.** A policy mandates, specifies, or prohibits conduct in order to enhance the institution's mission, ensure coordinated compliance with applicable laws and regulations, promote operational efficiency, and/or reduce institutional risk.

Procedure

A procedure is a **description of the operational processes necessary to implement policy**. A procedure includes information on the offices and positions responsible for policy implementation, as well as instructions to college constituents regarding how to implement the policy, where to turn for information, and the like. A properly developed and approved procedure ensures that policy is implemented efficiently and applied consistently. Unlike policy, procedures may change frequently to accommodate updated standards or methods. This is one reason it is best practice to separate policy from procedure; another is to ensure that users can clearly understand what the policy dictates separate from how to enact it.

Guideline

A guideline gives **recommendations, interpretations, administrative instructions, best practice guidance, or frameworks** in which to operate. Guidelines are informational, not mandatory. Like procedures, guidelines may change frequently depending on the organization's needs.