Write and Review the Housing Policy

First Nation housing policies need clear language and a logical structure.

You can start to write the first draft of your housing policy once the basic content has been agreed upon.

Use clear and concise language

Chief, council and housing staff rely on policies for direction in a range of circumstances. They expect policies to protect them and the community from arbitrary or unfair treatment. It's important that the wording of the policy is clear enough to meet these needs.

The language in the policy should be clear, concise and consistent. Words and phrases used in one policy should mean the same thing in all the other policies for your community. If possible, the format and writing style should be similar, too.

It's important to "say what you mean" and "mean what you say." Use direct, simple language that leaves no room for misunderstanding. This means using words that'll be understood in the same way by most readers.

Good policies don't cause people to make assumptions about what is meant. They include everything that is important to say about the issue and describe exactly the actions to be followed.

Other tips for writing effective housing policies

Keep the following tips in mind when writing your housing policy:

- Be brief. Short words, sentences and paragraphs are better than longer ones.
- Stay away from technical wording, jargon and slang.
- Write in the present or future tense to make the policy easier to understand.
- Check for any grammar or spelling errors.

Structure the housing policy document logically

Your policy should be presented in a logical order, leading readers from one idea to the next in sequence. Most policies will include the information listed below. However, not all communities will need all of this information in their housing policy.

- **Title:** The title should make it clear that this housing policy is for your community.
- **Background:** Note who drafted the policy, when it was approved and how it will be distributed. The signatures of the people who drafted the policy are often included in this section.
- **Dates:** Include the date the policy takes effect, its end date and the dates when any revisions were made.
- **Purpose:** Simply describe the purpose of the policy and programs covered by the policy.
- Specific policy information: Include any procedures that need to be followed and who is responsible for what tasks.

- **Key terms:** Avoid misinterpretation by defining the key terms contained in the policy.

- **Implementation details:** Describe how the policy will be implemented.

- **Exceptions:** Note how the community will handle any exceptions to the policy.

Review and revise the draft policy

Writing any type of policy involves reviewing and revising it many times before it is ready for approval and implementation.

Have your draft housing policy reviewed by those who will have to implement it or might be affected by it. You will see how different people will understand the written document differently than you had intended. They will let you know how the wording might be confusing, unclear or open to misinterpretation.

If you think the policy has legal implications, someone with legal training should also review the wording.

A housing policy affects the community as a whole. Consider bringing your draft housing policy to the broader community for review. Doing so will help you find out if the community is comfortable with the policies being presented. In some First Nations, key policies are translated by the housing department into the primary language of the community.

For more information, please contact your First Nation Housing Specialist.

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