

POLICIES... *Or Other Ways to Sustain Organizations*

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Many non-profit Boards struggle to clarify opinions, intentions and instructions (to themselves and to future generations of Board and staff) through length, tortured policy-setting discussion. Here we clarify COMMON TERMINOLOGY Boards can use when considering the question:

“Do we need a policy for this or not?”

WHICH WRITTEN THING DO WE NEED?	By-law, or By-law change	Policy	Guideline or Statement of Intention	Procedure
WHY?	Founding a non-profit organization requires a legal document	Addresses legal and financial obligations and protects the organization	Guides decision-making and operations	Conveys learning from one experience on to the next
WHAT?	Lengthy legal document defining organization’s intent and structure; usually must be revised when policies or structures change with time	Long term, written agreements that are applied consistently over years	Clarifies issues, defines “best thinking” and/or reasons for actions or decisions; leaves open future choices within framework of context	Describes efficient and effective ways to accomplish tasks
HOW LONG WILL IT HOLD?	Until revised through formal Board vote with legal review	Until revised through formal Board vote; established through formal process	Until no longer deemed relevant, due to changing circumstances; established as needed	Only applicable as others choose; usually developed as needed by those involved in the task
WHEN?	When the organization is changing in a major way	When the Board agrees to initiate a formal “policy development” process	When an issue is complex, recurring or has significant future impact	When the task will be repeated several times, and we don’t want to “reinvent the wheel”