

American Student Assistance

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Tech-4-Beginners

Wiki-size Your Financial Aid Policies & Procedures: Next Generation Knowledge Management

The central concept of this session focuses on how a financial aid office can retain knowledge. To start, we'll explore some central concepts in knowledge management, including the role and value that it brings to any industry. Then we'll spend a few minutes exploring the value this practice brings to the financial aid office specifically. To make this happen, we'll look to a technology-based solution called a Wiki that offers some unique features and functionality that could streamline the process of updating and maintaining this information. Included within this presentation will be a live demo of a sample procedures manual using a Wiki solution. Technophobes and technophiles alike will greatly benefit from this session!



Fall 2007

presented by Gina Lucente-Cole

Policies & Procedures In General

Why Should You Document Your Policies & Procedures?

- Audits, Program Reviews and Compliance**
 Institutional policies and procedures provide the core framework for how your office functions and how it complies with all of the various Federal regulations that impact the administration of financial aid. A set of comprehensive, documented policies and procedures may help justify how your institution has interpreted and applied those regulations in everyday practice.
- Knowledge Management & Training**
 By having well-documented procedures, you don't lose knowledge when you lose a staff member. Training time can also be reduced by having clear reference information available for your new hires.
- Accountability**
 Your policies are your guidelines. Documenting how your office selects and evaluates business partners may help prevent misperceptions within your institution and externally in your public relationships.

Notes

Professional Services at ASA

Do you have training needs for your staff that aren't being met? Are you struggling with staffing, organizational or technical issues in your office and need expert help to find solutions that will work for you? If so, ASA's Professional Services team can help!

We are a team of experienced consultants and professional trainers committed to our non-profit mission of ensuring student financial success! In addition to our wide range of commonly-requested topics, we can also customize training sessions or conduct personalized consultation sessions to address the needs of your institution!

Presenter

Gina Lucente-Cole is the manager of Professional Services at federal student loan guarantor American Student Assistance® (ASA).

Gina works with ASA staff to provide consulting services and create specialized training programs for the organization's lender and school clients. She also plays a pivotal role in putting together the ASA's annual symposium on financial aid.

Gina Lucente-Cole received a bachelor's degree in Management from Bentley College and a master's degree in Training and Development from Lesley University.



Must-See Resources

Whether you're starting from scratch or simply looking to revise your existing Policies & Procedures, these resources will help guide your process and efforts, keeping you on the right track!

NASFAA

<http://www.nasfaa.org>

Policies & Procedures Tools

<http://www.nasfaa.org/redesign/ppmanualindex.html>

Department of Education/FSA

Information for Financial Aid Professionals (IFAP)

<http://ifap.ed.gov>

FSA Assessments (Quality Assurance Program)

<http://ifap.ed.gov/qahome/qaassessments/institutionalelig.html>

Student Financial Aid Handbook (Volume 2—School Eligibility)

Government Printing Office

Code of Federal Regulations, United States Code, Notices of Proposed Rulemaking and more

<http://www.regulations.gov>

MediaWiki

<http://www.mediawiki.org>

WetPaint Wiki

<http://www.wetpaint.com>



Policies & Procedures In General

What Should Be Included In Your Policies & Procedures?

The more comprehensively your policies and procedures are documented, the less chance there is for confusion, misinterpretation or error. As a general rule of thumb, include everything.

For a more practical response, visit the FSA (Federal Student Aid) website. Here's a list to help get you started:

- Overview
- Description of all aid programs
- Organizational Structure of Financial Aid Office/Business Office
- Calendar of Financial Aid Activities
- Audits and Program Review Process/Self-Evaluation Process
- Samples of all Forms used by school
- Academic Year Definition
- Cost of Attendance
- Office Automation
- NSLDS Processes
- FERPA
- Institutional Eligibility
- Adequate Staffing
- Consumer Information
- Admissions Policy/ATB
- Secondary Confirmation
- Certification
- Satisfactory Academic Progress
- Return of Title IV/Refund Repayments
- Awarding/Packaging Policies
- Verification/Conflicting Data
- Professional Judgment
- Misrepresentation
- Adequate Checks and Balances
- Financial Aid Counseling
- Fiscal Reports and Financial Statements
- ACG and National SMART
- Federal Pell Program
- Federal SEOG Program
- Federal Work-Study Program
- Federal Perkins Loan Processes
- FFEL Loan Process/DL Process

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Policies & Procedures In General

Who Should Be Responsible?

There is no one right answer to this question, as long as someone is responsible. Some offices may choose to have the policies and procedures maintained by one individual. Other options include creating a policies and procedures team or assigning sections to staff members in a way that correlates to their job functions. Whatever option you elect, just remember to document it within the policies and procedures you've created!

Consider:

- Who knows the policies best?
- Who knows the procedures best?
- How can you allocate the responsibility accordingly?
- What makes sense for your office structure?

Notes

Wiki Demonstration

Policies & Procedures & A Wiki

Some of the most significant challenges of keeping your policies and procedures current are addressed by the features offered by a wiki. As a picture is worth a thousand words, hopefully a demonstration will be worth a few million!

For this demonstration, we're using an implementation of MediaWiki that is running on a laptop. MediaWiki is PHP-based and uses a MySQL database for storing the content. Both MediaWiki and MySQL are free, open-source products. Other wiki versions are available for most any web server platform, for more alternatives, just search for "wiki" on wikipedia.org.

If you don't know what PHP and MySQL are or you don't want to deal with having to install and setup anything on your own, a hosted alternative is WetPaint which provides a free, hosted wiki service that allows you to limit viewers only to those individuals you invite.

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Wiki Demonstration

Wiki Features

Fully Customizable Appearance

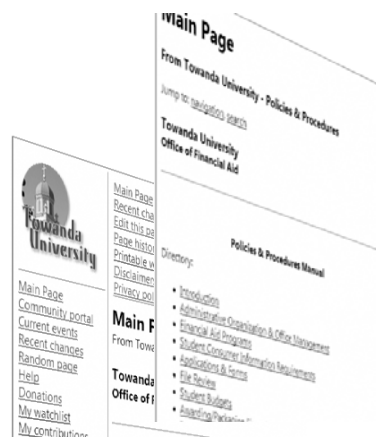
- Colors, fonts and even navigation options

Collaborate & Share

- Break down information silos
- WYSIWYG editing
(No need to know HTML, but for those of you who do, you can use it!)

Change Tracking and Versioning

- Know who changed what and when
- Never lose prior versions (automatically backs-up prior version with the ability to restore)
- See recently edited pages (easily see what's new, and what's not!)
- Maintain notes about changes



Version	Date	Time	IP Address
(cur) (last)	19:39, 11 September 2007	127.0.0.1	(Talk) (900 bytes) (undo)
(cur) (last)	18:49, 11 September 2007	127.0.0.1	(Talk) (356 bytes) (undo)
(cur) (last)	18:45, 11 September 2007	127.0.0.1	(Talk) (259 bytes) (undo)
(cur) (last)	18:43, 11 September 2007	127.0.0.1	(Talk) (200 bytes) (undo)
(cur) (last)	18:42, 11 September 2007	127.0.0.1	(Talk) (190 bytes) (undo)

Policies & Procedures In General

How Do You Actually Document Your Policies & Procedures?

Policies

- Be aware of changing rules and regulations and adapt your policies
- Look for guidance, best practices and be sure to share your experiences within your state, regional and national associations
- Ask for help

Procedures

- Make sure each staff member has documented what they do and how they do it
- Include daily tasks, weekly tasks, monthly tasks and even annual tasks within the documentation for their position
- Review the procedures on a regular and frequent basis

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Good Practices

Accurate, Relevant and Current

The key to developing effective policies and procedures is to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the information within them. Here are some good tips that might help you in both of those regards:

- Establish clear expectations with the staff about documenting their daily, weekly, monthly and annual practices
- Ensure that everyone always has the most current version of your practices and procedures
- If it's not documented, don't do it
- Train and retrain with vigor consistently and frequently
- Actively participate in state, regional and national associations to ensure that your policies are current and reflect the existing regulatory environment
- Keep staff members accountable for their actions to ensure that they are acting in accordance with your policies and procedures

Notes

Wiki Demonstration

Wiki Overview

The screenshot shows a Wiki page for Towanda University's Office of Financial Aid. The page title is "Main Page" and the content is titled "Policies & Procedures Manual". A directory lists various topics such as Introduction, Administrative Organization & Office Management, Financial Aid Programs, Student Consumer Information Requirements, Applications & Forms, File Review, Student Budgets, Awarding/Packaging Financial Aid, Professional Judgment, Disbursements, Satisfactory Academic Progress, Return of Title IV Funds, Institutional Refunds, Title IV Fraud, Audits, and Appendices. The page also includes a search bar, a navigation menu on the left, and a footer with a "Powered By MediaWiki" logo.

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