

TEMPLATE

Employee Handbook Template

A complete, fill-in-the-blank handbook framework for US small businesses

Replace each bracketed prompt and blank line with your own policy. Delete what does not apply. Have an attorney review before publishing.

How to use this template

This is a starting framework for a small-business employee handbook. Replace every bracketed prompt with your own policy, delete sections that do not apply, and add anything specific to your company. A handbook is not legally required in most cases, but it sets expectations and gives you a consistent, documented basis for decisions.

Before you publish: have an employment attorney review the final handbook for the states you operate in. Several states require specific policies (sick leave, harassment training, leave) that differ, and a handbook that contradicts state law can hurt you more than help.

1. Welcome and introduction

Open with a short welcome and what the handbook is for. State clearly that it is a guide, not a contract, and that employment is at-will where applicable.

Company name: _____

Founded / mission (1-2 sentences): _____

At-will statement (sample language to adapt):

Employment with [Company] is at-will. Either you or the company may end the employment relationship at any time, with or without cause or notice, except where prohibited by law. Nothing in this handbook creates a contract of employment.

2. Employment basics

- Equal employment opportunity statement (required content varies by state and size)
- Employment classifications: full-time, part-time, exempt, non-exempt, contractor
- Background checks and eligibility to work (I-9 / E-Verify if applicable)
- Introductory or probationary period, if you use one

Standard work hours / schedule: _____

How classifications are determined: _____

3. Pay and timekeeping

- Pay schedule (weekly, biweekly, semimonthly) and pay method
- Timekeeping rules for non-exempt employees
- Overtime policy and how it is calculated
- Deductions and how errors are corrected

Pay frequency: _____

Overtime rule (state-specific): _____

4. Time off and leave

Cover every type of leave you offer or are required to provide. State-mandated sick leave and family leave rules vary; confirm your states.

- Paid time off (PTO) or separate vacation and sick policies
- Accrual, carryover, and payout rules
- Holidays observed
- State-mandated sick leave, where applicable
- Family and medical leave (FMLA if 50+ employees; state programs if applicable)
- Bereavement, jury duty, military leave

PTO accrual rate: _____

Holidays observed: _____

5. Conduct and workplace policies

- Code of conduct and professionalism expectations
- Anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policy (required in many states)
- Complaint and reporting procedure, including anti-retaliation
- Attendance and punctuality
- Drug and alcohol policy
- Confidentiality and company property

The anti-harassment policy and a clear reporting procedure are the most important risk-reduction pieces in any handbook. Several states also mandate harassment-prevention training. Do not skip this section.

6. Technology, communication, and remote work

- Acceptable use of company systems and devices
- Email, internet, and social media expectations
- Remote and hybrid work policy, if applicable
- Data security and privacy basics

Remote work policy summary: _____

7. Benefits overview

Summarize benefits and point to the official plan documents, which govern. Do not restate plan details that could conflict with the actual policy.

- Health, dental, vision
- Retirement (401k) and any match
- Other benefits and perks
- Eligibility and enrollment

8. Separation

- Resignation notice expectations
- Final pay timing (state-specific, often strict)
- Return of company property
- Benefits continuation (COBRA where applicable)

9. Acknowledgment of receipt

Have every employee sign and date this. Keep the signed page in their personnel file. This is your proof they received and understood the policies.

Employee name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the [Company] Employee Handbook. I understand it is a guide, not a contract, and that my employment is at-will where applicable.