Written business processes, where to start and why

You recently accepted a new job. Your first assignment is to develop efficient and effective written agency business processes. But where do you begin? We recommend you start with the experts. Involve the people who carry out the process, their supervisors, and any upper-level management who may need to approve the process. Once you have the right people, it is time to map the process.

As you outline the process, keep it manageable. Look for ways to break down large processes into smaller activities. For example, if the agency business process is complaint resolution, you might start with the task, complaint intake. From there, you could break it into complaint receipt, review, and data entry. When you keep it manageable, you reduce the likelihood of process gaps that often introduce risk.

Within each task, you should identify the scope, or clear start and endpoints. Ask yourself what action causes the process to start? For complaint receipt, the starting point is probably the submission of a written complaint. Then ask, how do you know when the process is over? This could be the handoff of the complaint from receipt to complaint review.

With scope set, it’s time to document the steps of the process, the order, and who performs each one. Before you get too far, select a standard format. There are many ways to document a business process. For consistency and efficiency, select a format you can duplicate in other agency business processes. Your final format should communicate the purpose of the process, steps, individual responsible, related policies, procedures, and resources, key control activities, and the technical tools for the process, such as necessary software, technology, or equipment.

Finally, before you implement the process, be sure to test it to identify inaccuracies, missing steps, key control activities, and accessibility. To confirm proper control activities are documented in the process, highlight decision-making points, supervisory reviews, approvals, reconciliations, hand-offs, and other key control activities.

Written agency business processes have a high return on investment and support an efficient and effective system of internal control. With clear written business processes, your agency will save money and reduce overall process waste. In addition to reduced waste, written business processes establish clear accountability and enhance management’s ability to monitor and improve performance. With improved performance your agency can increase compliance, safety and security and strengthen its ability to safeguard assets from fraud, waste, and abuse.

**Suggested action steps**
- Use the Agency Risk Assessment Worksheet to identify agency business processes without written documentation or in need of update.
- Create a plan to develop and maintain written agency business processes.

**Questions?**
Contact [Jacob Rossow, Internal Control Specialist](mailto:jacob.rossow@state.mn.us).