A **policy** is a written principle or rule which is used to guide the decision-making process. A **procedure** is a series of steps or instructions, describing a way of doing things. Policies tell people *what* to do. Procedures tell people *how* to do it.

While policies and procedures provide a set of guiding principles to help with decision making, they are not generally considered to be constitutional documents (such as Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws). Policies and procedures should not be included in the bylaws of an organization. Policies and procedures do not require ratification by the Members and may simply be adopted by a board unless the bylaws state otherwise.

Why are written policies better than unwritten policies?
Written policies represent a more professional, objective structuring of the organization. They express the rules clearly, reducing the chance of misinterpretation and they remain constant, ensuring continuity and equity over time.

In general, the written word is regarded as more important. Written policies standardize decisions made and assure a greater level of compliance than might have been attainable using unwritten guidelines.

Further, written policies assist to meet and comply with legal requirements, funding agreements with potential partners and sponsors, the organization's bylaws and other requirements.

Who is responsible for creating policies for the organization?
The policy development process requires careful planning, organization, and input from several viewpoints within the organization. It is often advisable to establish a policy committee instead of placing responsibility on a specific employee or volunteer. A realistic timetable should also be established, providing adequate time for research, development and review.

Throughout the process, support, feedback and expertise can be sought from many internal and external sources, including employees, volunteers, board members, members, similar organizations, lawyers, insurance agents, and documents that govern the organization. For example, an established soccer club may be a valuable source of information for a newly formed club.

Structure of the Document
Using a standardized format for each of your policies and procedures will keep the sections organized and will aid the reader in finding information. Generally, a policy and procedure document is divided into the following parts:

1. **Header**: The header for each policy section includes the section number and name, approval date (will be entered after the section is approved), responsible department or committee (if applicable), and organization. Section names should be as simple and clear as possible to aid users finding appropriate policy sections.

2. **Purpose:** Briefly summarize the information covered in the section. A concise summary of the objectives may be given if it helps to clarify the subject matter. The purpose statement should inform readers why the section was issued and what information they will find there. If applicable, provide reference to the related policy sections for specific procedures addressed elsewhere.

3. **Definitions:** When the subject matter requires a precise understanding of terms, include them here. This allows a reader to approach the content in a more knowledgeable manner, and to easily refer back to the definition as needed when the term is used frequently throughout the policy section. When a term has more limited use, it can be defined in the body of the section and definitions may be omitted.

4. **Policy:** The policy statement is the governing principle, plan or understanding that guides the action. It is supplemented by the information within the rest of the section.

5. **Procedures:** Procedures describe the implementation process and responsibilities for accomplishing tasks governed by the policy. In addition to supplying procedures, you may want to include guidelines. Guidelines provide suggested methods for accomplishing tasks governed by the policy, but are not mandatory procedures and may be maintained elsewhere rather than in the policy.

6. **Further Information:** Provide a name and telephone number, email address, or website for individuals who may need assistance or additional information regarding topics covered in the policy section.

7. **References:** List the sources upon which the policy section is based, including federal and provincial laws, Sask Sport, FIFA, Canada Soccer, Saskatchewan Soccer, and other organizational policies. In addition, list other policies that are related to or referenced in the section.

What steps should be followed when developing a policy?

1. **Research**
The existing structure of the organization should be examined, as well as the written and unwritten policies already in place. The development of specific policies must be prioritized based on the importance of each policy to the effective operation of the organization.

Several questions must be asked, including:
- What areas of the organization are least effective?
- Where do issues of risk/liability rest?
- What rules are in greatest need of clarification?
- What policies must be in place before others can be developed?

Once the development process has been organized based on priority, specific policy requirements can be identified as defining:
- The issue, problem or opportunity that the policy needs to address
- What the policy is expected to accomplish

Contact volunteer groups or similar sport organizations (either soccer, or similar sports such as hockey or volleyball) that have things in common with the organization. They may be willing to share their policies and/or provide helpful input (e.g. an established sports club may be a source of policies and/or information for a newly formed club). As well, service organizations such as Volunteer Canada may have samples that can be utilized as a template. While referring to similar policies is a useful starting point, it is important to ensure others' policies are appropriate to your own organization.

2. Dialogue

Engage all stakeholders of the organization in the early stages of policy development. This will bring a variety of perspectives to the process and will help to ensure these groups accept ownership of the end-product. Involve everyone who may have an interest, including: volunteers, employees, service users, program sponsors, etc.

Use a variety of methods to conduct this exchange of information (e.g. brainstorming, questionnaires, group meetings).

3. Writing the Policy

Use clear, simple language and be as concise as possible. Write in the present tense and use active words that will direct people. Avoid jargon and overly technical descriptions. Word choice can make a big difference in how easily your policies/procedures can be used. For example, using the word "shall" or "must" indicates that something is required, while the term "should" implies that there might be other options, or someone could bypass the task associated with that step.

Write the policy and procedure assuming basic knowledge of the organization, but novice knowledge of the specific policy and procedure being described. You can always provide supplemental information elsewhere, such as on your website.

Clearly differentiate between "policy", "procedure", and other appropriate headings within the section. Consider why the user will need the information and what the user will likely be doing when looking for information. Provide accurate contact information for members who have questions.

Avoid using information that is likely to change frequently. Instead of using an individual's name, use the position title. By carefully considering the type of information you include in the document, you can help ensure better accuracy for a longer period of time.

Consider whether you need to develop forms or supplemental information to support the implementation of a policy. For example, formal complaints policies may need to be supported by advice to members and staff on how formal complaints might be lodged. The policy and procedure should include locations of forms or supplemental information and links to that information.

Draft and redraft. Do not worry about length. An effective policy may be articulated in a few paragraphs or may require several pages or even a binder.

4. Obtain Approval

Devote some time at every Board meeting to reviewing a draft policy and making decisions on it. It is essential to obtain approval from management and/or the board of directors.

5. Distribute and Implement

The policy counts for little unless it is implemented! The policy should be broadly distributed. Means of distribution may include bulletin board postings, newsletters, mail-outs, inclusion in orientation packages, etc.

Consider how you are going to assist existing staff/members to be aware of the policy and to develop the knowledge and skills for its implementation. This may require special training sessions, memos, etc. Ensure that staff/members can ask questions about the policy or express concern if implementation creates difficulties. Employees and volunteers should be asked to affirm their understanding of the policy in writing, by signing something confirming they have read the policy and agree to follow it.

The implementation of policies should be monitored by staff and/or the Board. Proper implementation requires consequences for non-compliance. Immediate action must be taken if the policy is breached.

Ensure that somebody in the organization is responsible for keeping 'control copies' of policies and the production of a policy manual, either in an electronic place or in hard copy.

6. Evaluate and Review

Good policy and procedure documents are reviewed regularly and updated as needed to provide appropriate direction to the organization. Sometimes it is useful to adopt the policy on a provisional basis, and then evaluate how it works in practice, before issuing the final policy.