



What To Include In Personnel Files For New Staff Members

Once you make the decision to hire a new staff member, you'll want to ensure that a personnel file is developed for him/her, and that it contains all required documentation and other pertinent materials. Including the appropriate paperwork in a personnel file can protect both the employer and employee, legally and otherwise. The following list itemizes which documents should be included in an employee's file:

1. Hiring letter – this letter documents the employee's start date, beginning salary, office location (if the organization has more than one office) length of probationary period, and any other information the organization requires. This letter can help protect both the employee and organization, as it clearly sets the conditions for employment.
2. Form I-9 - Proof of U.S. citizenship, required by federal law. All employers must have employees complete this form and submit the appropriate documentation. Two forms of identification are required to verify citizenship (e.g., driver's license and birth certificate).
3. W-4 – The employee completes this form, which is required by federal law. Completing it is necessary in order for your employer to withhold the correct federal income tax from your pay. This form also includes "head of household" information and documents the number of dependents the employee will be claiming.
4. Document verifying that the employee has read and understands all policies and procedures (regular and personnel). This form should be signed and dated by the employee.
5. Employee's application, cover letter, resume, and/or references. This information provides a snapshot of the employee's employment history and can be helpful when writing and submitting grants.
6. Emergency contact information form – This form should include the names, addresses, and phone numbers of at least two individuals who can be contacted in case of an emergency.

7. A copy of any required licenses or certification. For example, if an employee is hired to fill a licensed social worker position, you will want a copy of his or her current license.
8. The employee's job description, which should include the position's essential job duties (required by the Americans with Disabilities Act), responsibilities, and work expectations (e.g., travel, evening and weekend work).
9. A copy of the employee's goals and objectives during his/her probationary period. A condition for permanent employment may be contingent on the completion of these goals and objectives.

Information that should be included in the employee's file following the probationary period is as follows:

1. Annual goals and objectives that the employer and employee jointly develop. The employee should clearly understand that s/he will be evaluated on the accomplishment of these goals and objectives.
2. The annual performance evaluation, signed and dated by both the employer and employee. The evaluation should identify the employee's strengths and weaknesses, and identify action steps (with deadlines) the employee can take to address specific weaknesses.
3. Disciplinary action information, if applicable.
4. Termination information, if applicable. When an employee leaves the organization, there should be documentation related to the employee's end date (for cutting his/her final check), and the condition under which s/he left (e.g., resignation, firing).
5. A record of the employee's accrued and used vacation leave, sick leave, or other types of leave (e.g., jury, maternity).
6. Insurance provided to or purchased by the employee (e.g., medical, dental, vision, life, short-term or long-term disability).
7. 401 k or other retirement plan information.
8. Documentation regarding internal and external committees with which the employee is involved. Participation in committee meetings may be a part of the employee's annual goals and objectives.
9. Training record – personnel files should contain any training the employee has completed. Training can include reading work-related materials, internal training (e.g., guest speakers at staff meetings, staff member presenting to his/her colleagues), and external training (e.g., training provided by other agencies, workshops).

conferences, teleclasses, teleseminars, webinars). Retaining copies of training certificates might be needed to meet licensure or certification requirements.

Ensuring that each employee's personnel file contains the appropriate documentation helps protect the employer and employee, ensures that the employer adheres to all governmental and organizational requirements, and provides emergency contact information in case the employee is involved in an accident. As most of the information in personnel files is confidential, make sure that these files are kept in a locked and secure location.

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