

Policies, Orders and Rules Procedural Manual

King County
Archives, Records Management and Mail Services
September 2026

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Introduction

This manual is intended to describe the process of, and provide guidance for, the development of directives – Policies, Orders and Rules - under the Executive Policy System. Each portion of this manual is intended as a suggestive guide for best practice in developing and implementing directives.

The Department of Executive Services - Records and Licensing Services Division - Archives, Records Management and Mail Services Section (ARMMS) serves as the consulting agency for departments interested in creating policies, orders, or rules. ARMMS also provides an accessible index of current/active policies, orders, and rules, which is available on the county's internet website at <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/executive-services/data-information-services/policies>.

Contact Info

For questions about developing or publishing Policies, Orders or Rules, contact:
policy staff at policies@kingcounty.gov.

For copies of historical Policies, Orders or Rules that are no longer on the website, contact:
King County Archives at archives@kingcounty.gov or 206-263-2480.

For digital copies of existing Policies, Orders or Rules, visit:
<https://www.kingcounty.gov/about/policies/masterlist.aspx>

References

Executive Policy INF-7-4-2-EP — Drafting and Implementing Policies
Executive Policy INF-7-5-2-EP – Drafting and Implementing Orders
Executive Policy INF-7-6-2-EP – Drafting and Implementing Rules
King County Code 2.98 Rules of County Agencies

Guidance tool—distinguishing characteristics of King County directives

While this manual is not meant to be a guide for drafting charter revisions, ordinances, or motions they are included in this guidance tool for informational purposes.

What kind of directive is it?	What is this directive used for?	What are the Distinguishing Characteristics of this type of directive?
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King County Charter Revisions	A change or language revision to the King County charter.	a. Revisions or changes are enacted by voter approval. b. A review process is conducted every 10 years to update the charter. c. Carries the force of law.
Ordinance	A law to effect changes to current law, enact new law, or send issues to ballot for voter approval.	a. Proposed ordinances may be introduced by any councilmember, by initiative petition, by proposal of a regional committee, or by institutional initiative. b. Ordinances are adopted by the King County Council and presented to the Executive. The Executive's options when an ordinance is presented are described in the King County Charter. Ordinances are subject to referendum as described in the Charter. c. Has the force of law.
Motion	A declaration of policy adopted by the King County Council to communicate confirmation/rejection of appointments made by the Executive, accept reports, organize, or administer the legislative branch, make declarations of policy that do not have the force of law, or to request information from other agencies of county government.	a. Proposed motions may be introduced by any councilmember or by proposal of a regional committee. b. Does not have the force of law
Executive Order	A formal statement issued exclusively by the Executive mainly for the purpose of delegation of authority and responsibility, often to establish a value, and/or set a direction and/or require action for something that may not be a legal mandate.	a. The Executive has unilateral authority to issue these and no process for engagement or review prior to issuance is necessary. b. Because of a., these can be issued immediately if desired. c. These are typically initiated by the Executive Office, not the departments of the Executive Branch. d. These may or may not bear consequences for nonconformance. e. These may or may not (often don't) refer to existing mandates. f. Format is typically a series of "Whereas" statements that build up to a "Now, Therefore" statement, similar to a proclamation.
Executive Policy	A directive approved by the County Executive, for broad purposes and intended to achieve or reinforce compliance with	a. While the Executive signs these, best practice includes engagement with interested parties and a 10-day review and comment period.

	established mandates. Used by the Executive Branch to provide clear guidance to the workforce to ensure compliance with a mandate that exists in county code, state law or other legal authority.	b. Because of a., these take at least 10 business days from draft to issuance. c. These are typically initiated by the departments of the Executive Branch. d. These bear consequences for nonconformance. e. These refer to and support compliance with existing mandates. f. Format has prescribed sections and headers to ensure standard look and feel for all policies.
Department Policy	A directive approved by the director of a department (or individual agency) that have applicability and consequences that are limited to a single department of the Executive Branch.	a. While the Director signs these, best practice includes practice includes engagement with interested parties and a 10-day review and comment period. b. Because of a., these take at least 10 business days from draft to issuance. c. These are applicable only to individual departments. d. These bear consequences for nonconformance. e. These refer to and support compliance with existing mandates. f. Format has prescribed sections and headers to ensure standard look and feel for all policies.
Emergency Order	A directive at the administrative policy level. They can be proclamations, declarations, orders, or other formal statements issued by the Executive stating that an emergency situation exists and authorizing extraordinary actions in response to that emergency.	a. The Executive or designee has unilateral authority to issue these during an emergency or disaster. b. These can be issued immediately as needed. c. These are typically initiated by the Executive Office, at the urging of the Office of Emergency Management. d. These confer authorities more than consequences. e. These refer back to their authority in law. f. Format is typically like a proclamation, with Whereas statements that are resolved by a Now, Therefore statement.
Declaration	A mechanism used in emergencies by the County Executive to establish policy.	The Executive Office confers with the Prosecuting Attorney's Office to determine which mechanism is best for the circumstances. See Emergency Orders
Proclamation	A mechanism used in emergencies by the County Executive to establish policy.	The Executive Office confers with the Prosecuting Attorney's Office to determine which mechanism is best for the circumstances. See Emergency Orders

Public Rule	A rule enacted by the Executive, King County Council, or other designated body to create public rules as established by King County Code 2.98.010. Note: Specific time requirements are outlined in the process guidance below.	a. Directives affecting the public, and: 1) the violation of which subjects a person outside County employment to a penalty; or (2) which subject a person outside of County employment to a payment of a fee; or (3) which establish, alter, or revoke any procedure, practice, or requirement relating to agency hearings; and/or (4) which establish, alter or revoke any qualifications or standards for the issuance, suspension or revocation of licenses to pursue any commercial activity, trade or profession as may be otherwise defined by King County Code 2.98.020. b. Requires public notice and a comment period, including public meeting for comments if practicable. c. Has the force of law.
Emergency Rule	A rule enacted the same as Public Rules above but used in emergency situations as defined in the King County Code 2.98.070.	a. Same as Public Rules, except does not require public notice or a comment period per King County Code 2.98.070. b. Effective period limited to 150 days per King County Code 2.98.070. c. Has the force of law.

Guidance tool – difference between policies and procedures

What kind of directive is it?	Simplified Definition	What is this directive used for?	What are the Distinguishing Characteristics of this type of directive?
Policy	<i>What</i> must be done (A statement of intent to comply with legal mandates)	A directive intended to achieve or reinforce compliance with established mandates. Used to provide clear guidance to the workforce to ensure compliance with a mandate that exists in county code, state law or other legal authority.	1. These bear consequences for nonconformance. 2. These refer to and support compliance with existing mandates. 3. Format has prescribed sections and headers to ensure standard look and feel for all policies.
Procedure (also known as standard work)	<i>How</i> to accomplish something	A fixed, step-by-step sequence of activities or course of action (with definite start and end)	1. Provides a platform for implementing the consistency needed to decrease process variation

or process documentation.)	(Implementation of a policy)	points) that must be followed in the same order to correctly perform a task or comply with a policy.	2. Format determined at the agency level 3. Is developed, maintained, and revised at the agency level
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Guidance tool – Verbs Often Found in Policies and Procedures

Shall—a word that commands an action. It carries a weight of known or prescribed consequence.

Must—has nearly the same meaning as shall. It’s a word that commands an action or represents a duty or requirement. Because must covers more territory and is clearer and more and commonly understood than shall. Must is favored over Shall in modern contract and policy language.

Will—a word that captures a future tense or repeated action. This is a future-tense statement of fact, intention, or process, not necessarily a statement of requirement. If you are trying to make a statement of requirement, you **should** use the word Shall. Will is used with procedures more so than with policies for this reason.

Should—a word that suggests or encourages but does not require or prohibit an action. Failure to take a suggested action will not result in known or prescribed consequences.

May—is a word that provides an option with regard to an action. One can choose to do it or not without consequence.

Developing Policies

The following procedures should be followed when developing and implementing Executive Policies. See above for guidance on how to distinguish between an Executive Policy and a Department Policy. Though ARMMS is not involved in the process of developing or implementing Department Policies, the steps below are best practices and may be utilized for department-level policies.

These procedures apply to all types of Executive Policies: new policies, policy revisions, and policy renewals.

Note: these procedures are only for the development of **policies**, and **not** for the development of procedures. Refer to the above **Guidance tool – difference between policies and procedures** – for how to distinguish between policies and procedures.

Procedures

- I. Identify a policy need. The first stage in developing a policy is to identify a policy need. As defined by the Executive Policy on Drafting and Implementing Executive Policies, INF-7-4-EP, a policy should address a requirement that the County, administrative offices, or executive departments must fulfill, and for which there are consequences for fulfilling or not fulfilling that requirement. A requirement that necessitates a policy is defined broadly and may include satisfying legal or regulatory requirements. The department or staff person responsible for developing the policy should do all the research and writing to develop a policy draft. Cost analysis for the policy should occur in the first stage, as well as an analysis of the impacts the policy would have on the county's strategic plan.
- II. Draft a Policy. The person responsible should draft a policy using the template provided by ARMMS *. Use the **Required Policy Elements Worksheet** (available at <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/executive-services/data-information-services/policies/tools-templates>) when drafting any new policy.

* Executive Policies **must** be drafted on the Policy Template provided by ARMMS.
- III. Contact ARMMS. The department or staff person should contact ARMMS to obtain a document code for the policy. The ARMMS section is responsible for coding and indexing all Executive Policies.
- IV. Internal Review Process. The second stage for developing a policy is the review process. This process will be slightly different for executive vs. department level policies. Departments are responsible for their own internal review process. For executive level policies, the draft will be reviewed by interested parties, including high level staff in the executive's office and/or the department(s) working on the policy. Other reviews may include human resources, labor relations, risk management, information technology, and a legal review by the Prosecuting Attorney's Office.
- V. Formal Review Process (Executive Policies only). Once a final draft is ready, the policy owner must send a draft of the policy to ZZGroup, Executive Policy Review Group. We recommend allowing at least two weeks for review. The Executive Policy Review Group may not always return comments or suggestions. If no comments are received at the end of the two-week review, you may move ahead with finalizing the policy.
- VI. Finalize Policy. After completion of the review process and receiving all feedback, the policy should be revised as necessary and finalized.
- VII. Signature. The policy will then be sent to the approving authority for signature. Executive Policies must be signed by the County Executive. Digital signatures are encouraged. DocuSign is the county's official digital signature platform.

If the policy is not signed digitally, it must be scanned using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to ensure that its contents are searchable and saved to PDF/A.

- VIII. Send to ARMMS. Digitally signed policies must be emailed to ARMMS immediately (policies@kingcounty.gov) to be published on the King County internet site <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/executive-services/data-information-services/policies>. If the original signed policy was not digitally signed, the originating department must OCR scan to PDF/A before sending to ARMMS. Policies are effective on the date they are signed.
- IX. Dissemination. After publishing to the internet, ARMMS will send a formal announcement to the Executive Policies Manual Station ZZ Group. The issuing department should take whatever additional means are necessary to disseminate elsewhere.
- X. Implementation. Department Directors and Agency Heads are encouraged to communicate Executive level policy changes to their departments or agencies.
- XI. Maintenance. All policies expire 5 (five) years after the effective date unless an earlier expiration has been set. Departments should ensure that they have plans to revise or renew all policies prior to expiration dates.

Developing Orders

The following procedures should be followed when developing and implementing executive orders and emergency orders. These procedures apply to new orders, order revisions, and order renewals.

The development, approval, and implementation process is the same for executive orders and emergency orders.

Procedures

1. Identify the need for an order. The person responsible for developing the order should do all the research and writing to determine if an order is needed.
2. Draft an order. The person responsible for developing the order should draft the order using the template provided by ARMMS.
3. Contact ARMMS. Once a draft is in place, they should contact ARMMS to obtain a document code number for the order. The ARMMS section is responsible for coding and indexing all executive and emergency orders.
4. Internal Review. While a formal review process is not required for executive and emergency orders, an internal review by the drafter is recommended at this point in the process.
5. Finalize Document. Comments are collected after the internal review phase, and any final changes are made. Once finalized the document is sent to the Executive for signature and an electronic version,

Microsoft Word or similar format, of the order must be sent to ARMMS.

6. Executive Signs. The County Executive signs and dates the order. The order is effective the date it is signed. Digital signatures are encouraged. DocuSign is the county's official digital signature platform. If the policy is not signed digitally, it must be scanned using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) to ensure that its contents are searchable and saved to PDF/A.
7. Send to Department of Executive Services, Records and Licensing Services Division (RALS) Director. After the order is signed, the original document should be sent immediately to RALS Director by whose signature attests that the order has been filed. The RALS Director then sends the original document to ARMMS to be published to the King County internet site <https://www.kingcounty.gov/about/policies.aspx>.
8. Dissemination. After publishing to the internet, ARMMS will send a formal announcement to the Executive Policies Manual Station ZZ Group.

Developing Public Rules

The following procedures should be followed when developing and implementing Public Rules. These procedures apply to new rules, rule revisions and rule renewals.

Procedures

1. Identify the need for a rule. The department or staff person responsible for developing the rule should do all the research and writing to determine if a rule is needed.
2. Draft a rule. The person responsible for developing the rule should draft the rule using the template provided by ARMMS.
3. Contact ARMMS. Once a draft is in place, the department or staff person should contact ARMMS to obtain a document code for the rule. The ARMMS section is responsible for coding and indexing all public rules. Completing this step satisfies the requirement in 5.D. below.
4. Preliminary Review. This review process will depend on the content or effect of the rule. The draft should be reviewed by interested parties, including high level staff in the executive's office and/or the department(s) working on the rule. Other reviews may include human resources, labor relations, risk management, information technology, and a legal review by the prosecuting attorney's office.

Consider the equity impacts of the Public Rule being issued. Engage with communities likely to be impacted by the rule utilizing King County Equity tools to guide your community engagement <https://kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/tools-resources.aspx>

5. Formal Review. As required by King County Code 2.98, rules must go through a formal review process. The process must provide an opportunity for public comment for a period of at least forty-five days. The formal review process must include:
 - A. Publish a Notice of Intent to Adopt Public Rules in the Official County Newspaper (currently the Seattle Times). The notice must include:
 - I. reference to the authority under which the rule is proposed,
 - II. a statement of either the terms or substance of the proposed rule, and
 - III. the ways in which interested persons may present their views on the rule. The department should permit persons to present their views at a public meeting, if practicable.

Legal notices must be emailed to Legals@seattletimes.com two days prior to the desired publication date. Word is the preferred format for legal notices. Please include your agency name and account number when submitting your notice.

Note: The amount of time a notice must run may be dictated by an RCW, KCC or other law. If this does not apply to your specific rule, we recommend allowing the notice to run for at least a week.

 - B. Circulate the proposed Public Rule by email to the clerk of the council, each member of the county council, and all other persons or parties who have made timely request of the agency for advance notice of its rule-making procedures.
 - I. Send a draft of the rule and the Review and Comment Form (template available on [Tools and Templates web page](#)) to ZZGroup, Public Rules Review Group.
 - C. File a notice with ARMMS.
 6. Collect Comments and Finalize. After the forty-five day comment period has elapsed and steps 5A, 5B and 5C are complete; collect all comments and responses. Per KCC 2.98.060, the department should make an effort to provide written responses to all comments before the rule is adopted. Department should revise the public rule based on comments. If the revised rule is significantly different than the original, resubmit for comment (redo step 5).
- The public rule should be finalized and sent for signature by the department director, or other individual, as required. An electronic version, Microsoft Word or similar format, of the rule must be sent to ARMMS.
7. Signature. The public rule should be signed by the department director or other required individual. Digital signatures are encouraged. DocuSign is the county's official digital signature platform.
 8. Send to ARMMS. Digitally signed rules must be emailed to ARMMS immediately (policies@kingcounty.gov). The rule will be published to the King County Internet site <https://www.kingcounty.gov/about/policies.aspx>. If the original signed rule was not digitally signed, the originating department must OCR scan the document to PDF/A before sending to ARMMS. The public rule becomes effective 30 days after filing with ARMMS.

9. Dissemination. After publishing to the internet, ARMMS will send a formal announcement to the Executive Policies Manual Station ZZ Group. The issuing department should take whatever additional means to disseminate as needed.

Developing Emergency Rules

If the department finds that immediate adoption or amendment of a rule is necessary for the preservation of the public health, safety or general welfare, and that observance of the requirements of notice and opportunity to present views on the proposed rule would be contrary to the public interest, the department may dispense with the notice, comment and public meeting requirements and adopt the rule or amendment as an emergency rule or amendment.

Procedures

1. Identify the need for a rule. The department or staff person responsible for developing the emergency rule should do all the research and writing to determine if an emergency rule is needed and appropriate.
2. Draft a rule. A brief statement of the reasons that an emergency rule is necessary and why the requirements for public notice and opportunity for public comment would be contrary to the public interest must be incorporated into the rule. The person responsible for developing the emergency rule should draft the rule using the template provided by ARMMS.
3. Contact ARMMS. Once a draft is in place, the department or staff person should contact ARMMS to obtain a document code for the rule. The ARMMS section is responsible for coding and indexing all public rules.
4. Internal Review. This review process will depend on the content or effect of the review. The draft should be reviewed by interested parties, including high level staff in the executive's office and/or the department(s) working on the rule. Other reviews may include human resources, labor relations, risk management, information technology, and a legal review by the Prosecuting Attorney's Office.
5. Collect Comments and Finalize. Department should revise the public rule based on comments during internal review. The public rule should be finalized and sent for signature by the department director, or other individual, as required. An electronic version, Microsoft Word or similar format, of the emergency rule must be sent to ARMMS.
6. Signature. The emergency rule should be signed by the department director or other required individual. Digital signatures are encouraged. DocuSign is the county's official digital signature platform.
7. Send to ARMMS. Digitally signed emergency rules should be sent to ARMMS immediately (policies@kingcounty.gov). The emergency rule will be published to the King County internet site <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/executive-services/data-information-services/policies/tools-templates>. If the original signed policy was not digitally signed, the originating department must OCR scan to PDF/A

before sending to ARMMS. The emergency rule becomes effective the day it is filed with ARMMS.

8. Dissemination. After publishing to the internet, ARMMS will send a formal announcement to the Executive Policies Manual Station ZZ Group. The issuing department should take whatever additional means to disseminate as needed.
9. Expiration. Emergency Rules expire 150 (one hundred fifty) days after the effective date.

Managing Directives

After a directive is implemented, there may be ongoing maintenance to ensure it remains relevant, effective and compliant. Some directives may have associated procedures or require training for affected agencies. It is important to keep procedures and training up-to-date and accessible if the directive is active.

Additionally, most directives have consequences for non-compliance or other accountability measures. It is important to clearly communicate all requirements with affected agencies and interested parties.

Rescinding Directives

1. **Rescinding or repealing executive policies or orders** requires the same level of approval as enactment and shall be accomplished by an executive order. Multiple executive policies may be rescinded by a single executive order.
2. **Rescinding or repealing rules** shall follow the same process by which they were developed and enacted. A public rule is required to rescind or repeal a public rule.

Document Coding System

All Policies, Orders and Rules will be coded by ARMMS. The coding by is based on a classification system that is maintained and updated by ARMMS.

The format for all directives coded by ARMMS will be:

[primary code]-[secondary]-[chronological number]-[number of version]-[directive type]

For example: **INF-7-1-1-EP**

INF: Information Management (primary code)

7: Directives Management (secondary code)

1: first directive published under the primary and secondary code combination

1: number of times the original directive has been superseded

EP: Executive Policy (directive type)

Abbreviations of Directive Types:

EO: Emergency Order or Executive Order

EP: Executive Policy

PR: Emergency Rule or Public Rule

Primary Functional Codes:

ACO - Administrative Coordination

ART - Arts Management

ASM - Assessment Management

BUD - Budget Management

CIP – Capital Projects

CON - Contracting, Procurement
and Sale Management

CPM - Community Program
Management

DET - Detention Management

ELE - Election Management

FES - Facility, Equipment and
Supply Management

FIN - Financial Management

INF - Information Management

IRG - Intergovernmental Relations

JDC - Judicial - District Court

JJS - Juvenile Justice Services

JSC - Judicial - Superior Court

LES - Legislative Management

LGL - Legal Management

LIC - Licensing

LUD - Land Use/Development
Management

PAR - Park Program Management

PAY - Payroll

PER - Personnel Management

PFC - Public Facilities
Management

PHL - Public Health Management

PPR - Public Prosecution
Management

PRE - Public Relations

PSF - Public Safety Management

PUT - Public Utilities Management

RPM - Real Property Management

Templates and Forms

All of the below templates and forms are available at <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/executive-services/data-information-services/policies/tools-templates>.

Policy Template
Policy Checklist
Required Policy Elements Worksheet

Order Template
Order Checklist

Rule Template
Rule Checklist

Review and Comment Form