

The background of the entire page is a photograph of two men in a professional setting. The man in the foreground is smiling broadly, wearing a grey blazer over a blue checkered shirt. He is shaking hands with another man whose back is to the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing an office environment with other people and equipment.

Your 2026 Employee Handbook Update Guide

From pay transparency to AI in the workplace, here's *what changed in 2025* and how to align your policies for the year ahead.



It's time.

Your employee handbook is more than a compliance document—it's a risk management tool, a culture-defining statement, and often, your first line of defense in disputes.

Keeping it current can help reduce litigation exposure, align practices with the latest federal and state laws, and reinforce a set of consistent, defensible workplace standards.

What's Changed in 2025

Employment laws and agency guidance evolve constantly. Recent developments that may necessitate revisions to your handbooks and policies include:



Leave and time-off

Numerous states updated their paid family leave and paid sick leave laws in 2025, a handful of new state leave laws went into effect, and similar legislation has been proposed in multiple states.



Discrimination and harassment

Several states amended their discrimination laws, while the EEOC and other federal agencies increased scrutiny of DEI policies and practices.



Pay transparency

States continue to expand pay transparency laws in 2025, requiring disclosure of pay ranges (and in many jurisdictions, benefits) in job postings and upon request by employees or applicants.



AI in the workplace

AI laws are constantly evolving, particularly at the state level.



Religious accommodations

Religious accommodation requests and failure to accommodate claims are on the rise following a related Supreme Court decision in 2023.

The ROI of Annual Handbook Reviews

01

Reduce disputes and enforcement risk: Current, well-applied policies can be your first line of defense in audits, agency charges, and litigation.

02

Support consistency and culture: Clear rules reduce inconsistent management decisions and support fair, predictable treatment.

03

Enable scalable growth: Standardized policies streamline onboarding, mobility, and compliance for teams expanding across states.

04

Recruit and retain talent: Transparent, compliant pay and leave practices bolster competitiveness while reinforcing trust.

Handbook Update Checklist

Consider taking the following actions on an annual basis:

- ☐ **Conduct a gap analysis** against updated federal and state requirements.
- ☐ **Refresh core policies and state addenda** to keep a single national handbook workable.
- ☐ **Train managers and HR** to ensure policies are applied consistently.
- ☐ **Communicate clearly to employees** with concise updates and effective dates.
- ☐ **Calendar an annual review cycle** — begin in the fall, roll out in January.

Moving Forward

Employee handbooks shouldn't be “one and done.” Regular updates keep policies compliant with evolving laws and ensure your workplace culture stays aligned with today's workforce. Treating your handbook as a living, scalable framework is one of the most effective steps employers can take to protect the business and support employees.

Need help tailoring your policies? OGC's employment attorneys can guide you through a practical, risk-aware update process that aligns with both compliance requirements and company culture.

Contact us to schedule a handbook review.
www.outsideogc.com

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