

Welcome to *Policy Matters*, an engaging and informative e-newsletter featuring expert insight and analysis on emerging relocation products, policies and services that can provide immediate benefit to your organization.

The Tone of Your Relocation Policy May Impact the Outcome

The decision to relocate an employee or new hire is the result of significant effort and evaluation by a company. Agreeing to relocate at the request of an organization is not always an easy decision for an individual and his/her family—especially in today’s difficult home selling environment.

When describing your company’s relocation policy it is important to remember that regardless of the circumstances, agreeing to relocate will bring increased opportunities for employees – but can also begin a stressful and sometimes life-changing process. When crafting or revising the policy it is advisable to look beyond the level of benefits provided. You should also consider whether the policy will support the employee at the beginning of the relocation and if it flows in a logical progression and anticipates questions that will be asked.

In order to set the right tone in a relocation policy, there are a number of key points to keep in mind:

Optimistic Empathy

Begin your policy with a supportive, positive welcome or introduction. Recognize what your company is asking employees to do and acknowledge what they may realistically face during the process. Assure employees that your company understands the relocation experience, through assisting the transferees that preceded them. Point out that following the relocation policy will minimize the disruption to their lives and to their families. Close the introduction with words of appreciation and thanks for accepting the relocation and a commitment that your company and the service providers will be with them through each step.

Rational Processes and Requirements

When describing a process or requirement in your company’s policy include the reasoning. Explaining the “why” will often increase policy compliance and reduce the level of enforcement needed. While relocation is a complex process and there are a number of hard rules to be followed, the tone of the policy needs to convey that mutual benefits will result. The key is to avoid setting a negative tone while communicating that like all other HR benefits, certain rules must be followed.

Clarity and Firmness

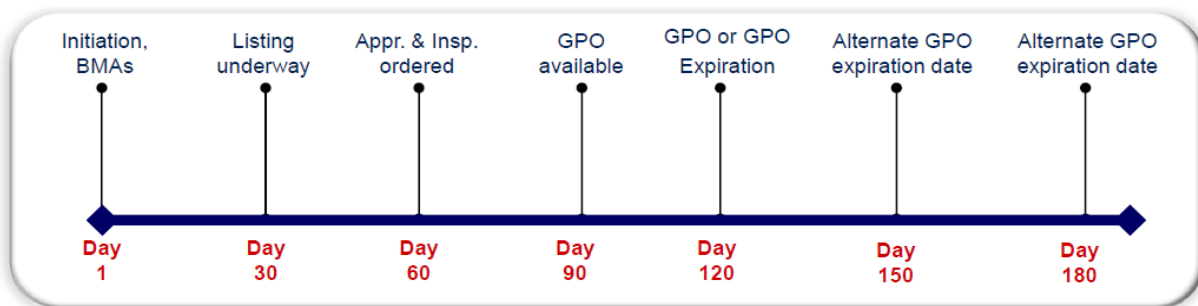
A policy needs to be clear in message and firm in statement. A policy should not give the impression that the components (benefits offered) are subject to personal interpretation and/or can be negotiated. Some policies state up front that the company is “...pleased to provide you with a quality relocation program and

exceptions are not anticipated.” While the tone should be supportive, the policy must clearly state what benefits will or will not be provided. If company style/format guidelines permit, write the relocation policy in the second person voice. Using the pronouns “you” and “your” adds a personal tone, and helps the employee understand which processes and procedures he or she must follow.

Process Flow

Successful relocation policies chronologically outline the benefit and when it will most likely take effect. For example, the house-hunting trip should precede the movement of household goods. In US domestic policies, it should include a home-sale event timeline since this process is often the most difficult for the employee to understand.

Example of the home-sale process:



Detail Versus Summary

Policies need to be detailed, yet structured simply – so employees can quickly reference specific areas and find answers efficiently. Details help protect a company from cases in which the policy does not cover the current situation. One example is in the “continuation of payment in the event of termination.” Let us say that a company terminates an employee for cause in the middle of a relocation. What does the company do if the terminated employee continues to submit relocation expenses? If the policy does not specifically state that relocation benefits will cease on the date an employee is terminated for cause, then the ex-employee has a strong case for the continuation of benefits beyond termination.

A properly written policy will not be short; however, there is a need for summaries and conciseness. To ensure succinctness, include a “table of contents” and a “benefits at a glance” section. An employee then has a shortened version of the policy that he/she can use without having to re-read all the detail in the policy itself. However, it is critical for the company to state that the full written policy will dictate how the policy is administered and will be the controlling document if questions/disputes arise.

Policy is the Foundation of the Relocation Experience

The goal of an effective relocation is when transferees “do the right things at the right times for the right reasons with the right results.” The policy is a key in setting the stage for this desired outcome, and the tone is an essential element in driving employee satisfaction and efficient use of company relocation dollars.

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