JIS IT GOVERNANCE POLICY DRAFT – FOR DISCUSSION

Background

On March 5, 2010, the JISC approved the draft IT Governance Framework. A key element of putting the framework into operation is the establishment by JISC of formal policy in the area of IT governance. This will give AOC clear guidance as it undertakes implementation of the IT Governance Framework. It is also consistent with the larger plan to formally adopt JISC guidance and practice into a cohesive set of written policies.

The following are some general rules on how to write a policy, and the relationship between policies, standards, and guidelines.

Policies, Standards & Guidelines

Policies:

Policies are mandatory and can be thought of as the equivalent of organization-specific law. Policies are management instructions indicating a predetermined course of action, or a way to handle a problem or situation. Policies are high-level statements that provide guidance to those who must make present and future decisions. Policies are generalized requirements that must be written down and communicated to certain groups of people inside, and in some cases outside, the organization. Policies also can be considered to be business rules.

A. A policy mandates standards for acceptable conduct.
B. Policies are high-level requirement statements that require compliance.
C. Policies provide general instructions, while standards provide specific requirements.
D. Policies are intended to last longer than standards and are aimed at a wider more general audience.

Elements of a policy

A. Statement of need or rationale
B. Statement of purpose
C. General principles
D. Definitions
E. Statement of relationship to existing policies

Writing Policies:

A policy, like a statute or court rule, cannot take precise account of all possible situations. Its provisions need to be general enough and clear enough to be applied to unanticipated circumstances. The overall goal for any policy is for the design to be simple, consistent and easy to use.

A. Policy statements address what is the rule rather than how to implement the rule.
B. Policy statements are readily available and their authority is clear
C. Policies should be written in clear, concise, simple language
D. Do not include information that may be quickly outdated (i.e. names)
E. Acronyms should be spelled it out the first time they are used in the policy.
F. As a body, policies represent a consistent, logical framework for action.
G. A policy should tell the reader why it exists, to whom it applies, when and under what circumstances it applies, and its major conditions or restrictions.
H. A policy should make reference to any previous policies so as to establish a historical and legal context of the current policy.

Guidelines:

A. Guidelines are high-level suggestions based on principles, but unlike policies, guidelines are <u>not</u> mandatory. Guidelines give general recommendations to follow to achieve desired results and often refer to best practices.

Standards:

Standards are more specific than policies and guidelines and cover details such as implementation steps, concepts, specifications and other specifics.

I. Standards are intended to last only a few years. Standards will need to be changed considerably more often than policies because the manual procedures, organization structures, business processes and information mentioned in standards change so rapidly.
II. Standards cover the details, measurements and procedures of how to implement policies in a specific way.