

The BrightLine Handbook.

Ninety-four people, seventeen countries, no offices. This is the written version of how that works — hours, pay, leave, on-call, security and what we owe each other in writing.

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EFFECTIVE	SUPERSEDES	OWNER	APPLIES-TO
2026-04-06	v3.2.1 2025-01-13	Ava Cruz Head of People	All employees and contractors

read-first	§01 and §03, in your first week. Everything else when you need it.
source	github.com/brightline/handbook — every change is a reviewed pull request
to-change-it	Open one. Two reviewers, one of whom must sit outside the leadership team.

Why this document exists at all

A note from Alex Rivera, who wrote the first version of it in a single sitting in 2019 and has been arguing with it ever since.

Brightline has never had an office. That was a constraint in 2019 — three of us in three countries and no money for a lease — and it is a decision now. Ninety-four people across seventeen countries do not accidentally agree on what a working week is. They agree on it because somebody wrote it down and everybody can read it.

So this is the written version. Not a summary of the culture, not a deck: the actual rules, with the actual numbers, at the version they are today. If a policy is not in here, it is not policy, and you should not be held to it.

Three things worth flagging before you read on. The first is section 3. Our leave policy has a floor, not a ceiling — thirty days, of which at least twenty must be taken. Unlimited leave sounds generous and reliably means people take less. We measured it in 2022 and switched.

The second is section 5. On-call is real work at an inconvenient hour, so it is paid as such and it comes back to you as time. Nobody at Brightline is on-call more than one week in six, and if a rotation cannot hold that, we hire before we ask.

The third is that this document is public. It sits on our careers site at the same version you are reading. That is deliberate — it is much harder to write a policy you would be embarrassed by when a candidate can read it before they apply.

It changes about four times a year. Every change goes through a pull request, gets reviewed by Ava Cruz and at least one person outside the leadership team, and lands with a changelog line. If something here is wrong, unclear, or quietly unfair, open one. Nine of the last fourteen changes came from someone who was not asked to look.

Alex Rivera

Co-founder and Chief Executive · Brightline

Lisbon

2026-04-06

changelog — what moved in v4.0.0

2026-04-06	Leave floor raised from 15 to 20 days, and the summer shutdown extended to a full week (§3.1).
2026-04-06	On-call stipend raised to \$600 a week, and out-of-hours pages now return as time in lieu at 1:1 (§5.3).
2026-03-11	Location factor for Tier 3 raised from 0.72 to 0.78 after the annual market review (§2.2).
2026-02-02	Hardware keys now required for every production role, replacing app-based codes (§6.1).
2025-11-18	Parental leave equalised at 18 weeks for any parent, with no distinction by role or gender (§3.4).

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the company, in numbers

headcount	94, of whom 71 are employees and 23 are long-term contractors
countries	17, with an employer of record in 11 of them
founded	2019, incorporated in Delaware, no registered office space
time-zones	UTC–8 to UTC+10, with squads built to overlap
meetups	Two a year, five days each, paid

who owns what

this-document	Ava Cruz, Head of People
pay-and-bands	Dana Whitfield, Head of Finance
on-call	Maya Chen, VP Engineering
security	Sam Ortiz, Security Lead
appeals	Alex Rivera, Chief Executive

how to read this

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|--|
| 01 | Read §01 and §03 in your first week. Everything else can wait until you need it. | 03 | Every figure is current at the effective date on the cover and reviewed each April. |
| 02 | Sign and return the acknowledgement within ten working days of your start date. | 04 | Where this document and your local employment contract differ, the contract governs. |

Six operating principles

Every policy in sections 1 to 8 is one of these six, written out at length. Where a rule and a principle appear to disagree, the principle is what we meant.

01 Write it down, or it did not happen.

A decision that lives in a call is a decision only the people on that call can act on. Every decision that outlives the week gets a document with a date, an owner and the alternatives that were rejected.

02 Default to asynchronous, escalate to synchronous.

Start in writing. Move to a call when the thread has gone three rounds without converging, and write up what the call concluded. A meeting is an expensive tool, not a default one.

03 Nobody's inconvenient hour is free.

A 22:00 page, a 06:00 handover, a meeting scheduled outside someone's published window — all of them cost something, and at Brightline they are paid or returned as time, not absorbed quietly.

04 Publish the number.

Bands, the location factor, the on-call stipend, the leave floor — all published to everyone, inside the company and out. If a number is uncomfortable to publish, that is information about the number.

05 The person closest to the work decides.

Approval thresholds exist for spend and for production access, and nowhere else. You do not need permission to change your working hours, pick a library, or reject a piece of scope you cannot deliver.

06 Say the difficult thing early and plainly.

A slipping date, a design you disagree with, a colleague's behaviour that is not acceptable. Early is cheap and late is not, and nobody here has ever been penalised for the early version.

§ 01

how-we-work

Where and when you work, how much overlap your squad needs, what a meeting has to earn before it exists, and what has to be written down.

1.1 the shape of a week

working-hours	You choose them. Publish your window in the directory and keep it accurate within an hour; that published window is what colleagues are entitled to rely on.
overlap	Four hours a day with your squad, agreed at squad level and recorded in the squad's charter. Squads are formed to make that possible, not the other way round.
contracted-week	40 hours, or the statutory week in your country if it is shorter. Consistently working beyond it is a staffing problem and is escalated as one.
no-meeting-day	Wednesday, company-wide. No recurring meeting may be scheduled on it, and an incident is the only thing that overrides it.
response-time	One working day for anything asynchronous. Nothing at Brightline needs an answer faster than that except a page from the on-call system.
location	Anywhere you have the right to work and a connection that holds a call. Moving country needs 60 days' notice so payroll and the employer of record can follow you.

1.2 the meeting budget

Every person carries a hard cap of three recurring meetings. Adding a fourth means removing one, and the removal happens first.

A meeting needs three things to exist: a document circulated at least twelve hours ahead, a named owner, and a decision it is trying to reach. Without all three, anyone invited may decline it without explanation and without it counting against them.

Recordings and notes go in the squad channel within a working day. If nobody writes them, the meeting did not happen and the decision is not binding.

1.3 written-first in practice

Anything that changes an interface, a schema, a price or a policy gets an RFC. Two reviewers, five working days open, and a decision recorded at the top with the date it was made.

1.4 being reachable, and not

Outside your published window you are not expected to read anything. Notifications off is the default and the company will never ask you to turn them on.

Nobody sends an @channel outside working hours. If it genuinely cannot wait, it is an incident and it goes through the pager, which is the one channel that is allowed to wake you.

Before any absence over two days, name your cover in the squad channel. Cover is a person, not a rota entry and not a shared inbox.

1.5 when we are all together

Two company meetups a year, five days each, travel and accommodation paid. Attendance is expected and the days are working days. Squads may hold one additional offsite a year with Maya Chen's agreement and a budget agreed in advance.

§ 02

pay-and-equity

One global band scale, one multiplier for where you live, one review a year. No negotiation at offer, and no secret exceptions afterwards.

2.1 the band scale, USD base

BAND	TITLE	BASE
E2	Engineer	\$104,000
E3	Engineer II	\$126,000
E4	Senior Engineer	\$152,000
E5	Staff Engineer	\$181,000
E6	Principal Engineer	\$214,000
M3	Engineering Manager	\$168,000
M4	Director	\$196,000

2.2 location factor

TIER	EXAMPLES	FACTOR
tier-1	US metro, Zurich, London, Sydney	1.00
tier-2	Berlin, Toronto, Barcelona, Auckland	0.89
tier-3	Lisbon, Kraków, Cape Town, Bogotá	0.78

- Your factor is set by where you live, not where you are from, and is reviewed each March against published market data.
- If you move to a lower tier, pay is held flat until the band catches up. It is never cut.

2.6 how a band is decided

Bands describe scope and independence, not years served. E4 owns a system; E5 owns a problem across systems; E6 changes what the company thinks is possible. The written definitions sit beside the scale and are the only thing calibration is allowed to argue from.

Manager and individual-contributor tracks are paid identically at every equivalent band, and moving between them carries no penalty in either direction.

2.3 the year

review-opens	1 May — self-assessment and two peers you choose
calibration	Early June, across every squad at once
outcome	Mid June, in a call and then in writing
effective	1 July, backdated if the paperwork slips
promotions	Same cycle. There is no second round
payday	Last working day of the month

2.4 equity

Every employee receives options at offer and again at promotion. Four-year vest, one-year cliff, monthly thereafter, and a ten-year window to exercise after you leave — you do not lose what you earned because you could not fund the exercise in ninety days.

The current strike price, the last 409A valuation and the total share count are in the equity document, which everyone can read whether or not they hold options.

2.5 what we do not do

- No negotiation at offer. The band is the band, and the person who negotiates hardest does not get paid more than the person who does not.
- No individual bonus, no commission, no spot awards.
- No pay secrecy. You may discuss your pay with anyone, and no contract at Brightline has ever said otherwise.

§ 03

time-off

Thirty days, of which twenty must actually be taken. Two weeks when the whole company stops. Everything else is a floor set by your country, never a ceiling set by us.

TYPE	ENTITLEMENT	NOTICE	HOW IT WORKS
annual-leave	30 days	2× the length	Plus the public holidays of the country you live in. A minimum of 20 days must be taken each calendar year.
shutdown	2 weeks	—	The first week of August and the last week of December. Not deducted from your 30 days. Only on-call works.
carry-over	5 days	By 31 December	Taken by 31 March or lost. Days above five are paid out only where local law requires it.
sick-leave	Uncapped	Same day	No note for under five consecutive days. Beyond 20 working days, income protection takes over at 70% of base.
parental	18 weeks	90 days	Full pay for any parent, any gender, after six months' service. Local statutory entitlement is added, never subtracted.
pregnancy-loss	10 days	None	Paid, for either partner, recorded as leave with no reason attached and no evidence requested.
bereavement	10 days	Tell your lead	Extended by agreement, and the definition of family is whatever you say it is.
sabbatical	6 weeks paid	6 months	Once at four years' service and again at eight. Not carried, not exchangeable for pay.
unpaid	Up to 3 months	3 months	Agreed with Ava Cruz. Equity keeps vesting; the role is held open.

3.1 why there is a floor

Brightline ran an unlimited policy from 2019 to 2022. Median leave taken was fourteen days a year, and the people taking least were the people who most needed it. We replaced it with a number and a floor, and the median is now twenty-six.

Your manager is measured on whether their squad clears twenty days. If you reach October under twelve, Ava Cruz will contact you directly and it is not a formality.

3.2 booking it

Put it in the calendar, tell your squad, name your cover. Approval is needed only for a block over three weeks or for leave that collides with a launch date already committed to a customer.

3.3 the shutdown weeks

Twice a year the whole company stops: the first week of August and the week between Christmas and New Year. Support runs on a skeleton on-call rotation, paid at the \$5.3 rate, and volunteers are taken before anyone is asked.

Nothing ships in a shutdown week. No deploy, no launch, no customer commitment that lands inside it — a rule that exists because the alternative was tested twice and failed twice.

3.4 returning

Any absence over six weeks comes back through a phased return: 60% of hours in week one, 80% in week two, full from week three, at full pay throughout. Nobody returns from parental or medical leave straight into an on-call rotation.

§ 04

kit-and-expenses

What the company buys you on day one, what it keeps paying for every month, and the three thresholds that decide who has to say yes before you spend.

4.1 the remote setup

setup-grant	\$2,500 on joining. Desk, chair, monitor, light, whatever your room actually needs. No receipts under \$200, no itemised justification, and it does not come back if you leave.
refresh	\$600 a year from your second anniversary, for replacing anything the grant bought.
laptop	Specified by you from the standard list, replaced on a three-year cycle or sooner if it stops being adequate for the work.
connectivity	\$120 a month , paid with salary, covering internet and mobile. No receipts.
coworking	Up to \$350 a month against an invoice, if you would rather not work from home. Take it or leave it; nobody is asked which.
wellbeing	\$100 a month , spent however you like, with no category list and no approval.

4.2 approval thresholds

AMOUNT	WHO SAYS YES
under \$500	Nobody. Spend it and file it.
\$500-\$5,000	Your manager, in advance
over \$5,000	Dana Whitfield, in advance
recurring	Dana Whitfield, at any amount
customer-data	Sam Ortiz, at any amount

- File within 30 days in the expense tool, coded to a squad. Reimbursed with the next month's salary.
- Anything under \$500 needs no approval at all — that is the whole of principle 05 in practice.

4.5 what is not reimbursed

- Anything already covered by a monthly stipend — a second router, a nicer chair, a gym.
- Fines, penalties, lounge passes and airport upgrades.
- A partner's travel to a meetup, and any personal day either side of one.
- Software a squad has not agreed to run, and any tool that would touch customer data without §6 review.

4.3 travel

WHAT	STANDARD
flights <6h	Economy, booked 21 days ahead
flights >6h	Premium economy, any role
hotel	Booked centrally for meetups
meals	\$70 a day, no receipts
rail	Any class cheaper than flying

- Add personal days either side of a meetup at your own cost; the company will not object and will not pay for them.

4.4 learning

\$2,000 a year for courses, conferences, books and certifications, plus five days of study leave. Approved by your manager, not by finance, and unspent budget does not carry over.

§ 05

on-call

We sell uptime, so someone carries a pager. This section says who, how often, what wakes them, what it pays, and what comes back to them afterwards.

5.1 severity ladder

SEV	WHAT IT MEANS	PAGES	ACK TARGET	WHO IS PULLED IN
sev-1	Customer-facing outage, or data at risk	Immediately, any hour	5 min	On-call, squad lead, Maya Chen, and comms within 15 minutes
sev-2	Major degradation, no data at risk	Immediately, any hour	15 min	On-call, and the owning squad at the start of their window
sev-3	Single-customer or partial impact	Working hours only	2 hours	On-call, escalated to the squad if it is still open at handover
sev-4	Cosmetic, or a workaround exists	Never	Next day	Filed as a ticket and prioritised in the normal way

5.2 the rotation

shift-length	Seven days, handover at 10:00 UTC on Mondays
frequency	No more than one week in six. If a rotation cannot hold that, we hire
secondary	Always staffed, always a different time zone
eligibility	After 90 days and two shadowed shifts
opt-out	Any week, no reason given, cover found by the lead

5.3 what it pays

weekly-stipend	\$600 for a primary week, \$250 for secondary, paid whether or not you are paged
out-of-hours	Time in lieu at 1:1 for every hour worked outside your published window
night-page	A page between 00:00 and 06:00 local buys the next day off, in full, automatically
shutdown-weeks	Double stipend, and volunteers taken before anyone is asked
time-in-lieu	Booked like leave, does not expire, not deducted from your 30 days

5.4 after an incident

- 01** Every sev-1 and sev-2 gets a written review within five working days, published to the whole company and, for a sev-1, to the affected customers.
- 02** Reviews are blameless by construction: they name systems and decisions, never a person, and the person who was on-call does not write it.
- 03** Every review produces owned, dated actions. Unclosed actions from a sev-1 block new feature work in the owning squad after 30 days.
- 04** If a rotation pages more than six times in a week, Maya Chen stops feature work in that squad until the noise is fixed. This has happened twice and worked twice.

§ 06

security

Customers give us their infrastructure telemetry on the strength of this section. It is audited annually, it is not negotiable, and it applies from your first hour.

6.1 the baseline

- [] **Hardware key** on every account. App codes and SMS are not accepted anywhere, for anyone, including founders.
- [] **Full-disk encryption** and the managed device profile, verified at enrolment and continuously after.
- [] **Password manager** for everything. Nothing shared in a message, a doc or a repository.
- [] **Screen lock** at five minutes, and manually whenever you leave the machine anywhere public.
- [] **Company work on company devices.** No repository, no customer data, no console on a personal machine.
- [] **Approved AI tooling only.** Customer data may not be pasted into any general assistant; the reviewed one is documented in the security handbook.
- [] **Report in one hour.** A lost device, a phished link, a message to the wrong person. Reporting fast has never been held against anyone here.

6.2 when you travel

Take a loaner for any border crossing where you would rather not carry your working machine — Sam Ortiz ships one, no reason required. Never connect to a customer environment from a network you do not control without the VPN.

6.5 if you think something has gone wrong

Report it in the security channel or directly to Sam Ortiz within one hour, whatever the hour is where you are. Say what you know and what you are unsure of; do not wait until you have worked out how bad it is.

Nothing is expected of you after that except availability. Sam runs the containment, and the written review that follows names systems, never people.

Brightline has never disciplined anyone for an honestly reported mistake, and the number of incidents caught early is the only security metric on the company dashboard.

6.3 data classes

CLASS	EXAMPLES	WHERE IT MAY LIVE
public	Docs, this handbook, pricing	Anywhere
internal	Roadmaps, RFCs, board decks	Company systems
customer	Telemetry, incident data, logs	Production only, access-logged
restricted	Credentials, personal data, keys	Vault only, never exported

6.4 production access

default	Nobody has standing access to production, including the founders
grant	Time-boxed to four hours, requested with a reason, approved by a second person
during-incident	Self-granted with the incident ID, reviewed next day
logging	Every session recorded and attributable
review	Quarterly, by Sam Ortiz; unused grants removed

- A deliberate breach of §6.1 or §6.4 is gross misconduct whether or not any data moved. An honest mistake reported inside the hour is a fix and a thank-you.

6.6 what customers hold us to

soc-2	Type 2, audited annually
pen-test	External, twice a year, summary published
breach-notice	Affected customers told within 24 hours

§ 07

conduct

How we write to each other, what is never acceptable, and the four steps that exist so that no concern has to sit with one person alone.

7.1 the code of conduct

Harassment, bullying and discrimination on any ground are gross misconduct. Distributed work does not soften that: a thread, a direct message, a video call and a meetup bar are all the workplace, and so is any channel the company pays for.

7.2 writing to each other

- Assume competence and good intent. Text strips tone, and the reader is not being difficult when they miss yours.
- Disagree in the thread, not around it. A concern raised in a private message about a public decision helps nobody.
- Say the thing. Ask the direct question, give the direct answer, and do not wrap a decision in five paragraphs of softening.
- English is the working language and it is a second language for most of the company. Write plainly; never make an idiom the load-bearing part of a sentence.

7.3 outside work

Side projects and open-source work are yours, and Brightline claims nothing you build outside working hours on your own equipment. Declare paid work for a direct competitor, and any advisory role at a customer, to Ava Cruz.

7.4 speaking publicly

Talk about your work. Do not publish a customer name, an incident before its review is out, an unreleased price or anything from a board deck. Personal opinions are yours; do not attach the company to them.

Writing publicly about how Brightline works is encouraged and paid for as working time. Most of what is in this handbook was a post first, and the engineering blog has never been reviewed by anyone other than an engineer.

7.5 raising a concern

01 say-it-directly

To the person, or to your manager. Most things end here and that is the outcome we want.

no record kept

02 escalate-to-people

To Ava Cruz, in writing or on a call. She confirms back in writing what she understood, so you know it landed.

acknowledged in 3 working days

03 formal-investigation

Run by someone with no stake, or by an external investigator where a founder or a manager is involved. You may bring a colleague to every meeting.

concluded in 15 working days

04 appeal

To Alex Rivera, or to a board member if the concern involves him, within ten working days of the outcome. Final inside the company; it touches no right you hold locally.

heard within 10 working days

- Retaliation for raising a concern, or for supporting someone who does, is gross misconduct and is treated as seriously as the original complaint.
- An anonymous route to the board's audit committee is published in the security handbook and is not routed through anyone named on this page.
- Every step above works in writing. Nobody at Brightline has to say a difficult thing out loud, on a call, in a second language, to be taken seriously.
- You may bring a colleague, a union representative or a support person to any meeting at steps 03 and 04, and to step 02 if you would rather not be alone in it.
- Where a concern involves someone in a different country, the investigation follows the stricter of the two jurisdictions' requirements, never the more convenient one.

§ 08

joining-leaving

The first ninety days, the notice each side gives, what happens to your options — and the page you sign and send back.

8.1 ramp and notice

STAGE	YOU GIVE	WE GIVE
first-90-days	2 weeks	2 weeks
ic-after-90	4 weeks	4 weeks
lead-or-above	8 weeks	8 weeks

- Checkpoints at day 30, 60 and 90, each booked in advance with a written note afterwards. Nothing at day 90 is ever a surprise.
- Unvested options stop at your leaving date; vested ones stay exercisable for ten years.
- Unused leave is paid where local law requires it. Devices are collected by courier; nothing is deducted from final pay.
- Everyone leaving is offered an exit conversation with someone outside their reporting line, and what is said in it is summarised to the leadership team without a name attached.
- Alumni keep read access to the handbook and to the public archive of incident reviews. Rejoining is common enough that we wrote it down.

8.2 your first week

- [] Contract and local right-to-work paperwork returned to Ava Cruz
- [] Hardware key enrolled and the device profile verified
- [] Working window published in the directory
- [] Squad charter read; overlap hours agreed with your lead
- [] Setup grant spent, or a plan for it written down
- [] §01 and §03 read in full; §05 before your first shadowed shift
- [] The acknowledgement signed and returned

acknowledgement

Sign and return this page to Ava Cruz, Head of People, within ten working days of your start date. Signing confirms the five statements below; it does not vary your employment contract or any right you hold under the law where you live.

- 01 I have received and read The Brightline Handbook, v4.0.0, effective 2026-04-06.
- 02 I accept the security baseline in §6.1 and the production access rules in §6.4.
- 03 I have published my working window and agreed overlap hours with my squad under §1.1.
- 04 I know the four steps in §7.5 and that using them carries no consequence for me.
- 05 I will open a pull request against this document rather than assume anything in it is wrong.

signature	print-name	start-date	countersigned	
people Ava Cruz people@brightline.dev	engineering Maya Chen maya@brightline.dev	security Sam Ortiz security@brightline.dev	finance Dana Whitfield finance@brightline.dev	appeals Alex Rivera alex@brightline.dev