



Complaint Procedures: Complaint by a Volunteer

Introduction

However good a program's procedures and treatment of volunteers may be, problems will occasionally arise. Some organizations adopt formal grievance and problem solving procedures to deal with such difficulties; others prefer less formal mechanisms for resolving disputes. The example procedures below incorporate both approaches, with the hope that most complaints or grievances can be resolved informally. Whatever the system, the procedures should be clear and understandable. The key is to make sure there is some form of system in place so that each person is not inventing a process as it goes along. If the procedure is clear, the complaint is more likely to be dealt with efficiently, objectively, and accurately. If the procedure is not clear then the complaint is more likely to escalate, more likely to be subject to emotional reactions, and more likely to be applied inconsistently over time.

Informal Resolution Procedure

Volunteers will initially discuss their complaint or grievance with their SHICK Coordinator, explaining their view of what has happened and what they feel needs to be done to resolve the situation.

The SHICK Coordinator will, if necessary, gather more information, determine if the complaint warrants further action and, as appropriate, act to resolve the complaint. This determination should be made within 7 days, with explanation and notification provided to the volunteer (oral notification may be sufficient when the complaint is resolved at the informal level). Explanation should also be provided of the volunteer's right, if dissatisfied with the supervisor's decision, to initiate a formal complaint.

The KDADS Medicare Grants staff may, as requested, offer advice and assistance to the SHICK Coordinator during this deliberation.

If the concern involves the volunteer's SHICK Coordinator, the volunteer may choose to report the concern directly to the Medicare Grants Regional Manager who should discuss the complaint with the volunteer.

Allegations involving a serious breach of policies or procedures or any breach of law will be immediately communicated to the KDADS Medicare Grants staff, or SHICK Director. The incident reporting procedures (see Policy 2.8: Incident reporting) should be followed in these circumstances.

Formal Resolution Procedure

Stage One

If the volunteer is not satisfied with the supervisor's resolution of the complaint, the volunteer will put their complaint in writing and deliver it to their SHICK Coordinator or, at their discretion, forward it directly to the KDADS Medicare Grants staff, or SHICK Director, depending upon whom the complaint is against. The volunteer should be encouraged to include the following in their complaint:

- The name of the complainant and person against whom the complaint is filed;
- The date of the incident precipitating the complaint;
- A concise description of the complaint and any precipitating incidences;

- The identity of anyone with relevant information or an explanation of where additional information can be found;
- Any documentation relevant to the complaint and where it can be found;
- Other information that supports the complaint;
- A description of action previously taken by the volunteer to resolve the complaint, and
- A listing of all desired outcomes and reasons why such outcomes are appropriate.

The written complaint will be forwarded within 5 days by the SHICK Coordinator to the Medicare Grants staff (or the SHICK Director, if applicable). The KDADS Medicare Grants staff will establish a file to hold all materials gathered during investigation of the complaint and should maintain a written timeline and record of actions taken during the resolution procedure.

The KDADS Medicare Grants staff may again attempt to resolve the complaint in an informal manner by talking with the individuals involved and taking appropriate action. One option at this stage is for the KDADS Medicare Grants staff to discuss the complaint directly with the volunteer and attempt to develop an agreeable resolution. Another option is for the KDADS Medicare Grants staff to arrange a meeting between the volunteer and their SHICK Coordinator to discuss the complaint and attempt to develop a consensus resolution. As appropriate, other individuals directly involved in the situation may be included in these discussions.

Stage Two

If the volunteer still feels that the issue has not been resolved satisfactorily then the matter should be referred to an individual designated by the program to deal with resolution of complaints. This could be the KDADS Medicare Grants staff, another staff member, the SHICK Director, or any other designee. This role may be on a permanent or ad hoc basis.

The individual designated to review complaints and grievances will then review all applicable information and evidence, re-interviewing appropriate parties as necessary, and render a formal decision of the person's response to the complaint. This determination should occur within 14 working days of receipt of the volunteer's decision not to accept an informal judgment.

Notice of the decision will be sent to all affected parties, along with a description of what next steps might occur based on the formal decision. Possible next steps might include, depending upon the nature of the complaint:

- Re-assignment of the volunteer to another role
- Disciplinary action against a volunteer or staff member
- Changes in the support provided the volunteer
- Additional training for a volunteer or staff member
- Adjustment in program procedures

The intent of these next steps is to both correct the problem in the immediate situation and to ensure that the individual is less likely to encounter a similar problem in the future.

Stage Three

If the volunteer wishes to appeal the formal decision then an appeal in writing can be submitted within 5 days to the SHICK Director, who will review the appeal and issue a determination within 14 days. An appeal may also be submitted by any other affected party.

This determination by the SHICK Director will constitute final disposition of the complaint or grievance.

Related Procedures

An explanation of the volunteer complaint/grievances procedure should be included in orientation of new volunteers and in the volunteer handbook.

Volunteers have the right to be accompanied to meetings or to be represented by their nominee at all meetings during this resolution process.

Complaints by volunteers shall be kept confidential other than to those directly involved in the complaint resolution procedure.

A complaint or grievance should not be viewed as a negative procedure – volunteers should feel welcome to use the procedure and the program should view it as an opportunity to learn and improve the involvement of volunteers.

Volunteers and staff members are expected to make every effort to resolve complaints fairly, promptly, and politely.

If at any time during the process or investigation, the program concludes that a volunteer has filed a claim in bad faith, has refused to cooperate in an investigation of the complaint, or has provided false information regarding the complaint, disciplinary action up to and including termination of the volunteer may be taken.

The program should realize that volunteers may quit at any time throughout the complaint and grievance process. Some volunteers may even quit before initiating the complaint and grievance process. If the volunteer quits as a result of a complaint, the volunteer should be contacted by the program, who should then acknowledge the volunteer's complaint and inform them of action that has been or will be taken by the program to address their complaint. The volunteer will also be given the opportunity to either participate in an exit interview or complete an exit survey, giving their feedback on their overall experience volunteering for the program. Even if the volunteer chooses not to participate in any or all of the complaint and grievance procedures, it behooves the program to fully address all ethical, human resources, and public relations issues raised by the complaint through phone calls and/or letters, as appropriate to the situation.