



# Management Support Unit (MSU)



## Information Sheet 8:

### Developing policies and procedures for grievances and complaints within non-government organisations

All organisations will need to handle complaints from time to time. These grievances or complaints can occur in a variety of forms and between various parties. There are disputes between staff, between staff and management, between management and management, between client and worker and visa versa.

'A grievance is a statement by an employee of a work-related problem, concern or complaint. Grievances can range from the very minor and easy to resolve, to the extremely serious, which may involve formal disciplinary action'<sup>1</sup>

#### Handling grievances

Policies and procedures in regards to grievance will vary depending on size, structure and type of organisation. Smaller organisations may have a procedure that involve all levels of management, including intervention at board level, while larger organisations may stop at a senior manager level, bringing in outside intervention long before it is ever bought to the attention of board members. There is no 'one size fits all' model.

As a first step, prior to the formal grievance process being initiated, the person making the complaint should be encouraged to resolve the issue directly with the person or persons concerned. If this is not possible or appropriate, then the formal process can begin.

#### Issues to consider

As a general rule, there are 6 key points that all grievance policies and procedures should take into account.

- **Confidentiality**

No person should have access to information on the grievance, other than those directly involved or those handling the complaint.

- **Freedom from any form of persecution or unjust repercussions**

The organisation needs to make it clear that it will not tolerate any form of persecution, harassment or discrimination towards any party

- **Handled with a minimum of fuss**

All complaints need to be handled promptly and with transparency.

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<sup>1</sup> From NSW Environment Protection Authority *Ethics Package – grievance procedures*

- **Impartiality**

All parties have an opportunity to put forward their side of the story without assumptions being made. Also no action will be taken until all information is collected and if any party requests support, it should be provided.

- **Compassion**

All people handling the complaint need to be sensitive to the needs of those directly involved.

- **Promptness**

Grievances should be dealt with as soon as possible. Time limits should be formally agreed to at all stages of the process.

Most grievance procedures work through certain stages, with the intention that the grievance be dealt with early on. In developing the process, the stages may involve the following:

- **Negotiation:** where two or more parties involved in the grievance, work on an agreement on how they can co-operate and resolve the issue.
- **Mediation:** where an impartial third party assists the parties towards an agreement and
- **Conciliation:** where an impartial third party assists in the process of dispute resolution

### **Withdrawing the Grievance**

The party/s who lodged the grievance, can at any time withdraw the grievance, however there is always the possibility that the other party may wish to, and have the right to continue the process, if they believe they have not had the opportunity to respond appropriately.

### **What are some of the outcomes of a grievance procedure?**

Outcomes could include the following:

- As a result of negotiation or mediation, one or both of the parties involved, may gain a better understanding of the issues and will no longer feel upset or, may be encouraged to change behaviour
- The party/s who made the complaint may receive a written or verbal apology
- The party/s complained about, may receive a written or verbal reprimand
- One or both of the parties may agree to participate in some form of counselling
- One of the parties may face disciplinary action if they were found to have breached accepted behaviour or misconduct or unsatisfactory performance has occurred.

#### **For further information:**

- If you are a member of a union, you can contact them for information or assistance.
- The Management Support Unit (contact details below) can provide further information on developing grievance policies and procedures
- The Conflict Resolution Network can assist with mediation. Contact them on 07 3410 0800 or email: [crnms@bigpond.com](mailto:crnms@bigpond.com)
- The Industrial Registrar of NSW will provide conciliation advice. Contact them on 9258 0080