



VOLUNTEER COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE (2016)

Unique Ref No: PROCV2

PEOPLE AND BUSINESS SERVICES DIRECTORATE VOLUNTEERING DEPARTMENT

Owner: Lara Rivans
Job title: Head of Volunteering

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Version: 3.5

VOLUNTEER COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Guide Dogs Volunteer Complaints Procedure is designed to enable volunteers who have a grievance arising from their volunteering activity with Guide Dogs to have the matter investigated and dealt with in a timely, fair and equitable manner.

Should the procedure for resolving issues of Volunteer Behaviour, Attitude or Ability (BAA procedure) be in progress, involving the same issues and people, the following Volunteer Complaints Procedure should be aligned with the next appropriate section of the BAA Procedure at the investigating manager's discretion. This will enable the processes to run in a joined up manner, rather than running separate meetings and investigations.

Guide Dogs take our charitable resources seriously; therefore on rare occasions we reserve the right to make a judgment to reject a complaint which lacks a sound basis, or where the relevant manager feels that a conclusive outcome will not be possible or appropriate.

Step One: Informal Discussion

If a volunteer has a grievance affecting their role as a volunteer, they should first raise it with their line manager – the person who is their key contact and allocates or supervises their work. The only exception to this would be if the line manager is the person to whom the problem relates and the volunteer feels unable to raise the grievance with them, then the matter should be referred to their line manager's own line manager or other impartial staff member from the same or another local team who will discuss the grievance with the volunteer informally. The Volunteering Department can inform a volunteer who the appropriate manager is if required.

The volunteer's line manager should log the complaint on the Volunteer Complaints/BAA database and discuss the grievance with the volunteer informally to gain further information and see what actions, if any, need to take place. It may be that the problem can be resolved without the need for a formal grievance being raised; if this is the case, the grievance needs no further action and should be marked as 'closed' in the system by the volunteer's line manager.

If during the discussion it becomes clear that the issue is more serious, the discussion should cease to allow for further investigation. The line manager should ask the volunteer if there are any witnesses or avenues of investigation they would like him/her to pursue.

- If any safeguarding concerns are suspected the line manager should telephone The Safeguarding Team on 0345 4130199, who will advise as to next steps.
- If any fraud or criminal activity is suspected the line manager should telephone a member of the Anti-Fraud and Criminal Activity Team (AFCAT) team, who will advise as to next steps.
- In these cases, this process may need to be suspended pending the outcome of a separate investigation.

Step Two: Formal Grievance

If the informal discussion does not resolve the issue and the volunteer indicates that they wish to raise a formal grievance, this must be logged onto the Volunteer Complaints/BAA database.

The volunteer should put the grievance in writing if it has not been done already. Alternatively the grievance should be summarised in the words of the volunteer, or read back to them and agreed as an accurate outline of their grievance within 5 working days of

the case being logged. Volunteers should be sent a copy of this Volunteer Complaints Procedure.

2.1. Investigation

The grievance investigation is confidential and will be undertaken with discretion solely by the investigating manager.

The Investigating Manager will ideally be the volunteer's line manager or another equivalent impartial staff member (as above). The Investigating Manager will study the facts surrounding a particular case, taking fact-based witness statements where required, within 15 working days of the case being logged.

2.2. Grievance Meeting

A meeting should be arranged between the volunteer and the individual whom the grievance is against and/or another person where appropriate who can discuss the subject the grievance relates to. The Investigating Manager will act as facilitator, to discuss and try to resolve the grievance. The Investigating Manager and the person who can discuss the subject the grievance relates to may in practice be the same person.

2.3. Before grievance meeting

A date for the meeting should be arranged, at a time and location that is suitable to all parties, as soon as is reasonably possible and in any event within 20 working days of the complaint being logged.

The volunteer should be given at least 5 working days' notice of when and where the meeting will take place and be provided with all appropriate investigation documents. Similarly the volunteer should provide any written information about the case to the Investigating Manager prior to the meeting. If requested, and it is agreeable and convenient for both parties, the meeting may take place sooner.

If the volunteer wishes, they may bring along a third party for support, such as a friend, family member or fellow volunteer, not acting in a legal capacity.

If the volunteer refuses to come to the meeting without reasonable cause or justification then the complaint will be closed. No appeal is possible in this situation, as the meeting is a basic requirement to resolve the issue.

2.4. During grievance meeting

During the meeting, the volunteer will be supported to state their case. Ideally the complaint will be resolved in the meeting. If appropriate an action plan will be discussed between both parties by the Investigating Manager with a set timescale for review.

2.5. After formal grievance meeting

A written summary of the meeting will be supplied to the volunteer within 10 working days of the date of the meeting, in their preferred format.

2.5.1 If all parties are content with the outcomes of the meeting no further action is required under this procedure and the complaint will be closed.

2.5.2 Alternatively the investigating Manager may identify actions to resolve the grievance, or extend the duration or scope of an existing action plan. To allow time for these actions to resolve the grievance, no appeal is possible until the period of the action plan has come to an end.

At the end of this time period the Investigating Manager should ensure actions are completed and arrange a follow-up call or face-to-face meeting with the volunteer. If the actions have been completed within the agreed timeframe and the matter resolved the grievance will be closed.

If the volunteer refuses to come to the review meeting without reasonable cause or justification then the grievance will be closed. No appeal is possible in this situation, as the meeting is a basic requirement to resolve the issue.

Confirmation of this follow-up call or meeting should be sent to the volunteer in their preferred format within 10 working days, with their right of appeal and name of Appeal Manager and a copy stored on the Volunteer Complaints/BAA database.

Appeal

Appeals are an opportunity for the organisation to ensure we are making the right decision, and for volunteers to challenge ones they feel are incorrect. To achieve a balance of fair and objective decision-making and appropriate use of charity resources, appeals will not simply re-investigate all previous information for a second time.

If after the actions from the formal meeting have been reviewed, the matter remains unresolved, a statement from the volunteer should be submitted to the Appeal Manager clearly indicating the basis for the appeal, stating why the case has not been handled appropriately and/or presenting new information that wasn't considered previously.

The Appeal Manager whom the volunteer should write to will be specified in the letter following the review meeting. Volunteers should send the appeal to the Appeal Manager within 10 working days of receiving the letter following the review meeting.

The Appeal manager must log this on the Volunteer Complaints/BAA database. The Appeal Manager will decide if it is reasonable to continue and must review all previous information and investigate any new information relating to the appeal statement and respond within 15 working days of receiving the request for appeal. They should provide a summary of the investigation and their decision on the complaint in the volunteers' preferred format, including details of the Final Review stage.

Final Review

If the volunteer is still not satisfied with the outcome of the appeal and has new information not considered in the Appeal previously that is significant and relevant, they must send this in their preferred format to the Head of Volunteering within 10 working days of the appeal decision.

The Head of Volunteering should review the new information and may at his/her sole discretion at this point liaise with an appropriate Trustee to consider the complaint. The outcome of the review of the new evidence will be communicated to the volunteer in their preferred format within 15 working days of Guide Dogs' receiving the request for Final Review.

If it is not possible to respond within the specified time period, the volunteer should be given an explanation of the delay and told when a response can be expected. The decision taken at this stage will be final.

Sign-off:

Name	Position	Date
Lara Rivans	Head of Volunteering	April 2016

References and Related Documents

Procedure for Resolving Issues of Volunteer Behaviour, Attitude or Ability.
Guidance Notes for volunteer line managers