

Volunteer Complaints Procedure

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Purpose of Procedure

Guide Dogs Volunteer Complaints Procedure is designed to enable current volunteers or applicants to volunteer roles who have a grievance arising from their volunteering activity with Guide Dogs to have that 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) already be in progress, involving the same issues and or people, the following Volunteer Complaints Procedure may be joined-up 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. For the same reason, complaints should be raised within 3 months of the volunteer encountering the events or issue in question. Complaints regarding events or situations which occurred more than 3 months previously will only be considered where there is a safeguarding concern.

Procedure Instructions

Step One: Informal Discussion

If a volunteer has a complaint affecting their role as a volunteer, they should first raise it with their volunteer manager - the person who is their key contact and allocates or supervises their work - who will act as Investigating Manager in the case. The only exception to this would be if the volunteer manager is both the person to whom the problem relates and the volunteer feels unable to raise the complaint with them. In such a case the matter should be referred to their volunteer manager's own line manager or another impartial staff member from the same or another local team, who will act as Investigating Manager. The Volunteering Office can inform a volunteer who the appropriate manager is if required (0345 143 0191).

The Investigating Manager should ensure the complaint is logged on the Volunteer Complaints/BAA System and discuss the complaint with the volunteer informally to gain further information and see what actions, if any, need to take place. Local Volunteer Coordinators can support Investigating Managers in recording complaints on the Complaints/BAA system. It may be that the problem can be resolved without the need for a formal complaint being raised; if this is the case, the complaint needs no further action and the Investigating Manager should ensure the case is marked as 'closed' in the system.

If during the informal discussion it becomes clear that the issue is more serious, the discussion should cease to allow for further investigation. The Investigating 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 Investigating Manager should telephone The Safeguarding Team on 0345 1430199, who will advise as to next steps.

- If any fraud or criminal activity is suspected the Investigating Manager should contact the Anti-Fraud and Criminal Activity Team (AFCAT) team afcat@guidedogs.org.uk, who will advise as to next steps.
- In these cases, this process may need to be suspended pending the outcome of any AFCAT or safeguarding investigations.

Step Two: Formal Complaint

If the informal discussion does not resolve the issue and the volunteer indicates that they wish to raise a formal complaint, the Investigating Manager must ensure this is updated on the Volunteer Complaints/BAA System. Volunteers must be sent a copy of this Volunteer Complaints Procedure at this point.

The volunteer should put the complaint in writing in a letter or email if it has not been done already. Alternatively, the complaint should be summarised in the words of the volunteer, and read back to them and agreed as an accurate record of their complaint within 5 working days of the case being logged.

Investigation

Wherever possible, the complaint investigation is confidential and will be undertaken with discretion solely by the Investigating Manager.

The Investigating Manager will be the volunteer's same line manager or another equivalent impartial staff member (as above) who had the informal discussion with the volunteer. The Investigating Manager will gather and study the facts surrounding a case, taking fact-based witness statements where required. This should occur within 15 working days of the case being logged.

Final versions of case documents including any relevant emails trails given to the Investigating Manager that provide a history of events and a summary of conversations must be stored on the Volunteer Complaints/BAA system.

Formal Meeting

A meeting should be arranged between the volunteer and any individual who is the subject of the complaint and/or any other person who can discuss the subject matter of the complaint. The Investigating Manager and the person who can discuss the subject the complaint relates to may in practice be the same person. The Investigating Manager will act as facilitator, to discuss and try to resolve the complaint. Where a complaint is made by an applicant the formal meeting may be carried out by telephone. In all other cases the Investigating Manager should meet face-to-face to look to resolve the situation and continue the existing relationship with Guide Dogs moving forward.

Before Formal meeting

A date for the meeting should be arranged, at a time and location that is suitable to all parties. This date should be as soon as is reasonably possible and in any event, should occur 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.

The volunteer should be informed they have the option to be accompanied by 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.

During Formal Meeting

During the meeting, the volunteer will be given the opportunity to give their view on the matter. 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. At the end of the meeting, the investigating manager should check that everyone has a shared understanding of the key points of the meeting.

After Formal Meeting

A written summary of the key points of the meeting together with any outcomes agreed or recommendations made by the Investigating manager will be supplied to the volunteer within 5 working days of the date of the meeting, in their preferred format.

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.

Alternatively, the Investigating Manager may have identified actions with a clear time scale to resolve the complaint, or extended the duration or scope of an existing action plan. To allow time for these actions to resolve the complaint, no appeal is possible until the period of the action plan has come to an end. A copy of the meeting summary and any action plan should be sent to the volunteer in their preferred format and stored on the Volunteer Complaints/BAA System by the Volunteer Coordinator.

Review

At the end of this time 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 complaint will be closed.

If the volunteer refuses to attend the follow-up meeting or call 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.

Confirmation of this follow-up call or meeting should be sent to the volunteer in their preferred format within 5 working days. It should include their right of appeal, the name of the Appeal Manager they should contact, and a copy stored

on the Volunteer Complaints/BAA database. The Appeals Manager should be the next level of manager not previously involved in the case or other equivalent person.

Appeal

Appeals are an opportunity for Guide Dogs to ensure that it is making the right decision, and for volunteers to challenge decisions they feel are incorrect. To achieve a balance of fair and objective decision-making and appropriate use of charity resources, appeals will not 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 by 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 or email following the review meeting. Volunteers must send the appeal to the Appeal Manager within 5 working days of receiving the letter or email following the review meeting.

The Appeal manager must ensure this is logged on the Volunteer Complaints/BAA System. The Appeal Manager will decide if it is reasonable to continue. They must review the previous decision and investigate any new information in the appeal statement and should 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 volunteer's 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 previously that is significant and relevant, they must send this in their preferred format to the Head of Volunteering within 5 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 Senior Manager to decide whether the complaint is upheld. The option of consultation supports objective decision-making and as such the Senior Manager should be from a different department to the one the volunteer supports. The outcome of the review of the new evidence will be communicated to the volunteer in their preferred format within 10 working days of Guide Dogs' receiving the request for Final Review.

If it is not possible to respond within the specified time, 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.

Documentation

Complaints must be logged on Volunteer Complaints system.

Permissible exceptions

None.

Related Policies or Processes:

Procedure for Resolving Issues of Volunteer Behaviour, Attitude or Ability

Volunteer Complaint Process - Guidance Notes for volunteer line managers

Governance Review & Approval Table**:

The table below contains two rows and five columns.

	H&S	Protection of Children & Adults	Insurance	Legal	GDPR
Date Reviewed					

Version control table:

The table below contains two rows and four columns. (Only the original approval date and the most recent amendment should be included in the table.)

Date	Version	Status	Details of Change
Apr 21	4.7		Updated to new template

**** Please see below when a document must be reviewed by governance**

Safeguarding - All documents with any reference to safeguarding, recruitment and training, working with clients (Adult and CYP)

Legal - All documents with any reference to agreements or contracts, third party partnerships, potential reputational risk, reference to compliance with any statutory or regulatory obligation

Health and Safety - All documents where an activity could cause harm to a member of staff, service user, volunteer or third party or where there is reputational risk

Insurance - A change to the way we deliver our services

GDPR - If we are gathering any personal information on volunteers or service users

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