

# Volunteer Conflict Resolution Manual

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**University of California**  
Agriculture and Natural Resources

# Volunteer Conflict Resolution Manual

Conflicts can happen between volunteers, volunteers and staff, and volunteers and the public. University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) advisors and staff are available to assist volunteers in addressing and creating

solutions to problems and are available for consultation and interpretation of policy and procedure.

Volunteers provide a service to the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR) and a valuable link to local communities. When in the course and scope of their duties, they are considered agents of the University of

California (UC) and have specific rights and responsibilities.

In dealing with situations of conflict, UC personnel may not agree to confidentiality.

Information regarding a conflict should be given out as sparingly as possible and should not include unnecessary personal detail. Complete confidentiality may not be possible due to (1) a need for UC to fulfill any applicable legal requirements (subpoenas, etc.) that may arise in

the future and (2) the requirement to inform others of suspension, dismissal/retirement on a need-to-know basis. Notification of suspension, dismissal/retirement may be done in writing or verbally.

When conflicts occur within a volunteer program, corrective action generally falls into one of four categories.

## Informal Corrective Action

- Minor problems in behavior, attitude, management or performance

## Disciplinary Action

- Problems in behavior, attitude, management or performance that affect more than a small group of people
- No improvement from an Informal Corrective Action

## Progressive Dismissal

- Problems of a serious nature or repeated over time and no improvement from an Informal Corrective and Disciplinary Action

## Immediate Suspension or Dismissal

- Transgressions of the most serious nature: may include a US Department of Justice (DOJ) based barrier offense, zero tolerance, violent or abusive behavior, etc.

The Conflict Resolution Manual is intended to serve as a process guide for working through infractions of the Adult Volunteer Code of Conduct. When there is a complaint or conflict regarding an individual, situation or event, refer to the policies and procedures as specified in this document.



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Use the flowcharts on the following pages to determine the best practice to work through each category of conflict. The flowcharts establish at what level the conflict should attempt to be resolved as well as when the Director and/or State Office Volunteer Coordinator gets involved.

UCCE personnel may contact the State Office Volunteer Coordinator at any time for support and guidance working through these steps. In the context of this manual the term “Director” refers to the UCCE County Director, the Research and Extension Center (REC) Director, and/or the Statewide Program Director.

If conflict occurs between volunteer(s) and a UCCE staff/academic/Director, resolution of the conflict is the responsibility of the UCCE staff/academic/Director’s supervisor. In these cases, UCCE personnel and volunteers may contact the State Office Volunteer Coordinator at any time for support and guidance.

Performance feedback is a best practice for avoiding conflict. Where feasible, UCCE personnel should institute systems that let volunteers know when they are meeting and/or exceeding program goals and to identify when extra support, coaching, mentoring and training is required. When developing volunteer engagement plans, consider opportunities to engage middle management volunteers to accomplish these support tasks.

## Contact Us:

Master Gardener Program: [http://mg.ucanr.edu/Contact\\_Us/](http://mg.ucanr.edu/Contact_Us/)

4-H Program: <http://4h.ucanr.edu/contactus/StateOffice/>

Master Food Preserver Program: [http://mfp.ucanr.edu/Contact/Statewide\\_Staff/](http://mfp.ucanr.edu/Contact/Statewide_Staff/)

Research and Extension Centers: [http://recs.ucanr.edu/About\\_Us/Staff\\_Directory/](http://recs.ucanr.edu/About_Us/Staff_Directory/)

## Resources

Balbach, K. (2014). Dealing with difficult volunteers. *Volunteer Hub Blog*, October 13, 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.volunteerhub.com/blog/difficult-volunteers/>

Graff, L. (2005). *Best of all: The quick reference guide to effective volunteer involvement*. Dundas, Ontario: L. Graff and Associates

Haski-Leventhal, D., & Bargal, D. (2008). The volunteer stages and transitions model: Organizational socialization of volunteers. *Sage Journals: Human Relations*, 61(1).

Lobely, J. (2011). Difficult volunteer behaviors: What’s behind it and how do you deal with it? *Volunteers Maine Blog*, November 10, 2011. Retrieved from: <http://volunteermaine.org/blog/difficult-volunteer-behaviors-what%E2%80%99s-behind-it-and-how-do-you-deal-with-it>

McCurley, F. (1993). How to fire a volunteer and live to tell about it. *National CASA Association*, OJJDP.

McKee, J., McKee, T.W. (2012). *The new breed: Understanding and equipping the 21st century volunteer*. Loveland, CO: Group.

Miner, G., Gable, M. (2017). Volunteer conflict resolution manual. University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources. Retrieved from <http://ucanr.edu/conflictresolution>

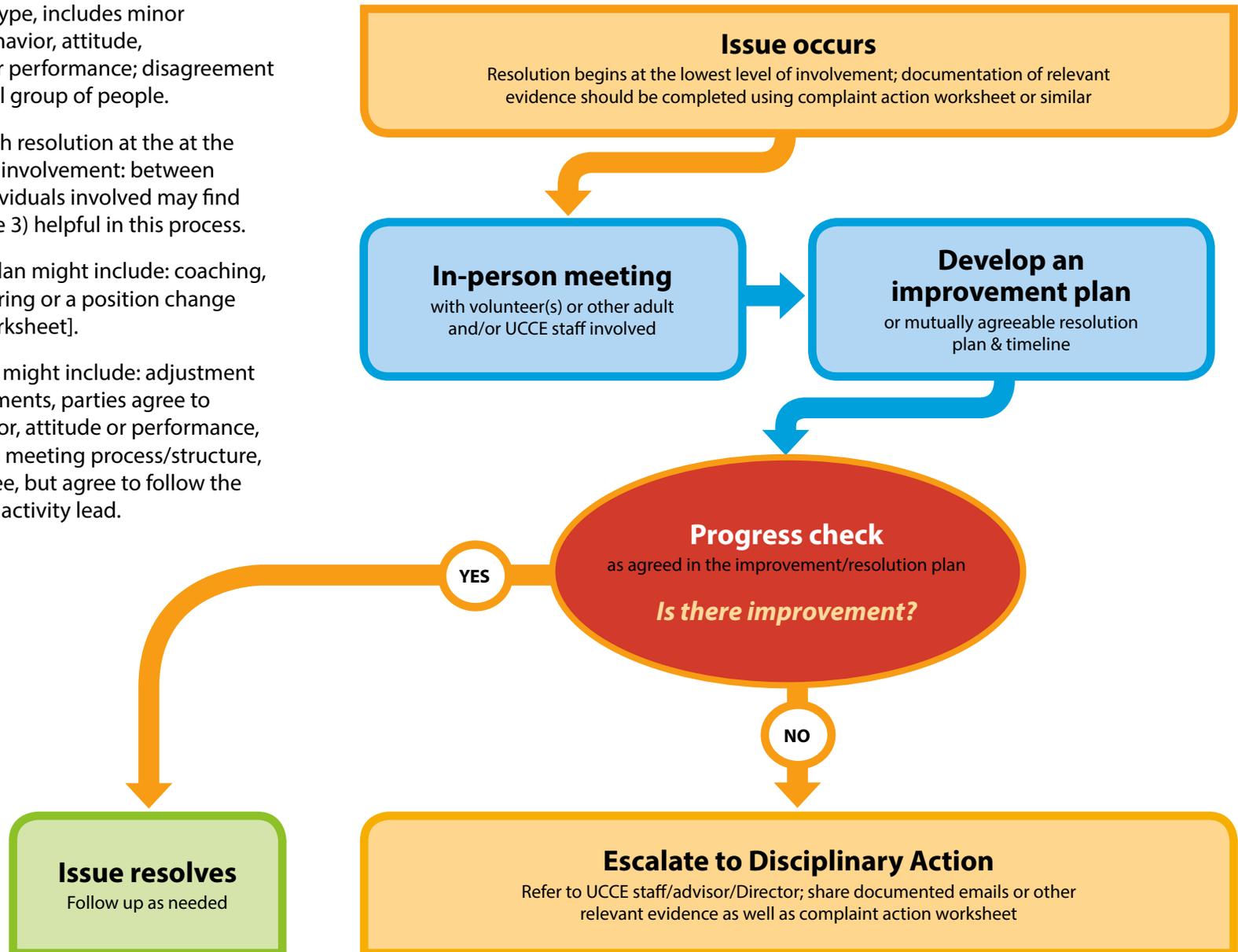
Pleskac, S., Siebold, S., et. al (2010). *National 4-H learning priorities: Volunteerism for the next generation*. NIFA, USDA

Stallings, B. (2015). 12 key actions of volunteer program champions. *Reimagining Service*, Energize, Inc.

*Volunteer Management: A Handbook for Expanding Volunteer Management Systems in a Local 4-H Youth Program*. (1997) University of Illinois Extension

# Informal Corrective Action

- Most frequent type, includes minor problems in behavior, attitude, management or performance; disagreement between a small group of people.
- Attempt to reach resolution at the at the original level of involvement: between the parties; individuals involved may find [Resources](#) (page 3) helpful in this process.
- Improvement Plan might include: coaching, training, mentoring or a position change [see sample worksheet].
- Resolution Plan might include: adjustment to group agreements, parties agree to work on behavior, attitude or performance, adjustment to a meeting process/structure, agree to disagree, but agree to follow the direction of the activity lead.



# Disciplinary Action

- ❑ Problems in behavior, attitude, management or performance that affect more than a small group of people or no improvement through the Informal Corrective Action.
- ❑ UCCE staff identifies opportunity for improvement.
- ❑ Improvement Plan might include increased supervision, coaching, training, mentoring or a position change [see sample worksheet].
- ❑ Resolution Plan might include reassignment/position change, referral to different unit or program, and/or dismissal/retirement.



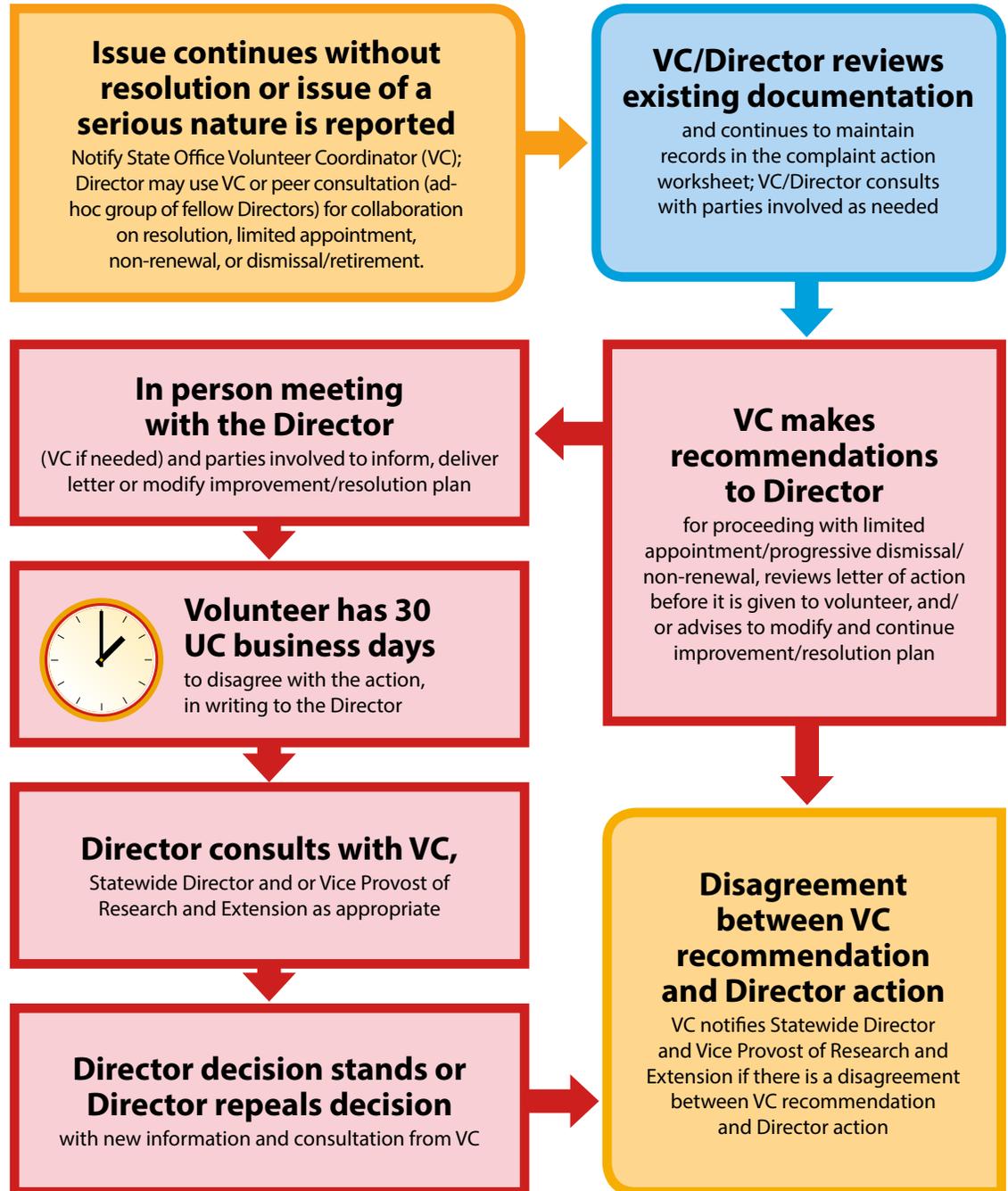
From notification of the conflict to the adoption of an improvement plan or mutually agreeable resolution plan, this process shall take no more than **30 UC business days**.



# Progressive Dismissal

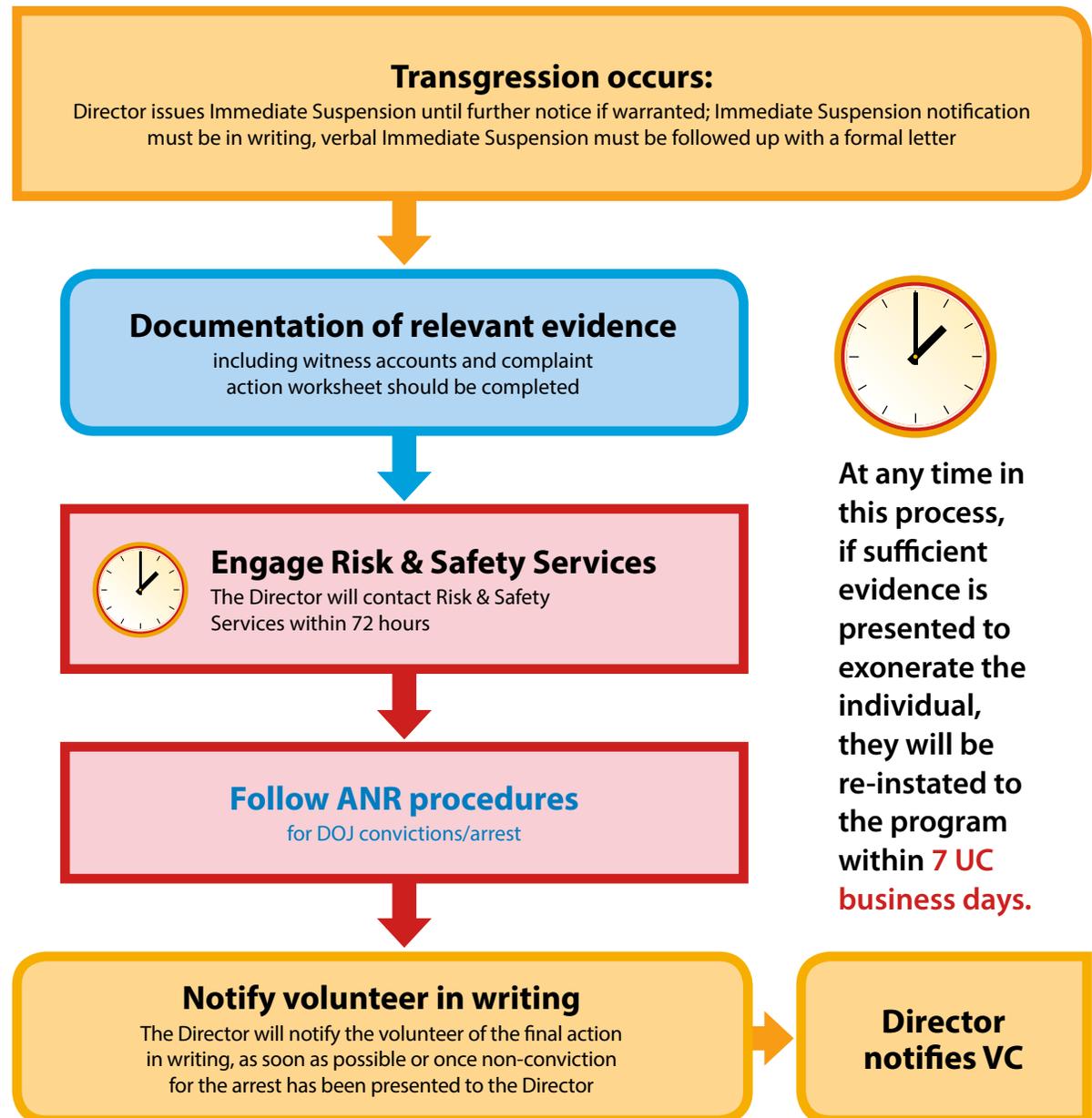
- ❑ Problems of a serious nature or repeated over time, Informal and Disciplinary Actions (if warranted by definitions) have occurred with no improvement; refusal to perform tasks, continual negativity which hampers program delivery, inappropriate behavior that prevents volunteer from performing their role.
- ❑ UCCE staff and/or Director recommends dismissal or retirement.
- ❑ State Office Volunteer Coordinator reviews existing documentation, consults with Director and parties involved, and makes recommendations on course of action that could include modifications to an improvement/resolution plan before proceeding with dismissal/retirement.
- ❑ Dismissal/retirement requires an in-person meeting and written notification with the volunteer who then has 30 UC business days to disagree with the action [see sample letter]. Dismissal/retirement is the responsibility of the Director and may not be delegated.
- ❑ Director follow up to action includes notification to Statewide Director and Vice Provost of Research and Extension.

 **From notification of the conflict to the adoption of an improvement plan or mutually agreeable resolution plan, this process shall take no more than 30 UC business days.**



# Immediate Suspension or Dismissal

- ❑ Transgression of the most serious nature: may include arrest or conviction of a [DOJ barrier offense](#), zero tolerance, violent or abusive behavior, willful or careless disregard for the safety or dignity of any person.
- ❑ Immediate actions may include the individual being removed from the worksite/meeting place, relieved of duties, escorted from premises.
- ❑ Director notifies the volunteer in writing of Immediate Suspension until further notice [see sample letter].
- ❑ Director contacts Risk & Safety Services (RSS) within 72 hours for guidance. If RSS cannot be reached or are not able to review within 72 hours, the volunteer must be suspended (if the Director has not already done so) until RSS can participate.
- ❑ In cases of a DOJ conviction/arrest follow [ANR procedures](#).
- ❑ Director notifies the volunteer of final action in writing which may include reinstatement of volunteer status, changes to volunteer status (e.g., limited appointment) or immediate dismissal/retirement. Dismissal/retirement is the responsibility of the Director and may not be delegated.
- ❑ Director follow up to action includes notification to State Office Volunteer Coordinator.



[ucanr.edu/conflictresolution](http://ucanr.edu/conflictresolution)

It is the policy of the University of California (UC) and the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR) not to engage in discrimination against or harassment of any person in any of its programs or activities (complete nondiscrimination policy statement can be found at <http://ucanr.edu/sites/anrstaff/files/187680.pdf>).

Inquiries regarding UC ANR's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to John Sims, Affirmative Action Compliance Officer, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 2801 Second Street, Davis, CA 95618, (530) 750-1397.



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