Volunteer Conflict Resolution Manual

Revised March 2018
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 and Disciplinary 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.
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_/  
4-H Program: http://4h.ucanr.edu/contactus/StateOffice/  
Master Food Preserver Program: http://mfp.ucanr.edu/Contact/Statewide_Staff/  
Research and Extension Centers: http://recs.ucanr.edu/About_Us/Staff_Directory/

Resources


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 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.

Issue occurs
Resolution begins at the lowest level of involvement; documentation of relevant evidence should be completed using complaint action worksheet or similar

In-person meeting
with volunteer(s) or other adult and/or UCCE staff involved

Develop an improvement plan
or mutually agreeable resolution plan & timeline

Progress check
as agreed in the improvement/resolution plan

Is there improvement?

YES

Issue resolves
Follow up as needed

NO

Escalate to Disciplinary Action
Refer to UCCE staff/advisor/Director; share documented emails or other relevant evidence as well as complaint action worksheet
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.

- Issue occurs or continues
  - Escalate to UCCE staff/advisor and/or Director who will take the lead on this process

- Review existing documentation
  - and start/continue to maintain records in the complaint action worksheet

- In-person meeting
  - with volunteer(s) or other adult and/or UCCE staff involved

- Share documentation with the Director
  - (if not already included in process)
  - and/or UCCE staff involved

- Develop an improvement plan
  - or mutually agreeable resolution plan & timeline

- Progress check
  - Is there improvement?

- Yes
  - Issue resolves
    - Follow up as needed

- No
  - Notify State Office Volunteer Coordinator (VC)
    - Director may use VC or peer consultation (ad-hoc group of fellow Directors) for collaboration on resolution, limited appointment, non-renewal, or Progressive Dismissal
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.

Transgression occurs:
Director issues Immediate Suspension until further notice if warranted; Immediate Suspension notification must be in writing, verbal Immediate Suspension must be followed up with a formal letter.

Documentation of relevant evidence
including witness accounts and complaint action worksheet should be completed.

Engage Risk & Safety Services
The Director will contact Risk & Safety Services within 72 hours.

Follow ANR procedures for DOJ convictions/arrest.

Notify volunteer in writing
The Director will notify the volunteer of the final action in writing, as soon as possible or once non-conviction for the arrest has been presented to the Director.

At any time in this process, if sufficient evidence is presented to exonerate the individual, they will be re-instated to the program within 7 UC business days.

Director notifies VC.
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.