



## INFORMATION SHEET: CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS AND NOT FOR PROFITS

The Centre for Volunteering recognises that building relationships by Volunteer Involving Organisations with volunteers requires time, effort, resources, communication skills and active engagement in the volunteering process, including the development of a conflict resolution process.

### **Why your organisation should have a conflict resolution process**

Conflict resolution processes are important for all organisations in order to ensure a productive and peaceful workplace. Organisational conflict can lead, in extreme circumstances, to lost production, loss of time, loss of industry reputation, chronic absenteeism and possible legal action. When conflict is well managed, it can de-escalate the conflict and accelerate the resolution process.

The capacity for organisational conflict exists whenever there is more than one person in an organisation. In the main, there are two kinds of organisational conflict:

1. when people's ideas, decisions or actions relating directly to the job are in opposition, or
2. when two or more people are not able to co-exist in the same organisational area.

All Volunteer Involving Organisations and Not for Profit organisations should have certain procedures and guidelines which they follow to ensure that the rights and safety of their volunteers are maintained. It is critical to the organisation that their volunteering roles are a positive experience for them and that the volunteers' contribution enhances their aims, rather than being detrimental to their interests.

The rights and responsibilities of the organisations and volunteers are generally set out in the organisation's Code of Conduct and/or Handbook and in its policies and procedures and all staff, including volunteers, have a responsibility to comply.

Breaches of the Code of Conduct may relate to specific breaches of policies and/or procedures which attract disciplinary action. Disciplinary action may include investigation, removal of privileges or access, repayment of monies, referral to Police in the case of unlawful behaviour, and termination of employment or engagement. All staff should perform their duties efficiently and act in a manner that promotes an industrious and congenial working environment.

### **How to deal with conflict within an organisation**

When conflict arises within an organisation there are a number of ways of dealing with such matters. The matters may be addressed by employing a **complaint management process** within the organisation or by utilising alternative dispute



resolution methodologies, namely negotiation, arbitration, conciliation or mediation. It should be recognised that the complaint management process forms a part of the quality assurance process in any organisation, whether it is a Volunteer Involving Organisation or not.

### **Australian Standard**

A robust complaint management process allows the complainant to constructively ventilate their concerns within a supportive framework. The standard for complaint management process is contained within Australian Standard *AS/NZS 10002:2014* and the international standard *ISO 10002:2014*. Each organisation must determine which standard applies to their business, as the two standards are not identical in content or focus. The Centre for Volunteering has a **Complaint Management Form** on its website which can be used to effectively manage conflicts.

The Australian standard *AS/NZS 10002:2014* details the model complaint management process. The process includes a complaints handling policy which:

- acknowledges the right of a person to complain,
- makes it easy for people to make a complaint by providing forms, personal or technological assistance in clarifying the complaint,
- where possible the complaint is resolved at point of first contact, to this end, staff are properly trained to handle complaints,
- there are clear procedures on how to deal with unreasonable conduct by complainants,
- there are clear lines of escalation of complaints through the organisation including appeals to external agencies including the judicial system, and
- continuous monitoring of the complaints received and
- the complaint management system updated to ensure that it is compliant with legislation, internal policies and that recurring complaints are addressed at management level.

Well developed complaint handling process includes alternative dispute resolution processes. *Negotiation* is the process by which the parties to a dispute can come to an agreement which is acceptable to both parties. *Arbitration* is determined by the arbitrator who takes into account the issues in dispute between the parties and determines the outcome of the case and usually their decision is binding on the parties. In *Conciliation*, an impartial person assists the parties to the dispute by guiding the negotiations between the parties and suggesting outcomes. In *Mediation*, the mediator, an impartial third party, enables discussion between the parties to a dispute to reach a final, mutually acceptable outcome. Mediation is a voluntary and non-binding process.

### **Where to get help**

The **Centre for Volunteering** in association with **Voluntas** currently has a pilot scheme in operation whereby any volunteer or Volunteer Involving Organisation involved in a dispute will be assisted to resolve that dispute by way of an assisted "Constructive Conversation" by a trained mediator from Voluntas. Participation in the



“Constructive Conversation” program may stop the situation from escalating to a formal dispute and access to the program is free.

On receipt of notification of a dispute the matter will be referred to Voluntas for further assessment and, if the dispute is suitable, a program of “Constructive Conversation” will be initiated with a view to resolving the dispute by mutual consent. However, not all disputes will be suitable for mediation by Voluntas. Where a dispute has been assessed by Voluntas as being unsuitable for mediation, the parties to the dispute will be so notified and information will be provided in relation to other conflict resolution avenues.

Please contact The Centre for Volunteering to discuss a referral on 02 9261 3600 or [info@volunteering.com.au](mailto:info@volunteering.com.au).

The Centre for Volunteering has a range of services and resources available for Volunteer Involving Organisations and volunteers. For more information please visit [www.volunteering.com.au](http://www.volunteering.com.au) or contact us on 02 9261 3600.