

Solving Volunteer Workplace Disputes

Although volunteers are not covered by awards or workplace agreements they are entitled to undertake their volunteer activities in a safe and fair environment.

When disputes occur between volunteers and their organisations most are resolved internally, however outside assistance is available if the problem cannot be easily fixed.

Disputes occur within volunteer organisations just like they do in the paid workforce. Many can be simple misunderstandings that can be resolved easily between the volunteer and their manager. Some can become more complex because they have not been dealt with quickly, or they are serious matters covered by law such as sexual harassment, bullying or discrimination. These more serious cases may need to be dealt with by outside authorities if they cannot be resolved satisfactorily within the organisation.

Solving Disputes Internally

Before commencing volunteering activities within an organisation be clear about your role and responsibilities. Most larger organisations will have a Disputes Resolution Policy. If a problem arises, obtain a copy and familiarise yourself and follow the steps laid out for your type of complaint. If there is no policy you may decide to seek guidance from an appropriate person from within the organisation. This person may be your immediate supervisor or someone else in a management role.

Internal disputes, especially when the organisation has a Disputes Resolution Policy, are typically resolved in a number of ways that may include:

- Intervention by senior management.
- Mediation by an independent person where both parties have the opportunity to discuss the problem.
- More formal review that will include an investigation of the claims of both parties.

Unfortunately in some instances a solution that is acceptable to all will not be found, or the complaint is of a serious nature. In these cases an external authority will be required.

Solving Disputes Externally

Some disputes are not able to be resolved internally and either the volunteer or the organisation may choose to take the problem to an external authority. The authorities listed below will be able to assist:

For general advice contact:

Office of the Employee Ombudsman <http://www.oeo.sa.gov.au>
Telephone: (08) 8207 1970

For issues relating to discrimination and harassment contact:

Equal Opportunity Commission <http://www.eoc.sa.gov.au>
Telephone: (08) 8207 1977; for hearing impaired (08) 8207 1911
Outside Adelaide free call 1800 188 163

For issues relating to workplace health and safety contact:

SafeWork SA <http://www.safework.sa.gov.au>
Telephone: 1300 365 255

For legal advice and assistance contact:

Legal Services Commission <http://www.lsc.sa.gov.au>
Telephone: 1300 366 424



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Office for Volunteers