RNIB See differently Logo

# Problem solving procedure for volunteers

## Introduction

We are committed to making your volunteering experience enjoyable and worthwhile. We understand that occasionally things go wrong and that problems occur. If you experience any issues, we encourage you to discuss these with your volunteer manager. We will ensure that any concerns you raise are reviewed fully, fairly and transparently.

Our problem solving procedure will ensure that you know how to deal with problems if they arise. It will help you find the most appropriate solution to the problem.

All complaints and concerns should be dealt with openly, fairly and quickly to:

* protect you
* minimise any disruption to blind and partially sighted people, staff and other volunteers
* demonstrate that we respect our volunteers
* protect our reputation.

### Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set out the procedure on how complaints or concerns relating to volunteering should be managed to reflect the objective of providing a safe, good quality experience to RNIB volunteers.

### Risks and implications

It is important for RNIB to provide a framework within which volunteers can raise any concerns and have them resolved promptly, consistently and fairly.

### Scope

This procedure applies to all RNIB volunteers.

### Exceptions to this procedure

Any exceptions to this procedure must have authorisation from the Head of Volunteering.

## Roles and responsibilities

### Volunteers

Volunteers are responsible for:

* Raising matters of legitimate concern openly and honestly
* Cooperating with the application of RNIB processes and familiarising themselves with the Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure
* Doing as much as possible to resolve conflicts quickly and amicably
* Cooperating with any investigations including attending meetings and providing information when requested
* Ensuring your own conduct does not cause offence or misunderstanding.

### Volunteer Managers and Line Managers

Volunteer managers and line managers are responsible for:

* Providing support to all volunteers and ensuring they have regular catch ups to enable any issues or concerns to be addressed at an early stage
* Ensuring volunteers are clear about RNIB values, behaviours and the standards of conduct expected
* Ensuring volunteers have access to, are familiar with and understand this procedure
* Applying and managing the Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure fairly and being aware of when it is necessary to take informal and formal action
* Seeking approval from the Head of Volunteering if it is considered appropriate to suspend volunteers to support an investigation
* Ensuring that any records that relate to the Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure are held in a confidential manner and in accordance with the principles contained within the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation and shared with the Volunteering team if requested.

### Volunteering Team

The Volunteering Team is responsible for:

* Supporting and advising managers who are managing informal complaints
* Managing the formal process of the Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure
* Ensuring that the correct procedure is followed
* Ensuring that all volunteers involved have support available throughout the process
* Ensuring that concerns are thoroughly investigated before any action is considered
* Providing support to Chief Officers in the complaint review process
* Supporting with learning and development opportunities for volunteers and staff to improve skills and behaviours to promote a harmonious working environment
* Escalating any concerns relating to the nature of the complaint or its management to the Head of Volunteering
* Keeping accurate records of the complaint process ensuring that any records are kept in a confidential way and in accordance with the principles contained within the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation
* Monitoring and evaluating the number and nature of complaints and using this to develop, improve and update responses to complaints.

## Our approach to solving problems

We prefer to resolve issues informally. Very often discussions of the problem, perhaps with the support of an external person like a member of staff, is all that is needed to clear things up to the satisfaction of all involved.

Depending on the nature of the concern or issue, this will be investigated as follows:

* If your complaint is about an RNIB employee(s), our Grievance Policy will be followed. Please contact the Volunteering Team by emailing volunteering@rnib.org.uk or calling 0303 123 9999 (option 4, then option 2). The team will pass your complaint on to a member of our HR team.
* If your complaint is about an RNIB service, our Customer Feedback Policy will be followed. Please contact our Helpline by emailing helpline@rnib.org.uk or calling on 0303 123 9999.
* If your concern has a safeguarding element to it, our Safeguarding Policies and Procedures will be followed. All complaints relating to safeguarding will be investigated formally and we will seek guidance from our Safeguarding Team.
* We are committed to providing an environment free from discrimination where everyone is treated fairly, with dignity and respect. All complaints of bullying or harassment will be taken seriously and will be investigated fairly and independently. If your complaint relates to bullying or harassment, our Bullying and Harassment Policy will be followed. Please contact your volunteer manager or the Volunteering Team.
* If your complaint is about RNIB volunteer(s) or your experiences as a volunteer, this procedure will be followed. Informal complaints are typically investigated by volunteer managers, or by the Volunteering as appropriate. Formal complaints are investigated by the Volunteering Team. Please contact your volunteer manager or the Volunteering Team.
* In the event that a complaint is about an RNIB volunteer who is also an employee, it is essential that Volunteering and HR teams work together to confirm the appropriate procedure or policy to follow and to manage the concern or complaint.

To summarise, there are three possible stages involved in the Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure, which are:

* [Stage 1: Resolving informally](#_Stage_1_–)
* [Stage 2: Managing formally](#_Stage_2_–)
* [Stage 3: Review](#_Stage_3_–)

## Stage 1 – Resolving informally

We prefer to resolve issues informally. Very often discussions of the matter, perhaps with the support of an external person, for example a member of staff, is all that is needed to clear things up to the satisfaction of all involved.

We encourage you to raise any concerns or complaints in a timely manner where possible. Please note that we are not able to investigate any concerns or complaints that happened over six months ago, unless this is in relation to a safeguarding concern or allegation or is supplementary evidence for a more recent concern or complaint. This is to ensure that we are able to gather evidence, speak to the relevant people and support you in the resolving the issue you have raised.

### If you want to raise a concern or make a complaint

If you have a concern or a complaint to make about the activities with your team, the behaviour of someone you work with, or in fact, anything at all, you should raise the issue with your volunteer manager.

If you are uncomfortable raising the issue directly with your volunteer manager – for example if your complaint is about them – you should speak to their manager. If you don’t wish to do this, or if you are not sure what steps to take, contact our Volunteering Team at volunteering@rnib.org.uk or 0303 123 9999 (option 4, then option 2).

The person you speak to about your concern will ensure that your complaint is looked into and that any steps needed to rectify the situation are taken. This might be your volunteer manager, their line manager or a member of the Volunteering Team. They will:

* Acknowledge the concern/complaint within seven working days.
* Speak with you about the concern and ask you what outcome you would like to achieve. This is normally within 21 working days from the date the concern is received.
* Collect all relevant information, speak with relevant parties, and consult relevant policies and procedures.
* Seek guidance from the Volunteering Team, as required, to ensure your issue is resolved in line with this procedure.
* Update you if more time is required to explore the concern or complaint you have raised.
* Provide you with a response to the concern you raised. A copy of this communication will also be shared with the Volunteering Team.

### If a concern or complaint is made about you

If a concern or complaint is made about you, your volunteer manager will discuss the complaint with you. They will:

* Try to resolve the matter by talking to you
* Find out more from you about the issue and what might be causing any problems
* Identify any goals and any changes needed to help you
* Offer you extra support and training where necessary
* Agree a deadline to review the situation with you.

Your volunteer manager will maintain confidentiality regarding your personal experience as far as possible. However, there may be a need to seek advice from other key individuals or teams. They will treat this information confidentially. Your volunteer manager will, however, keep the complainant informed of any measures taken to rectify a situation.

### Mediation

Depending on the nature of the concern/complaint, mediation may be an appropriate option to support with resolving the issue. It is recommended that mediation is used at the informal stage however it can be used at any stage of the process. All parties need to agree to using mediation before it is organised. The Volunteering Team will seek guidance and support from the HR Business Partnering Team on this option.

### Recording and sharing outcomes

You should receive a response to the concern or complaint that has been raised. We expect the outcome of an informal complaint or concern will be confirmed with you in writing, in your preferred communication format. This should include:

* A summary explaining what has happened
* Any resolutions that have been agreed
* Any further training or support that is required
* A deadline to review the situation as necessary.

All complaints and outcomes must be recorded, and a copy of this must be shared with the Volunteering Team. This will allow for monitoring and evaluation of the process and volunteer experience.

### Next steps

We hope that the concern or complaint raised can be resolved using the informal process. However, this is not always possible. If a complaint can’t be resolved informally at stage one or if the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution, it should be referred to [Stage two – managing a concern or complaint formally.](#_Stage_2_–)

## Stage 2 – Managing formally

There are occasions where an informal concern or complaint cannot be resolved through informal discussions. It may be that the person who made the complaint is not satisfied with the outcome after raising it informally or the issue may be too serious to be dealt with informally. If that is the case, the concern or complaint should be raised formally with the Volunteering Team where an Investigation Officer will be assigned to investigate the issue.

### If you want to raise a formal concern or complaint

If you want to raise a concern or complaint formally, you should contact the Volunteering Team by emailing volunteering@rnib.org.uk or calling 0303 123 9999 (option 4, then option 2). Please explain the issue, provide full details and ask for it to be dealt with formally. If appropriate, you can ask another person to do this on your behalf.

If your concern or complaint is about your volunteering experience or another volunteer, this will be investigated by an Investigation Officer from the Volunteering Team. They will acknowledge your concern or complaint within seven working days and tell you the timescale for providing you with a response. This is normally within 21 working days from the date the concern/complaint is received.

The Investigation Officer is responsible for ensuring that the investigation is documented and the findings, if any, are supported by reliable evidence. They will:

* Write to the volunteer advising them of the investigation and inviting them to an investigatory meeting to provide relevant information.
* Collect all relevant documentation.
* Interview witnesses (if appropriate). Explain to each interviewee the proposed structure of the interview.
* Consider any other written or physical evidence that supports the case. Create the witness statements electronically and get them signed by the witnesses.
* Produce a final report covering the findings, any key issues that arose during the investigation, including any conflicting evidence. The report should also state whether the matter warrants further consideration or meetings to implement any recommendations.

If, for any reason, more time is required to deal with the issue, the Investigation Officer will explain the reasons for this and give you a date by which they will respond.

### If a formal concern or complaint is made about you

If a formal complaint is made about you, this will be raised with the Volunteering Team and an Investigation Officer will be assigned to formally investigate the concern or complaint.

The Investigation Officer will:

* Issue you with written details outlining the complaint.
* Give you the opportunity to state your case. You will be allowed to be accompanied by a person of your choice, this can be a RNIB staff member, another volunteer, a family member or friend.
* Make recommendations depending on the nature of the concern and what they find out about the issue. They may set further objectives, offer further help and/or make changes to the role and how you are managed.
* Involve a more senior manager at this stage if appropriate.

### Serious incidents and suspending volunteer activity

There may be occasions where it is necessary to suspend you or another volunteer from volunteering while an investigation is underway. Suspension should be seen as a neutral act and is intended to protect volunteers involved in the concern/complaint, minimise disruption to the delivery of RNIB’s services, and allow for an unimpeded investigation. This decision is risk assessed and must have the approval of the Head of Volunteering. There are a number of reasons for suspension:

* Formal complaint
* Serious criminal allegation
* Following a notification of a police investigation
* Serious safeguarding concern
* Suspected misuse of data
* Or another serious concern that requires a formal investigation.

####  Making the decision to suspend

The decision to suspend volunteers during an investigation is not taken lightly. The Volunteering Team can provide guidance and support with assessing whether a suspension is appropriate. The Head of Volunteering must be informed and agree to any suspension decision. In their absence, the Volunteering Insight and Support Manager or Director of People must be informed and agree to the suspension decision. There may be occasions where it is appropriate for the Head of Legal to be involved in this decision. This will depend on the reasons for the suspension and will be discussed and agreed with the volunteer manager, their line manager and the Volunteering Team.

#### Communicating the decision to suspend

If we need to suspend you from your role, your volunteer manager or another appropriate staff member will call you as soon as possible. They will explain:

* That due to the nature of the concern or complaint there is a need to suspend you while this is investigated.
* Confirm that you understand that you cannot continue to volunteer in this role, and if appropriate other roles, while the investigation takes place.
* Confirm that contact with you will be necessary for further information and provide the name of your main point of contact during the investigation.

Following this phone call, we will confirm the decision to suspend you in writing, either by email or post, to confirm everything that has been discussed. A copy of this communication must be sent to the Volunteering Team.

If the suspension is confirmed by the Volunteering Team, they must ensure the relevant volunteer manager(s) are aware you have been suspended and cannot volunteer until we (or the local authority and/or the police) have completed the investigation.

If the suspension is confirmed by the volunteer manager, they must update the Investigation Officer and Head of Volunteering that this has been communicated. They must send a copy of the confirmation to the Volunteering Team to be stored securely.

#### Reasons for immediate suspension

There are some occasions when you may be suspended immediately while an investigation is carried out. These include, but are not limited to, acts of a serious nature or breaches of our Volunteering Commitment or Professional Code of Behaviour. Examples of these include allegations about:

* Causing harm or abuse to anyone in our care
* Dangerous, reckless or violent behaviour involving risk or injury to others
* Behaviour likely to offend others, including insults relating to someone's physical or mental ability, race, sexual orientation etc.
* Fraud, theft or bribery
* Malicious damage to our property or other criminal offences
* Serious misuse of Information Technology e.g. accessing pornographic websites on the Internet
* Serious incapacity due to use of alcohol or illegal drugs
* Behaving in a way which may indicate you are unsuitable to work or volunteer with vulnerable people
* Breaching our data protection guidelines
* Not adhering to our Volunteering Commitment or Professional Code of Behaviour
* Declining to renew a criminal record check
* Refusing to complete the essential training that is necessary to carry out your role(s).

#### Informing and updating others about a suspension

In a formal complaint, the Investigation Officer is responsible for ensuring the relevant teams and individuals are informed and updated about the suspension as appropriate. The list below includes some of the key individuals that may need to be informed and updated:

* Your volunteer manager and Head of Service.
* Head of Volunteering. In their absence, the Volunteering Insight and Support Manager or Director of People must be informed and agree to the suspension decision. There may be occasions where it is appropriate for the Head of Legal to be involved in this decision.
* A designated member of the Volunteering Team who will be available to provide guidance and may be involved or leading the investigation.
* Director of People or HR Business Partners for matters that involve a member of staff.
* Designated Safeguarding Lead, or the Head of Safeguarding (for safeguarding concerns).
* Information Governance Manager (for possible or confirmed data breaches).
* Director of Technology (for suspected or confirmed data breaches).
* Head of Legal (for suspected or confirmed incidents involving criminality)
* Head of Governance (for incidents linked to Charity Commission Serious Incidents).
* Any other staff or volunteers who are involved, for example if a complaint is made about a volunteer by another volunteer or staff member.

#### Lifting a suspension

Once the investigation is finalised, it may be necessary to carry out a risk assessment and/or further criminal record check to confirm if the suspension can be lifted. This must be discussed with the Volunteering Team. The decision to lift a suspension will be confirmed with you ideally over the phone and followed up with a written confirmation.

Please be aware that if it is a safeguarding concern, this must be discussed with the service’s Designated Safeguarding Lead or the Head of Safeguarding. It may be necessary for us to update PVG, DBS or Access NI of the outcome of the investigation. The Safeguarding Team will be able to advise on this.

### Recording and sharing outcomes

Following an investigation, you will receive a formal response to the concern or complaint, which will include:

* Details of the investigation carried out
* A decision about whether or not the complaint was upheld, or whether the concern was found to be valid
* The reason for the decision
* Any appropriate resolution that will be offered, e.g. an apology, help to access support from another source, or additional training
* Information about any other actions to be taken as a result of the concern or complaint

All complaints and outcomes must be recorded, regardless of timeframes, to enable ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the process and volunteer experience. This information is stored securely and managed by the Volunteering Team.

#### Informing and updating others about the outcome of a formal complaint

The list of people to inform and update about the outcome of a formal complaint or concern will depend on the nature of the issue and reason for the decision. This will be discussed and agreed with your volunteer manager(s), their line manager and the Volunteering Team.

The Investigation Officer is responsible for ensuring the relevant individuals and teams are informed and updated as appropriate. The list below includes some of the key individuals that may need to be informed and updated:

* Your volunteer manager and Head of Service.
* Head of Volunteering. In their absence, the Volunteering Insight and Support Manager or Director of People must be informed of the outcome. There may be occasions where it is appropriate for the Head of Legal to be updated about this decision.
* Other members of the Volunteering Team, as required. They will ensure that the volunteer’s record is updated on RNIB's volunteer management system.
* Director of People or HR Business Partners for matters that involve a member of staff.
* Designated Safeguarding Lead, or the Head of Safeguarding (for safeguarding concerns).
* Information Governance Manager, Head of Information Security or Director of Technology (for possible or confirmed data breaches).
* Head of Legal (for suspected or confirmed incidents involving criminality)
* Head of Governance (for incidents linked to Charity Commission Serious Incidents).

The Volunteering Team can provide guidance to anyone who is investigating a concern/complaint to ensure the appropriate individuals are informed and updated.

### Next steps

We hope that a resolution can be reached through the formal complaint process to the satisfaction of all involved. In serious cases or where problems remain unsolved after informal and formal attempts have been made, it may be necessary to ask a volunteer to leave their role.

If you are not satisfied with the response and/or outcome to the concern or complaint, you can ask for the decision to be reviewed. This process is outlined in [Stage three – review](#_Stage_3_–).

## Stage 3 – Review

If you are not satisfied with the response and/or outcome to the concern or complaint, you may ask for a review. The process is the same whether you have raised the issue or if a concern has been raised about you.

You should write to the Chief Officer of the team that you volunteer with setting out the reasons you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the concern or complaint. The details of the relevant Chief Officer will be made available in the formal outcome letter you will receive from the Investigation Officer responsible for investigating the concern or complaint.

You have seven days to ask for a review from the day you received the outcome communication. After this period has passed, your request for a review will not be granted.

The Chief Officer will either carry out the review of your case or appoint one or more senior managers to carry out a review. They will acknowledge your request for a review within seven working days and will inform you of the name and contact details of the person(s) who will be handling the review. The typical timescale for providing you with a response is within 21 working days from the date that the review request is received.

The review will examine:

* The original concern or complaint raised
* The way it has been investigated
* The decision made and any agreed actions.

When the review has been completed and they have considered their findings, the Chief Officer will write to you to:

* Tell you the outcome of the review and the reasons for this
* Inform you of any actions that we will be taking as a result.

The outcome of this review is final, and no further action is allowed under the Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure.

## Support during any investigation

We understand that dealing with a complaint or concern can be a stressful experience for all involved. You will be given the details of a member of staff who will be available during an investigation to offer moral support and check in with you. This will normally be your volunteer manager or another member of your team where this is not appropriate.

### Employee and Volunteer Assistance Programme (EVAP)

The Employee and Volunteer Assistance Programme (EVAP) is a useful source of support for volunteers facing difficulties. It is a free, confidential service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to all RNIB volunteers and their immediate family members (living in the same household).

It provides unlimited access to support, information, professional guidance and, where appropriate, short term counselling on any personal or professional issue which may be causing concern.

You will be able to access EVAP up to three months after you have stopped volunteering with RNIB. We will share the details of the EVAP service with you during any investigation.

## Role reviews and ending your volunteering

### Reviewing your volunteer role

All volunteer relationships with RNIB should be reviewed at least once a year. During the review, you and your volunteer manager will be able to openly discuss any concerns you may have and come with a possible resolution. This will provide your volunteer manager with an opportunity to provide you with feedback about how you are doing in your role. You will also be able to discuss the support, information and resources you need to enable you to carry out your role.

### Ending your volunteer role

You can stop volunteering with RNIB at any time. If a concern or complaint is being investigated and you decide to stop volunteering mid-investigation, we may continue to investigate the issues and conclude the investigation after you have left your role. We will keep a record of the investigation and any outcomes reached.

In the event that you return to volunteering with RNIB, we expect to hold a conversation with you about the complaint outcome and discuss whether volunteering with RNIB is a suitable option for you.

### Asking you to stop volunteering

In rare cases it may be appropriate for us to ask you to stop volunteering with RNIB. The reasons for this could be:

* A significant breakdown in the relationship between you and your volunteer manager, other volunteers or members of your team
* If you are no longer acting in the best interests of RNIB, our charitable objectives or strategy
* If you behave in a way that is against our Professional Code of Behaviour or Volunteering Commitment
* In the case of a serious safeguarding concern
* If you commit a serious criminal offence
* If you act in a way that may cause reputational damage to RNIB
* Refusing to adhere to RNIB policies and procedures
* Refusing to complete the essential training or apply/renew a criminal record check that is necessary to carry out your role(s).

In the event where it is necessary to ask you to stop volunteering, this must be acted upon promptly. This must be communicated either in person or over the phone, where possible, and followed with a confirmation in writing. This will normally be communicated by the volunteer manager or a senior manager in their team, or where appropriate, the Investigation Officer.

### Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility: for services to be effective each individual and service area should play their full part. As of 12 October 2009, we have a legal obligation to refer anyone removed or dismissed, as a result of a serious incident as described earlier, from working/volunteering with children and vulnerable adults in a regulated activity to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in England and Wales. The relevant agency will be Disclosure Scotland or Access Northern Ireland for volunteers who are not based in England or Wales.

This may result in the person being barred from working/volunteering with children or vulnerable adults in a regulated activity indefinitely. This applies even when information comes to light after an individual has left the organisation. For further information, please see the DBS referral information factsheets: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-referral-and-barring-decision-making-process>

If you have a safeguarding concern about a child or vulnerable adult, you must follow RNIB’s safeguarding policies and procedures. In the first instance, contact your Designated Safeguarding Lead and/or RNIB’s Safeguarding Team at safeguarding@rnib.org.uk. Our full policy and practice guidelines are available on our website by visiting: <https://www.rnib.org.uk/safeguarding-policy>

## Further support

The Volunteering Team can provide guidance and support with the Volunteer Problem Solving Procedure. They will involve relevant staff and policies and procedures to support resolving any concern or complaint with you.

RNIB Volunteering Team

0303 123 9999 (option 4, then option 2)

volunteering@rnib.org.uk

## Review schedule

This procedure is due for review every three years or following any significant organisational changes.

Last Reviewed: December 2022

Date of next review: December 2025

Approved by: Jo Keller, Head of Volunteering

## Associated policies, procedures, standards and guidelines

* Volunteer Involving Policy
* Volunteering Commitment
* Professional Code of Behaviour
* Safeguarding Policies and Procedures
* Bullying and Harassment Policy

Document ends.