

## HOW TO COMPLAIN EFFECTIVELY

Often when we believe there has been unfair treatment, or our dealings with organizations or public officials have been less than satisfactory, there is a strong emotional response. We feel angry, disappointed or frustrated. We want to give someone a piece of our mind in no uncertain terms. An immediate response like this is usually not productive or helpful – even though we get some short term satisfaction with having vented our emotions.

To get a more permanent and mutually satisfactory solution, the following checklist is offered:

- Make sure the complaint is valid**
  - do your homework; research the relevant program, policy, regulation, practice so you understand your rights or entitlements
- Clearly define the issue(s)**
  - focus on the real concern(s) and be able to clearly explain what that is
- Get the help of an advocate, if necessary**
  - if the issues are complex, or if you lack the necessary communication skills to make the complaint, seek the help of someone who can work through this with you
- Use the most appropriate form to make your complaint**
  - in person, telephone, letter, email, or some other form
- Timing**
  - deal with the problem in a timely way; don't put it off or 'stew' about it with others
- Determine who has the authority to decide the matter**
  - keep in mind that the person who receives your complaint may not be the person who has the authority to resolve and the power to make changes
- Determine to be part of the solution**
  - be open to the possibility of a different and valid viewpoint; listen to understand – even if you disagree; be respectful; be tough on issues and soft on people
- Be assertive, but not aggressive**
  - leave anger behind; avoid accusations

- **Lay out your case in an organized way**
  - if the matter is complex, prepare a written plan about how you want to present the information, and, when presenting it in person, check occasionally to make sure each piece is being understood.
- **Rely on facts**
  - be ready to rely on relevant documents and notes – don't exaggerate the details of the complaint or its impact
- **Don't apologize**
  - when the grievance or concern is valid, the organization should accept it as an opportunity to improve
- **Admit to your part in the problem, if such is the case**
  - this is being honest and fair, and shows your willingness to work out a reasonable solution
- **State the best possible outcome for you**
  - work out what you want to achieve, and what it would take to resolve the matter in your view
- **Set a reasonable deadline**
  - collaborate with the other party on what that might be

### **What to avoid:**

- Being viewed as a chronic complainer, whose concerns are without merit
- Claiming special consideration
- Name dropping
- Using bad language
- Personal attacks
- Threatening behaviour
- Making accusations
- Listing all the things that went wrong in a 'rant'