

PROBLEM SOLVING

1

Telephone and in-person

Conflicts, disagreements or differences of opinion can arise when decisions are being made by government organizations. Trying to resolve a problem on your own is a good first step.

Sometimes a phone call is a good way to begin, especially if you are not sure where to direct your complaint. The organization may ask you to put your complaint in writing, particularly if it is complicated or there is a lot of history to the issue. If you think an in-person meeting would be helpful, ask for a meeting.

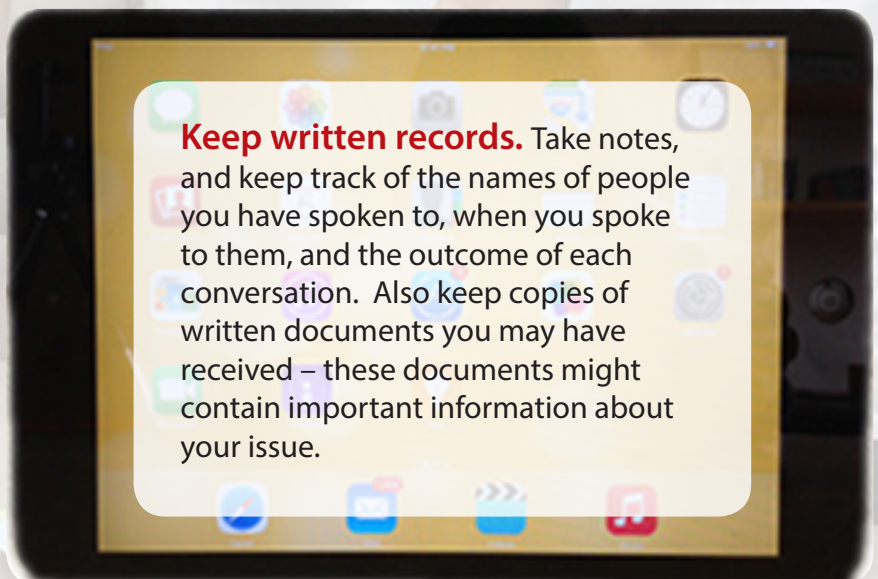


Talk to the right people. If the first person you talk to does not have the authority to change the decision or action you are complaining about, ask to talk to someone who does have the authority. Keep at it until you feel that you are being understood and that your concern is being taken seriously.

Be calm and courteous. Explain that you have a problem or concern and that you need help in solving it.

Listen carefully. Make an effort to hear not only the words the other person is saying but to understand the complete message. Resist the urge to interrupt. Do not become distracted and start forming counter-arguments to make when the other person stops speaking. Ask questions, reflect and paraphrase to make sure you understand the message. Even if the person you are speaking with cannot solve your problem, he or she can likely provide valuable information.

Ask questions and ask for action. Ask for clarification when you do not understand a policy or procedure. Ask employees to identify the rules, policies or laws that guided their actions and ask for copies. Ask how long it will take to deal with your concern, and if nothing happens, call back to check on progress. If there is a degree of urgency involved, be sure to say so and explain why.



PROBLEM SOLVING

2

In writing

Conflicts, disagreements or differences of opinion can arise when decisions are being made by government organizations. Trying to resolve a problem on your own is a good first step.

What to include in your written complaint to the organization

Your letter or email about your issue should be clear, to the point, and explain why you think you have been treated unfairly or improperly. Set out your letter or email in logical order, and include details such as:

- the date
- your name, address, daytime telephone number
- a description of your problem, concern or incident
- relevant dates, places and times
- relevant details of any telephone conversations and meetings
- any explanations you think are important
- any information that supports your position or argument
- important information that was overlooked, or information that was incorrect, or new information since the decision was made
- copies of relevant documents
- the result you are seeking

Ask for a response. Always request that your letter or email be acknowledged in writing. Ask the organization how long it will take to deal with your complaint. Explaining what action you think should be taken to resolve your problem will give the organization a chance to fix a mistake or omission. If there is a degree of urgency involved, be sure to say so and explain why.

Keep records. Keep copies of all letters and other documents you send and receive, as well as details of all telephone calls and meetings. You may need to provide evidence of your dealings with an organization, particularly if you decide to seek help elsewhere (such as from the ombudsman). Organize your documents, photographs or other evidence in logical order so you can easily find what you need.

If your request is reasonable and you have contacted the appropriate person within the organization to address your complaint, you are more likely to have your complaint resolved.