

Appendix R: Strategies for Conflict Resolution

When dealt with professionally and conscientiously – as well as with empathy (after all, most people don't aspire to deliver poor quality work) – conflict can lead to both better working conditions as well as overall internship program improvements.

The first step to addressing problems and resolving conflict is to immediately address them. For example, a supervisor might need to discuss work-performance issues, interpersonal challenges, missed deadlines, missteps if/when dealing with the public (misinformation, unsatisfactory patron services, etc.), or other issues directly related to the intern's work at the library. Discussing subpar intern performance can be addressed in a couple of ways:

- Revisit the internship agreement and mutually agreed upon expectations, goals, and objectives. Also potentially revisit training and orientation materials that might have covered the issue at hand. Then address inconsistencies and see if the intern understands your concerns and is still committed to the principles and practices agreed upon at the start of the internship.
- Reassess the goals and deliverables for the remainder of the internship experience to identify mutually acceptable goals between what needs to be done at the library and what the intern is capable of doing.
- Keep in mind that an intern might need to discuss a lack of support, insufficiently challenging work, interpersonal issues, unrealistic deadlines, misinformation leading to missteps when dealing with other staff or the community at large, and other issues directly related to how they are supported or have been prepared for their work. In these cases, your role will be to listen and offer suggestions for resolutions and support.

By treating the issue as one between professionals in the library system and following any conflict resolution training and best practices as developed internally by human resources or volunteer engagement staff persons, library staff can help limit the issue to one of work rather than allow it to become something personal.

Note: If either party is uncomfortable or unwilling to address the other directly, consider bringing in a neutral third party – someone from the intern's college or university, a community member from a conflict resolution or similar type of organization, or possibly even the Internship Program Manager and/or a staff person responsible for human resources or engaging library volunteers – to facilitate a resolution. The inclusion of a neutral third party may also be necessary if either the supervisor or the intern feels that they've raised the issue with the other and, after more than one conversation and an acceptable window of time allowing for reasonable improvement, feel that the issue is still not being resolved. Finally, if there are any problems or concerns regarding a student intern, consider engaging their school or department advisor in the conversation as well. ●

About this book

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