



Tips for Municipal Complaint Resolution Policies

- 1** Every municipality should have a general complaint policy approved by council.
- 2** The complaint policy should be publicly posted.
- 3** The policy should specify if anonymous complaints will be accepted.
- 4** There should be a clear timeline for responding to complaints, including a timeline for acknowledging receipt of the complaint.
- 5** Staff should be trained on the policy.
- 6** Complaints should be treated in confidence as much as possible.
- 7** General complaint resolution should be distinguished from complaints about the conduct of council, committee and local board members. The municipality should provide referral information for these complaints – for example, to an integrity commissioner.
- 8** The policy should distinguish between requests for service (“I need garbage pick-up”) and a complaint (“The staff who picked up my garbage were rude”).
- 9** The policy should also distinguish between complaints and inquiries (“When will my garbage be picked up?”), or suggestions and compliments (“Garbage pick-up would be more convenient on Fridays”).
- 10** The municipality may want to establish a separate process for monetary claims against the municipality (such as for negligence or pothole damage) which may be referred for review by a municipal insurer.
- 11** There should be information provided for service request referrals and for processing financial claims.
- 12** There should be contact information provided for municipal staff so residents can appropriately direct their complaints.
- 13** The policy should encourage complaint resolution at the lowest level; each department should be responsible for initially addressing and attempting to resolve complaints.
- 14** There should be a clear complaint path. If a complaint is not resolved at one level, there should be clear direction to the next level of complaint resolution.
- 15** There should be an official with the ultimate responsibility to address complaints within the municipality (the Clerk, City Manager or Chief Administrative Officer, for example). Some municipalities may choose to establish a municipal ombudsman.



- 16** A record should be kept of every complaint received, any interactions between municipal staff and the individual complaining, and the results.
- 17** There should be clear delegation to staff to confirm the scope of their authority in addressing complaints.
- 18** Where the competence or conduct of staff is the subject of a complaint, the complaint should generally be reviewed by someone who has not had prior involvement in the matter.
- 19** All relevant information and documents should be considered during the complaint review process, staff should be required to co-operate with complaint resolution attempts, and complainants should have an opportunity to comment before a final decision is made about the complaint.
- 20** An individual or body that has complained should be provided with a written explanation concerning any decisions made in response to their complaint and be advised where they can go next if they remain dissatisfied.
- 21** The complaint policy should prohibit retaliation for anyone making a complaint.
- 22** Municipalities should address how they will deal with frivolous and vexatious complaints.
- 23** It is useful to set out examples of remedies that may be available, such as apologies (apologies go a long way and don't create legal obligations: see *Apology Act*), changes in policies or practices, financial or other remedial action as appropriate.
- 24** The complaint policy should cross-reference the municipality's accessibility policy and accommodations available in accordance with the Ontario *Human Rights Code* as well as any general customer service policy.
- 25** The municipality should provide a way for complainants to provide feedback about their experience with the complaint process.
- 26** Complaint statistics including volume, issue complained about, and result should be collected, analyzed and reported on publicly.
- 27** The policy should explain that members of the public can contact the Ontario Ombudsman if they are dissatisfied with the municipality's final response to their complaint.