



## Dispute Resolution

*Adopted on: 10/06/2021*

**Last Revision Date: 11/13/2024**

**Policy No. 4.503**

**Last Enabling Resolution:  
240-2024/920-2024**

**Developer/Reviewer:  
Division of Human Resources**

### 1. Purpose

The policies and procedures described herein have been established to foster a positive work environment throughout all Sedgwick County departments. The primary objective of the Dispute Resolution Process is to resolve interpersonal conflicts between Sedgwick County employees or between employees and the organization in a manner that is safe for employees and guarantees no retaliation from any level of County supervision.

### 2. Scope

The Sedgwick County Dispute Resolution Process is available to all Sedgwick County employees, with the exception of employees of the Office of the District Attorney and the Sedgwick County Sheriff's Office.

### 3. Policy Statement

The Sedgwick County Dispute Resolution Process may be used to settle interpersonal conflicts between two or more Sedgwick County employees or supervisors, or disagreements between employees and the organization over working conditions or the work environment. The process may not be utilized to dispute compensation, job descriptions, or performance evaluations. It may also not be used to challenge disciplinary actions, including Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs). The Sedgwick County grievance process may be used to grieve terminations, demotions, or disciplinary suspensions without pay. Disputes related to lower level disciplinary actions or any other issues may be addressed by contacting Human Resources.

Any dispute related to an act of discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, age, (40 and older) sex ( including pregnancy, gender identity and sexual orientation), genetic information, disability, political affiliations, status as member of the uniformed services, opposition to prohibited discrimination, or participation in a discrimination or harassment complaint process, may use the discrimination complaint procedure described in policy 4.506 Workplace Discrimination.

The Sedgwick County Dispute Resolution Process consists of three steps that may be applied if the employees are not able to resolve the matter themselves. The final step entails a hearing in front of three members of the Sedgwick County Leadership Team who will have the authority to resolve the dispute.

#### 4. Definitions

- A. **Dispute Resolution Form** – When initiating the Dispute Resolution Process, all parties involved are required to fill out a Dispute Resolution Form stating the nature of the conflict, the initiatives taken so far to resolve the issue, and their preferred resolution. The form can be found under “County Forms” and as an attachment to this policy on e-line.
- B. **Facilitation** – The process during which a neutral party provides structure and process to the interactions between two or more people to help them constructively work to resolve a problem, conflict or dispute.
- C. **Leadership Resolution Hearing** – Three members of the Sedgwick County Leadership Team will hear testimony from each party. The hearing panel has the authority to determine a resolution to the dispute.
- D. **Sedgwick County Leadership Team** – The Sedgwick County Leadership Team is defined as the Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Information Officer, Assistant County Manager of Administrative Services, Assistant County Manager of Public Safety, Deputy County Manager of Public Services, and the County Manager.
- E. **M.E.E.T.™ Model** – The Four-Step M.E.E.T.™ Model is a conflict resolution tool utilizing a trained Sedgwick County facilitator. The M.E.E.T.™ acronym stands for *Make Time to Discuss, Explore Differences, Encourage Respect and Take Personal Responsibility*. M.E.E.T.™ promotes a respectful work environment by focusing on resolving problems and maintaining effective work relationships.

#### 5. Procedures

Employees are expected to attempt to resolve the dispute. If this is not possible, employees may access the Dispute Resolution Process outlined below:

- A. **Step 1: Supervisor/Manager Facilitation**  
If employees are unable to resolve the conflict or dispute themselves, they may inform the appropriate supervisor or manager of the disagreement. Each party will be required to complete and submit the Dispute Resolution Form describing the issue, initiatives taken to settle the dispute, and the preferred resolution. The supervisor or manager will assist in resolving the issue by meeting with the parties.
- B. **Step 2: Human Resources Consultation**  
If no resolution is reached in Step 1, the supervisor/manager or employee may consult with Sedgwick County Human Resources. The completed Dispute Resolution Forms, and any other written documentation submitted by the parties, should be forwarded to the Employee Relations Specialist for review prior to the consultation. Depending on the nature and severity of the issue, HR may:
  - 1. Refer the matter back to the Department/Division for resolution;
  - 2. Recommend and coordinate an employee-led M.E.E.T.™ facilitation (see definitions), or;
  - 3. Secure the consultation of an external mediator.

### C. Step 3: Leadership Resolution Hearing

If no resolution was found in Step 2, three members of the Sedgwick County Leadership Team, identified by the Chief Human Resources Officer, shall serve as a hearing panel with the authority to determine a resolution to the dispute. When the involved employee(s) work in the office of an Elected Official and no resolution was found in Step 2, the Elected Official may choose to convene a three person hearing panel comprised of Elected Officials or may request the matter be heard by the Leadership Team. The Employee Relations Specialist will liaison with the Elected Official regarding the determination of the hearing panel. In all cases, the steps and timeline outlined below should be followed.

1. The hearing shall be conducted within ten (10) business days.
2. The Employee Relations Specialist will submit copies of all forms and written documentation to the members of the hearing panel for review prior to the hearing.
3. All parties will have the opportunity to state their case in front of the panel. As a part of their testimony, each party shall be required to clearly state their preferred resolution.
4. After the hearing, the panel members will communicate their decision in writing to the Employee Relations Specialist within three (3) business days. The Employee Relations Specialist will send the determination in writing to all involved parties within three (3) business days.
5. In the event a party fails to appear in person without good cause being shown for their absence, the matter will be reviewed without their representation.
6. The hearing panel may not consider unrelated matters.
7. The decision of the hearing panel shall be final.

### 6. Record Keeping

All records pertaining to dispute resolution processes will be maintained by the Division of Human Resources in files separate from the employee's personnel file.

### 7. Prohibition Against Retaliation

**Retaliating against a person using or being involved in the Sedgwick County Dispute Resolution Process is prohibited by this policy and will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.**