



Grievance Processes - June 2022

Background

Pigweed Food Co-operative, trading as Thoughtful Foods, is committed to providing an inclusive, supportive, participatory and safe space for all members, volunteers, Coordinators, Directors and members of the public. If a member or someone using the space feels that another member or someone using the space has violated the Safer Spaces Policy, they are encouraged to use the avenues listed below to seek resolution to the conflict.

Coordinators and Directors should participate in annual training on Grievance Processes on how to best manage grievance events. This should be part of regular Coordinator Training.

Principles and Related Thoughtful Foods' Policies

This Grievance Policy should be viewed in conjunction with Thoughtful Foods' Safer Spaces Policy.

The procedures listed below are designed to encourage both the person making the grievance and the person(s) that the grievance involves, to (when it is appropriate and safe to do so) seek dialogue and resolution to the conflict. This is not designed or intended to be a punitive process, to seek justice or apportion blame.

In instances when a grievance involves a serious complaint, including a grievance that may involve an offence under law and/or incur on Thoughtful Foods an obligation to act, Thoughtful Foods may be required to report this matter to the relevant authorities. Further details on such circumstances are described in our Privacy Policy.

Grievance Officers

Thoughtful Foods should nominate two Coordinator Grievance Officers and two Director Grievance Officers. The Grievance Team should:

- Include at least one male identifying and at least one female identifying person, where possible
- Be as representative as possible
- Aim to be as impartial as possible, and seek to challenge their own prejudices and preconceived ideas when dealing with a grievance
- Uphold the values of the co-op
- Adhere to the Safer Spaces Policy at all times
- Report any matters that incur on the co-op an obligation to act
- Work with the Coordinators and Directors to address systemic problems
- Keep accurate notes of grievances and upload these to the TF Grievance Folder
- Work as a team
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of members

The Grievance Officer position is a secondary role. The Grievance Team is required to meet at least once per term, preferably at the start of term. Given grievances occur infrequently, this meeting can constitute messages on WhatsApp that specify 1) who the primary person to check emails is, 2) any issues raised through email, 3) any grievances reported.

If there is a grievance raised with the Grievance Team, the Grievance Officers are required to confer with each other about the process, unless the person raising the grievance has requested that the grievance be kept confidential.

If a grievance is made against one of the Grievance Officers, they should not be part of the Grievance Team assigned to resolve the grievance. Unless the person making the grievance has given explicit permission to do so, they should not be informed of the grievance unless there is a requirement by law. Should multiple Grievance Officers be involved, such that it is not appropriate for the Grievance Officers to collectively address the issue, the default is for the grievance to be referred to the Directors Collective for management.

There is a generic grievance email address - Grievance@ThoughtfulFoods.org.au to facilitate direct communication between members and the Grievance Officers. This address will be accessible and should be monitored by all the Grievance Officers.

Grievance Avenues

There are six possible avenues for grievances. These are described in greater detail in the [*Processes for Different Grievance Avenues*](#) section of document.

- **Direct:** The person making the grievance is comfortable raising the grievance with the person directly.
- **Confidential:** The person making the grievance is not comfortable raising the grievance with the person directly, and does not wish to be identified, or for the person the grievance involves to be made aware of the grievance.
- **Anonymous:** The person making the grievance is not comfortable raising the grievance with the person directly, and does not wish to be identified, but would like the person the grievance involves to be made aware of the grievance
- **Formal:** The person making the grievance is not comfortable raising the grievance with the person directly, but is happy to be identified and for the person involved to be made aware of the grievance
- **Formal External:** The grievance involves a matter that Thoughtful Foods is obliged to report to the relevant authorities.

In determining which avenue the person making the grievance wishes to pursue, the following questions should be asked:

1. Does the grievance involve a serious complaint or issue that Thoughtful Foods is obliged to report to the relevant authorities?
 - a. Yes: Formal External
 - b. No: One of the other avenues
2. Is the person comfortable raising the issue directly with the person the grievance involves?
 - a. Yes: Direct
 - b. No: One of the other avenues
3. Is the person comfortable with the person the grievance involves being informed of the grievance?
 - a. Yes: Direct, Anonymous or Formal
 - b. No: Confidential
4. Is the person comfortable with being identified to the person the grievance involves?
 - a. Yes: Direct or Formal
 - b. No: Confidential or Anonymous

The person making the grievance should also be asked:

- Are they comfortable with the Board of Directors being informed of the issue?
- Are they happy to be identified?
- Are they happy for the person the grievance involves to be identified?

The person making the grievance can, at any time in the process, decide to take a different avenue, or withdraw consent for their identity to be disclosed. If someone withdraws consent for their identity to be disclosed at a later point, they should understand that their identity may have already been disclosed previously, as part of the resolution process, and this cannot always be reversed.

Processes for Coordinators

Coordinators are most likely to be the initial contact person in the case of a grievance. If a grievance is raised with a Coordinator, they should ask the five questions listed above, and help the person making the grievance decide which avenue to take. If they do not feel able to do so, they should refer the person to one of the nominated Grievance Officers.

If the matter is a serious complaint, such as those that may involve an offence under law (e.g. assault) and/or incur on Thoughtful Foods an obligation to act (e.g. sexual harassment, harassment, vilification, bullying, victimisation), or the Coordinator is unsure of this, then the Coordinator should immediately seek advice from a Grievance Officer. The Grievance Officer must advise a Director as soon as practicable if they deem it to be a serious complaint. The person making the grievance should be made aware of this before the Grievance Officer and/or Director are informed.

Coordinators may act as facilitators or support people for the person making the grievance or the person the grievance is made against (unless the person making the grievance has directed the Coordinator not to disclose any information to this person). If the Coordinator is not comfortable acting in these roles, or the person making the grievance prefers, Grievance Officers can fulfill these roles.

Coordinators can seek confidential advice, including in a de-identified manner, from Grievance Officers at any time. In these instances, they should not disclose any details the person making the grievance has made confidential.

Coordinators may also be required to implement strategies during their shop shifts that support people who have raised grievances. Depending on the avenue

pursued, there may be times when identifiers or detailed circumstances cannot be shared with the Coordinator.

Processes for Directors

Unless the person making the grievance matter has not given consent for the Grievance Officers to do so, grievances should be discussed at the next Directors' Meeting. Where relevant, details such as identities and specifics will be withheld to maintain confidentiality.

Directors must be informed of any grievances involving any allegations of offences under law or obligations to act. If the grievance is deemed a serious complaint, an out-of-session Directors meeting should be convened. Where a grievance involves one or more of the Directors, Grievance Officers will request that the Directors not involved meet privately to discuss the matter.

It is important that all grievances are discussed at Directors Meetings because:

- Directors have a legal responsibility for the organisation
- Directors must respond to grievances that highlight organisational risks
- Directors should prevent future grievances by implementing changes to training, procedures, policies and/or communication processes in response to previous grievances.

Processes for Different Grievance Avenues

If at any point the person making the grievance feels uncomfortable with this avenue, or their grievance has not been resolved after undertaking one avenue, they can choose one of the other avenues at any time.

Irrespective of the avenue, the Initial Contact Person and/or one of the Grievance Officers should follow up with the person raising the grievance to:

- Offer support
- Check in to see if they feel that their grievance has been resolved
- Offer other avenues as necessary
- Ask permission to discuss the grievance at a meeting of Grievance Officers and at a Director meeting. This is designed not to re-hash or try to resolve the grievance, but to ensure that the Grievance Officers and Directors are aware of any ongoing, related, or systemic issues that may relate to the grievance. This discussion can be de-identified if preferred.

Supporting the person(s) involved in the grievance

Grievance Officers should be aware that it is possible or even likely that the person(s) involved in the grievance is not aware of the problem. The person(s) involved:

- May react strongly to the news that a grievance has been lodged involving them
- May be unwilling to change or hear feedback
- May require support (and should always be offered support)
- May wish to lodge a grievance themselves relating to this issue. In this instance they should ideally be referred to another Grievance Officer as their primary point of contact.

The Grievance Officer should ensure that they are acting in an impartial fashion, and not seek to pass judgment or allocate blame.

Direct Avenue

The Direct avenue is the simplest of the five options for someone expressing a grievance. The person raising the grievance should be supported to discuss the issue directly with the person(s) involved and, ideally, to arrive at a mutually agreeable outcome. Grievance Officers can provide support to the person raising the grievance by discussing how to raise the grievance, possible responses from the other party and/or possible outcomes, for example.

Following such discussion, the Grievance Officer involved should follow up with both parties to offer support.

Confidential Avenue

The Confidential avenue is designed for people who are not comfortable speaking directly to the person the grievance relates to, do not wish to be identified, and/or do not wish the person the grievance involves to be made aware of the grievance.

Grievance Officers may need to support the person making the grievance to identify and implement alternative means of resolving the issue. This can include solutions such as alternative rostering or different allocation of tasks as relates to shop shifts. Regular follow-up with the person making the grievance should be undertaken to assess the utility of these solutions and whether this resolves the grievance issue. This should continue until the person making the grievance agrees that the matter can be closed.

Anonymous Avenue

This avenue is designed for people who are not comfortable raising the grievance directly with the person(s) involved, do not wish to be identified, but do want the person(s) the grievance involves to be made aware of the issue.

Key aspects of this avenue:

- The person making the grievance should be made aware of the potential of being identified by the person(s) involved due to the nature of the grievance
- Both the person making the grievance and the person(s) involved should be offered support throughout the process
- The process and the role of the Grievance Officer should be explained to the person(s) involved
- With the person making the grievance's consent, Grievance Officers should report back to the Director Meeting (ensuring that information that the person making the grievance has chosen not to make public is kept confidential)

Formal Avenue

The Formal avenue is suited for grievances in which the person making the grievance is not comfortable raising the grievance with the person directly, but is happy to be identified and for the person involved to be made aware of the grievance.

Key aspects of this avenue:

- Both the person making the grievance and the person(s) involved should be offered support throughout the process
- The process and the role of the Grievance Officer should be explained to the person(s) involved
- With the person making the grievance's consent, Grievance Officers should report back to the Director Meeting
- Grievance Officers should encourage both parties to think about what outcome they would like to achieve

As this is a more involved and time consuming process, Grievance Officers should ensure that they are reporting back to the Grievance Team, and seeking consensus before coming to any decisions on a regular basis.

Formal External

This avenue must be used when the grievance involves a serious complaint that may involve an offence under law (e.g. assault) and/or incur on Thoughtful Foods an obligation to act (e.g. sexual harassment, harassment, vilification, bullying, victimisation).

The person making the grievance must be informed if reporting to a government agency is required. Ideally, they should also be referred to formal services (list below) to ensure appropriate support is available to them. Although a Grievance Officer should continue to check in and provide support as needed, the person making the grievance should be advised that professional support is recommended in their circumstances.

Process for Documentation

There is a Grievance specific folder in the Directors' Google Drive that is accessible only by current Grievance Officers. Where required, password protected documents may be used to further support confidentiality. When a Grievance Officer resigns their position they must also be removed from the folder sharing.

Notes of the grievance incident, action undertaken and outcome should be kept. Notes for meetings held between Directors must also be kept in the Google Drive folder, unless the Grievance relates to one of the current Grievance Officers.

Referral Options for External Support

Although Grievance Officers intend to provide support to our members, they are not able, and certainly not intended or expected, to replace formal professional psychological support. All persons involved in a grievance issue should be provided with information for formal support.

This may include:

- [UNSW Psychology and Wellness](#)
- [LifeLine Crisis Support](#) - 13 11 14
- [NSW Government Communities and Justice](#)
- [Randwick Police Station](#)

Endorsed by:

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Signature Directors

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