

Introduction: The whitepaper process is one the Governing Board (GB) of Harris County System of Hope (SOH) agreed upon in January 2008, when and if conflict arises. It was observed that we had a conflict on January 20, 2010 during the meeting of the GB between one member of the board and the board. A conflict also arose between two members of the board.

Summary of Conflict: A family member who is on the Systems of Hope (SOH) Governing Board (GB), as a member of the Parent Empowerment Group (PEG), entered into a contract with SOH, making her eligible to provide mentoring services to families, should there be such a need. During the time that the contract was in force, no work order was issued against the contract, and the contract expired in September of 2009. The family member stated in the GB meeting that her expectations of being asked to provide service has not been met and her attempts to address this dispute through numerous channels has not been addressed to her satisfaction.

Findings: It has been noted by the SOHGB that the Harris County Systems of Hope program does not have a contractor grievance process, nor any documented way for a contractor to complain about a contract dispute. Therefore, the SOHGB has asked a small work team to generate this whitepaper so as to propose a process for SOH contractors to resolve contract disputes in the future.

Recommendation: The whitepaper team recommends that the SOHGB adopt the following process for contractors to use if they have a contract dispute with the SOH program. This process will be documented and be kept on file with the program director.

1. Contractor documents concerns in a letter to the director of Systems of Hope program. Director will respond to the concerns and issue his/her findings, in writing, within 10 business days of receiving notice of a contract dispute.
2. Contractor can appeal the director's decision to the principal investigator by sending a written request for review of the director's findings within 10 business days of receiving the director's findings. Principal investigator will issue a written account of his decision within 10 days.
3. Contractor can appeal the principal investigator's decision to Executive Committee of the Governing Board (not the full board) within 10 days of receiving the principal investigator's decision. The dispute will be heard in an open session. The chair of the Governing Board will issue a written decision within 10 business days, and that decision is final.

The following is the description of how the conflict must be managed. It is taken from the GB agreement adopted in January 2008.

- Be respectful
- Use a step by step process
- At what level is the conflict
- Do we have all of the information that we need?
- If not, table the issue and/or send it to a workgroup
- When things get emotional... what is the emotion about?
- Present viewpoint as objectively as possible... careful of tone
- Listen to opposing views
- Look for similarities/differences
- Can it be resolved now? If not then use an ombudsman or workgroup

The following is the manner in which a board member must conduct him/herself during the process. It is excerpted from the Appendix to the by-laws revised and adopted July 23, 2008. **HARRIS COUNTY SYSTEMS OF HOPE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS OF CONDUCT - Standard D: Colleague Relations [Board Members shall not commit any of the following transgressions:]** Make declarations critical of colleagues or their organizations unless these critiques serve a constructive purpose and contribute to the improvement of Systems of Hope. Members must promote mutual respect among colleagues regardless of rank, position or volunteer status in order to improve Systems of Hope service quality mechanisms.