

Managing Client Expectations Script

Introduction

Welcome Screen

Welcome to - Managing Client Expectations. When a client has a complaint, it is generally because an expectation has not been met. And if staff members aren't trained to properly address complaints, a client could become confused or angry. In this module, we'll provide strategies for how staff can effectively manage client expectations and resolve challenging complaints. We will also discuss strategies for dealing with customer complaints effectively to reduce the possibility of repeat calls for the same complaint.

If you'd like information on how to navigate this course, please select the Navigation Tutorial button. Otherwise, select the forward arrow to begin.

Navigation

To get started, make sure your audio is turned on. This learning experience is primarily audio driven. To move backward and forward in the module, select the next and back arrows. Want to see something again? Select the refresh button. Need to pause the module? Select the play/pause button. You can also navigate to a different section in this course by selecting the menu tab at the top of the screen.

So, let's get started. Select the next arrow to continue.

Course Objectives

By the time you've completed this course, you should be able to:

- Effectively address client complaints, and apply strategies for dealing with challenging clients
 - Determine when to escalate a client complaint to a more senior staff member. You will also be able to
 - Proactively educate clients in key areas to reduce confusion and potential complaints. And lastly, you will
 - Become familiar with the appeal process.
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Addressing Client Complaints

Meet Sharon and How to Address Client Complaints (Part 1)

Hi and welcome to our weatherization agency. My name is Sharon, and I'm an Eligibility Coordinator. Today as I am working with our clients, I could really use your help. Dealing with upset clients can sometimes be challenging, especially if they feel that an expectation about a certain service or timeline isn't being met. Here's a call from one of our clients now. Are you ready?

Thank you for calling XYZ agency, this is u - how can I help you?

How to Address Client Complaints (Part 2)

Yeah, this is Eric Johnson, I applied for the weatherization program 4 months ago and I haven't heard anything from your Agency. It's starting to get colder out and I need this service to be able to afford my heating bill. What's taking so long?

Mr. Johnson had an expectation that the application process wouldn't take 4 months. Clients may get anxious when they wait with no notification about how things will proceed. This can lead to a complaint.

How to Address Client Complaints (Part 3)

To better serve our clients when they have a complaint, listen to what they are saying, review previous notes in the client file, and work to identify the problem.

How to Address Client Complaints (Part 4)

The problem could be that the client was confused or not informed about the operating procedures of the weatherization program, such as guidelines and time frames. If this is the case, respectfully explain the process and clearly outline realistic expectations.

How to Address Client Complaints (Part 5)

If the issue is not within the parameters of the normal weatherization process, respectfully inform the client of the next steps for resolving the complaint, per program guidance. These next steps may include a visual inspection of the home. This personal interaction offers a better chance of resolving the complaint than simply listening over the phone. Follow steps according to the subgrantee's policies and procedures or complaint resolution process.

How to Address Client Complaints (Part 6)

Whenever you interact with clients, document all communications and actions taken in the client's file.

How to Address Client Complaints (Part 7)

Take care to listen, show respect, identify next-steps and escalate the concern to a senior manager when it's appropriate.

What Do You Think?

Four months to complete the application process seems a bit long. Given what I know about working with customers who have complaints, how should I respond to Mr. Johnson?

Can you help Sharon respond to Mr. Johnson? Select the best response and choose Submit. If you need help, select the Ask a Colleague button.

Working with Challenging Clients

Mr. Johnson's file indicated that his application was incomplete. When I gave him this information, he became even more upset. Apparently, we tried contacting him several times about it, but he claimed he never received our messages. What should I do to defuse this situation?

Strategies for Dealing with Challenging Clients

Some clients can be a challenge to work with. Therefore, it is important to have tools in place to help defuse tense situations and work toward a resolution. Help Sharon calm Mr. Johnson. Select the icons for some strategies that can help to defuse a difficult situation.

[A] When communicating with a client who is agitated, stay calm. Repeat the client's concerns back to them to show you understand.

[B] Acknowledge the complaint and let the client know you will investigate and be back in touch in a reasonable amount of time. Avoid over promising. Make sure to follow-up with the client.

[C] Share any applicable program guidance, and always save detailed notes in the client's file.

[D] If the client remains agitated, involve another staff member into the conversation. Another voice may help to reduce tension and this person serves as a neutral third party who can objectively record the interaction.

What Do You Think?

Which phrases would best help Sharon to defuse the situation with Mr. Johnson? Move the most helpful phrases to Sharon's response. If the phrase would not help to defuse the situation, it will return to its place.

Working with Challenging Clients

Thanks for your help! As I was talking with Mr. Johnson, I remained calm. I told him that I understood he was frustrated about the delay with his application and asked him if he could send me the completed paperwork so we could move forward with the process. Mr. Johnson was no longer upset and will be stopping by later today with the documents. Now I just need to update his file with this information.

The Importance of a Complaint Policy

Each Subgrantee should have a policy regarding complaints and a documented procedure to follow. Failure to properly handle a complaint could result in an unhappy client and negative publicity for the program.

In addition to having detailed policies and procedures, train staff on how to effectively follow them. Collect and analyze complaint data to track trends. Share the results with management. If repeated complaint areas are identified, there may be training opportunities that can alleviate the underlying issues.

A complaint that is escalated to the Grantee costs both the Grantee and Subgrantee time and resources. Demonstrate that you have followed the proper procedure by accurately documenting steps taken. This mitigates the risk for the agency.

Check Your Understanding

Sharon is in the process of drafting a complaint policy for her agency. Can you help her determine items she should include?

Move the slider to indicate which items should be included in the complaint policy.

Great work, I have included these items to the complaint policy.

Recognize When to Escalate

Recognize When to Escalate (Part 1)

Each Subgrantee should have a complaint resolution procedure that includes when to escalate a complaint to a senior manager. However, escalating a complaint may not always be a clear-cut decision.

Recognize When to Escalate (Part 2)

While following procedures, be judicious when making the decision. If an unresolved complaint is not escalated when appropriate, this could further frustrate the client. In more extreme cases, there could be health and safety concerns or negative publicity for the program.

Recognize When to Escalate (Part 3)

On the other hand, escalating the complaint too early in the process may not help. Try to manage any client problems at your level to minimize the client's frustration. If you can't resolve the situation effectively, then bring in upper management.

Recognize When to Escalate (Part 4)

There are certain complaints that need to be reported to the designated manager immediately. These include those that have potential legal consequences, especially harassment or discrimination; complaints involving suspected theft or fraud; incidents relating to severe structural damage or impact to the health of a client or worker, or incidents that pose a threat to the Subgrantee or the agency.

Recognize When to Escalate (Part 5)

And lastly, respect the client's request to speak with the next level manager.

What Do You Think?

Now to decide which client complaints should be escalated to my manager. Do you think you can help?

Help Sharon decide which complaints should be escalated. Select the client folder to view the complaint. Then determine whether each complaint should be escalated. If you need help, select the Ask a Colleague button.

Managing Clients' Expectations

What Do You Think?

Ok. I am going to escalate these three complaints per our agency's policy. Now I need to follow up with Ms. Garcia. She's upset because she's not getting the same measure that her neighbor did. I need to call her and explain why she is getting a different service. What is the best way for me to respond to Ms. Garcia's complaint?

Use what you know about defusing a situation to help Sharon respond to Ms. Garcia's complaint. Select the best response and choose Submit. If you need help, select the Ask a Colleague button.

Manage Client Expectations with Education

Program staff can reduce the likelihood of complaints by accurately explaining the weatherization process and helping to set realistic expectations. As an administrator, you may be responsible for training your team to handle client complaints. Develop materials about the stages of the weatherization process that your team can use to educate clients.

Select each tab to learn more.

[General:] Inform clients about eligibility requirements and deferral guidelines. Present the overall timeline from application through the final inspection by the quality control inspector.

[Pre-installation:] Set accurate expectations by explaining what measures are part of the weatherization program, and more importantly what is not covered. Provide specific information about what the client should do to get ready for installation.

[Installation:] Let the client know if any aspects of the work will temporarily restrict their access to any part of the home or have any other impact to residents during installation.

[Post-installation:] Tell clients about the quality control inspection so they are ready for an additional person on site after the work has been completed. Explain the benefits of properly maintaining the new measures to maximize energy savings.

Handling Appeals

Client Appeals

I feel better about knowing when to escalate a complaint and how to proactively educate clients to avoid potential complaints. Now I need to prepare for a client meeting later today. It was determined that he is ineligible for services, and he is appealing the decision. An appeal is when a client disputes the determination that the program has reached. Clients can appeal when their application wasn't processed in a timely fashion, or if they disagree with the outcome of the application. It could be about eligibility, but it could also be about the viability of a recommended measure or the decision to defer.

As WAP program staff, it is your responsibility to know the appeal procedure approved by the Grantee. For more information, select the Ask a Colleague button.

Inspecting and Evaluating

I know the common steps most agencies take when handling the appeals process. The first step of the appeals process is an Informal conference at the local agency with the client. Next, if the client is unsatisfied with the results of this meeting, he or she may request a Grantee level review. Finally, if after the Grantee level review the client is still dissatisfied, he or she may request a formal hearing.

If a client has a complaint disputing a program outcome and wants to appeal, subgrantee staff members should check their policies and procedures as well as those of the Grantee. The appeal policy should include a time limit for the client to initiate the appeal. If there is no Grantee limit when the client may appeal, then the appeal process begins. Always research and adhere to the Grantee's appeal policy.

Conclusion

Key Takeaways

I've learned so much about managing client expectations. I now know it's important to follow a consistent process to handle and document complaints. I should listen and show respect, understand the issue, identify next steps, and escalate a complaint according to our policy. When working with challenging clients, I should remain calm, avoid making promises, and bring in a second staff member to ease tension and act as a neutral third party to the client interaction.

I can effectively follow the agency's policies and procedures to resolve a complaint and recognize when to escalate it in cases where there are potential legal consequences, theft or fraud, health and safety concerns or a possible threat to the agency.

By properly training staff to educate clients, I can manage client expectations, reduce frustration and provide the highest level of service.

Finally, If I understand my agency or Grantee's appeals policy and have followed my agency's complaint resolution process, the chance of negative repercussions is decreased.

Congratulations

Thank you for helping me with the clients today. You did an outstanding job!

Nicely done! You have successfully helped Sharon use strategies to effectively manage client expectations and resolve challenging complaints. As a result, there has been increased client satisfaction, and staff members feel empowered to proactively address issues before they become complaints.

Moving forward, consider checking out our additional training so that you can continue to improve the services provided by WAP staff to our clients. This includes training on key topics such as Basic Employee Management for Weatherization and Supporting Quality Work with Training and Technical Assistance. For more information, review the additional references section of the course. Consider checking out our additional training on topics such as Basic Employee Management for Weatherization Directors and Supporting Quality work with Training and Technical Assistance.

When you're ready, you may close your browser window to exit.