

A GUIDE TO DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS WITH RACE OFFICIALS
May 22, 2024

BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPLEMENTING SOME ASPECTS OF THE [RACE OFFICIAL REPORTS AND COMPLAINTS POLICY](#) found on the [Give Feedback webpage](#)

This guidance is meant to be used in conjunction with the above US Sailing policy. It in no way supersedes anything in that Policy. In case of conflict, the Policy must be followed.

1. Always closely follow the Race Official Reports and Complaints Policy. This Policy was developed by US Sailing based on fairness, transparency and best practices used in Human Resources in the US. If in doubt, contact US Sailing Race Administration Director or Staff Counsel for advice.
2. Complaints should generally go through the Report a Complaint About a Race Official form, found on the US Sailing website. Confidentiality is ensured while US Sailing staff investigate and determine validity, timeliness and best means of resolution.
3. Review the policy Reporting Process (shown here):

3. Reporting process

A. Guidelines for reporting

1. Serious misconduct or performance issues that should be reported directly to US Sailing:
 - a. Criminal activity
 - b. Sexual misconduct
 - c. Conduct that suggests a lack of integrity
 - d. Practice that may endanger or disadvantage competitors
 - e. Significant errors in process; unresponsiveness to correction
 - f. Issues that may damage the reputation of US Sailing, the sport, the event, or other certified race officials
2. Reporting less severe concerns:
 - a. Report to the team leader at the event: Principal Race Officer, Chief Judge, Chief Umpire, Chief Classifier or Chief Measurer. Team leaders are expected to correct situations that do not merit a formal complaint.
 - b. Report to the Area Race Officer (ARO), Regional Administrative Judge (RAJ) or committee member, who will handle the report via the appropriate channel.
 - c. Report to the Race Administration Director (RAD), who will handle the report via the appropriate channel.

4. A formal report in writing, identifying the person making the complaint, is required before the matter proceeds past the initial stage.
5. After the initial report validation, The Race Officials Reports and Complaints Policy outlines referral to the applicable certifying committee or the Ethics Committee (Paragraph 5). The next stage may be a hearing. Specific requirements are outlined in the Race Official Reports and Complaints Policy. The procedures must be carefully followed to ensure due process.
6. Paragraph 6A (A) allows a certifying committee to have a discussion with the race official for matters involving alleged “sub-standard performance of official duties”.
7. Discussion tips:

You may want to let the person who submitted the Complaint know that it is soon going to the Race Official.

- a. Give the race official time to prepare. Ideally, a short phone call or email will alert the official that a written complaint has been received. If a US Sailing complaint, that it has been reviewed by the Race Administration Director or Staff Counsel for initial report validity and has referred it to the [name] of the Committee.
- b. Provide a written copy of the complaint and the Race Officials Reports and Complaints Policy and allow the race official time to prepare. The written complaint will include a description of the issue, place, time and name of the complainant. Without this information the race official will likely be unable to respond to the complaint. Do not add other information outside of the complaint.
- c. Make an appointment for the discussion, which may be in person, by telephone or by Zoom. The race official should have the opportunity for privacy.
- d. It is preferable to have at least two people participate the discussion of the complaint with the race official. One should take notes.
- e. The conversation should proceed fairly directly to the complaint. Do not begin as if this a social conversation. This is not the time to ask after holiday plans, status of family or other unrelated social matters. The complaint should be treated with the serious respect it deserves.
- f. Ask how the issue appears to the race official. Acknowledge that you have read only one side of the story and that it may look very different to the race official.
- g. Remember that you are talking to an adult volunteer. Whether the complaint is justified or not, the race official has provided time and effort to the sport of sailing.
- h. Allow the race official an opportunity to refute the allegations and provide witness names as determined by the race official.
- i. If the race official acknowledges the validity of the complaint, the certifying committee representatives may take no further action or co-develop a plan to address the issue which may include an apology, a written plan of improvement, conditional reappointment, resignation or retirement (paragraph 6A (A)).
- j. Otherwise, the certifying committee chair shall proceed under the Race Official Report and Complaint Policy under paragraph 6A (B) and forward. Procedures for formal hearing and due process requirements are specifically outlined in the policy.

Sample letter example. Feel free to use your own.

US Sailing has received a Race Official complaint about you. I'd like to have a conversation with you and [note the other person] about this. Please let us know when is a good time to chat.

The complaint US Sailing received is attached. The attached Race Officials Reports and Complaints Policy explains the process of handling a complaint. The next step is a conversation with you to discuss it and listen to your views about it. We are at step 6A (A) and consulting with you about the report. That section highlights various options available to you.

Let us know a time and date that works to discuss on the phone. Please acknowledge that you have received this email.

Thanks,