



Employee Grievance Procedure FAQs - Personnel Rule 1.4

Many city employees have the option of using the employee grievance process to resolve disputes related to an alleged policy violation in City employment. Most commonly, employees grieve disciplinary actions such as suspension, demotion or termination, but employees also use it to resolve other disagreements on the application of a personnel-related City law (Seattle Municipal Code 4.04), Personnel Rule or related policy. Employees must complete the grievance process before appealing the Civil Service Commission for a final decision.

These FAQs explain how the grievance process works under [Personnel Rule 1.4](#), and provides some additional resources to employees. The FAQs are intended to explain but not supersede Personnel Rule 1.4 and [SMC 4.04.240](#), which are the authorizing policies over the grievance process.

Eligibility

1) Who is eligible to file a grievance under Personnel Rule 1.4?

All (non-public safety) civil service employees may file a grievance under Personnel Rule 1.4. An employee's hire letter should say if they are covered by the civil service system. Employees who are not covered by civil service ("exempt") cannot use the grievance process.

An employee who is unsure of their coverage can contact their human resources representative or email civilservice@seattle.gov to learn their civil service status. Library and temporary employees are never covered by civil service.¹

2) Can employees represented by a union use the grievance process under Personnel Rule 1.4?

Yes, civil service covered union employees can file a grievance under Personnel Rule 1.4. However, they must choose to use the process under Personnel Rule 1.4 or their collective bargaining unit, they cannot use both (see also FAQ #4 about union contract language and grievance jurisdiction.)

Scope of Personnel Rule 1.4 Grievance Jurisdiction

3) What may an employee grieve?

Employees may grieve alleged violations of [Seattle Municipal Code \(SMC\) 4.04](#), or related [Personnel Rules](#) or policies. Employees who are considering grieving disciplinary decisions should see [Personnel Rule 1.3](#), the policy related to employee discipline. Employees may also consider grieving other matters found in SMC 4.04 or the Personnel Rules.

¹ Employees covered by the public safety civil service, in the police and firefighter ranks, have access to a different process that is not addressed in these FAQs (and should contact publicsafety@seattle.gov with any questions).

4) What may an employee not grieve?

Matters outside the jurisdiction of Personnel Rule 1.4 include:

- Alleged violations of a collective bargaining agreement (employees should instead reach out to their union representative about filing a contract grievance).
- Final classification or compensation decisions issued by the Seattle Human Resources Director.
- Other policies outside the scope of the grievance process, such as federal or state laws that are not encompassed in SMC 4.04 or related Rules or policies. Examples of this include state or federal safety regulations, or department workplace expectations that are independent of a Personnel Rule.

Filing Process Requirements

5) When must an employee file a grievance?

An employee must file the initial step of the grievance within 20 calendar days of the grievable incident to meet the timelines of Personnel Rule 1.4. Weekends and holidays are included in the 20-day count. The date of the grievable incident is not counted in the 20-day period. For example, if the grievable incident occurred on June 1, the last day of the 20-day timeline is June 21.

The grievant and City representative responding to the grievance may agree to extend any timelines. Grievants must escalate to subsequent steps in the grievance process within 14 days of each step's response (see also FAQ #7).

6) What is the “grievable incident?”

The grievable incident is the specific event or incident of an alleged violation. For example, the written notice of decision to suspend an employee, which the employee believes violates Personnel Rule 1.3, would be a grievable incident.

7) What “step” should the employee file the grievance?

The grievance process consists of three progressively escalating steps. Personnel Rule 1.4 seeks to resolve the matter at the lowest level possible but allows steps to be skipped if both parties agree.

- Step 1 is answered by the employee's supervisor, and is a meeting between the parties.
- Step 2 is answered by the division director, and is a review of Step 1 materials.
- Step 3 is reviewed by the Seattle Human Resources Director or their designee, who may convene a meeting if they choose.
 - A) The Seattle Human Resources Director issues a grievance report to the grievant and the grievant's department head.

- B) The Seattle Human Resources Director also makes a separate, confidential recommendation to the grievant's department head, who will make the final decision to accept or deny the grievance.

Employees who file at an initial step higher than Step 1 should provide a copy of the grievance to those individuals at the skipped steps, and must file the grievance within 20 days of the grievable incident.

8) What happens if the department representative misses a deadline or does not respond to a grievance?

The grievant may escalate the process to the next step.

9) What information should be submitted with the grievance at each step?

The employee should submit the following information at the initial step of the grievance:

- The grievable incident (it is helpful to include related documentation, such as written notices of disciplinary actions, or other employment actions taken),
- The provision of the SMC 4.04 or the related Personnel Rule or policy that they believe was improperly applied,
- The remedy sought.

Employees should include information that was provided in the lower steps to each higher step to allow for review the grievance history.

If the grievant is not satisfied with the outcome of the grievance at Step 1, they may escalate to Step 2 to their division director within 14 calendar days. The employee shall provide a signed and dated written description of their grievance and an explanation for why they found the lower step outcome unacceptable.

If the grievant is not satisfied with the outcome of the grievance at Step 2, they may escalate to Step 3 within 14 calendar days. The employee shall provide the Seattle Human Resources Director with an email from the grievant to the SHR Director (SHR_Director@seattle.gov) identifying their Step 3 grievance, the written Step 2 grievance and response, and an explanation for why they found the lower step outcome unacceptable.

10) What are an employee's options if they are not satisfied with the Step 3 grievance outcome?

Once Step 3 has been exhausted, the employee has 20 days from the receipt of the grievance response to appeal the Civil Service Commission. Typically, no verbal warnings or written reprimands may be appealed because they do not involve loss of pay; however, employees may approach the Commission to determine if a lower-level discipline falls within its jurisdiction.

More information about the Civil service Commission and appeals process can be found at the [Civil Service Commission website](#), or by contacting staff at (206) 586-1991.

Overview of Grievance Process

Note: all references to “days” are calendar days (days falling on weekends or business holidays are counted towards process timelines).

| Step | Timeline | Information/ Materials | Respondent | Step Response |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|---|
| 1 | 20 days from grievable incident | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grievable incident• Policy violated• Remedy sought | Supervisor | Verbal or written, within 14 days |
| 2 | 14 days from Step 1 response | Step 1 information and response | Division Director | Written, within 14 days |
| 3 | 14 days from Step 2 response | Step 1 and 2 information and response | SHR Director/ Grievant's Department Director | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Written grievance report from SHR Director within 14 days from grievance filing, or within 7 days from Step 3 meeting• SHR Director makes confidential recommendation to department head• Written response from department head within 7 days of SHR Director's recommendation. |
| Civil Service Appeal | 20 days from Step 3 response | See Notice of Appeal on CSC website | Civil Service Commission | Executive Director or staff will reach out to appellant about next steps |

Other Considerations

11) What if my grievable incident is related to a complaint of discrimination, harassment, retaliation, or workplace misconduct (Personnel Rule 1.1)?

If a violation of Personnel Rule 1.1 is alleged in a grievance, it may be held in abeyance (paused) until the Human Resources Investigation Unit (HRIU) staff completes their intake or investigation process.

12) What other City resources are available to City employees to resolve disputes?

- The [Office of the Employee Ombud](#) (OEO) assigns caseworkers and in some cases, mediators, to seek resolution of employee conflicts.

- The [Human Resources Investigation Unit](#) (HRIU) completes intakes and investigations of employee allegations of illegal discrimination, harassment, or retaliation; HRIU also investigates allegations of workplace misconduct.
- Employees who are represented by a union can speak with their union representative about their options under their collective bargaining agreement.

13) Who should I reach out to if I have questions?

- Ireneo Bartolome (Ireneo.Bartolome@seattle.gov) can assist with questions about the grievance process.
- Sarah Butler (sarah.butler@seattle.gov or civilservice@seattle.gov) can respond to questions about the civil service appeals process. More information about civil service appeals is also available at <https://www.seattle.gov/civil-service-commission>.

Personnel Rule Grievance Form

Employee and Organization

Employee Name:

Job Title:

Employee Unit, Division, and Department:

Employee Supervisor Name and Title (Step 1):

Employee Division Director Name (Step 2):

Employee Department Head Name (Step 3):

Employee Representative (if applicable):

Grievance Matter

Date of Grievance Filing:

Grievable Incident:

Date of Grievable Incident:

Personnel Rule or Seattle Municipal Code alleged to be violated:

Remedy/Solution Sought:

Additional materials or documents for consideration? Please list, or attach to form.