

Compliance Today – July 2021 Essential elements of an effective investigation report

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When an investigation is coming to a close, an investigation report should be completed to provide a clear explanation of what it entailed and an analysis of how the investigator reached their conclusion. This report needs to be written objectively and persuasively, and in a format that is consistent throughout your organization. With this, the essential elements of an investigation report include the following:

- **Executive summary:** The executive summary should include a summary of the complaint, the specific allegations and affected policies, and a conclusion. This is the most important section of the report as it is the first, and sometimes only, section senior leaders and management will read.
- **List of allegations and affected policies:** List out each allegation one by one and identify the policy or policies that were alleged to be violated. Further, make sure the relevant policies are current to the time of the alleged incident.
- **Witness list:** List out the witnesses interviewed during this investigation, which can include the reporter, subject, witnesses, and subject matter experts. Also include the relationship of the witness to your organization, the date of the interview, and how the interview was conducted.
- **Chronology:** Include relevant dates and details that you learned during the investigation that are relevant to the allegation.
- **Investigation section:** For each witness interviewed, include their respective statements, but do not include the investigator's own notes and observations from the interview. Also, include a list of any evidence and forms completed by the investigator, and include the attachments to your investigation report.
- **Analysis:** For each allegation, the investigation needs to apply the facts and evidence to summarize findings using your organization's standard of evidence. Ensure that everything mentioned in the analysis section has been previously mentioned in the report, as no new facts should be introduced in this section.
- **Conclusion and recommendations:** Prepare a summary of the findings, using similar language as the executive summary, and, if necessary, provide reasonable recommendations, which can include disciplinary actions, changes to policies or processes, further investigation into other matters, or recommend education and trainings.

Given the above, investigation reports can be an important resource for carrying out a comprehensive examination of your organization's policies and processes, provide a framework for communicating with partners that may require actions or response for routine and general compliance matters, and can easily be used as a handoff tool to partners and key stakeholders.

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