

RESPONSE & RESOLUTION PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS: PRELIMINARY UPDATE

In April of 2024, the U.S. Center for SafeSport (the Center) announced a series of process improvements (available at uscenterforsafesport.org/process-improvements) to enhance efficiency, information sharing, and trauma sensitivity. These improvements were developed based on a thorough review of the Center's Response & Resolution (R&R) processes, including feedback received from Center staff, athletes, survivor organizations, and national governing bodies (NGBs).

The Center made significant progress in implementing improvements across each phase of its Response & Resolution process. While data collection and evaluation are ongoing, anecdotal information demonstrates the benefits of continuing implementation. The Center remains committed to seeking feedback as its overhaul advances further. The Center's initial evaluation from April 1, 2024 through March 31, 2025 preliminarily demonstrates:

Improved Efficiency within the Response & Resolution Process

- Creating effective synergy between the Legal, Investigations, Intake and Resolutions teams has enabled better cross-collaboration. Because of increased integration, the Legal team has been able to provide advice regarding policy decisions, temporary measures decisions, and informal resolution decisions earlier in these processes leading to more efficient and consistent outcomes.
- Anecdotally, the Center has observed cases moving through the core stages of the Response & Resolution process more efficiently. Given the complexity of individual cases and acknowledging variances between the cases the Center receives every year, ongoing data collection and evaluation is necessary.
- The Center conducted a pilot program involving a new streamlined format for the final Investigation Report (IR) and Notice of Decision (NOD), and also incorporated earlier and more consistent coordination between the Investigation and Legal teams in the drafting of these documents, which is showing promising signs of success.
- The Center doubled the size of the legal team in 2024 to more efficiently handle the legal review of cases during each stage of the process.

Improved Training

- The Center revamped its in-house training curriculum for the R&R department, which includes enhanced trauma-sensitivity training. The Center has also worked with outside experts to provide additional training in trauma sensitivity, and the training curriculum includes resources developed by experts concerning the neurobiology of trauma. Additionally, the curriculum was enhanced to include training on investigations involving emotional and physical misconduct as well as investigating drug and alcohol facilitated sexual assault.
- The formalized onboarding process for every new R&R staff member is based on a consistent, standardized lesson plan grounded in the understanding of the fundamentals of investigations, trauma-informed communication, and longer-term institutional memory. Among other elements, it includes:
 - » Trauma's impact on the brain and memory,
 - » Trauma-informed interviewing,
 - » Best practices for documenting investigations, and
 - » The dynamics of sport culture, including power dynamics.
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) take into account the importance of a trauma-informed response as cases move through the process, including expectations for updating parties in the manner and timeframe they want to be updated. Training curriculum was developed and implemented for all SOPs, and will continue to be updated in line with best practices.
- In 2024, staff attended 14 internal trainings, nine external trainings, and the Center hosted six onboarding sessions. The Center varied the topics, trainers, and types of training to allow for different adult learning styles.

Improved Communication and Information Sharing

- The Center invested in specialized education for parties in the R&R process, which included developing accessible information specifically designed to enhance learning and understanding for those who have experienced trauma.
- The Center successfully redefined and recategorized Administrative Closures and Holds to increase clarity and understanding, implemented the updated outcome categories with immediate effect, and provided training for NGBs accordingly. As part of this effort, the Center retroactively updated case outcomes prior to April 2024 under the new category definitions, enabling year-to-year data comparisons.
- The recategorization and more detailed sub-categories have enabled the Center to better collect and share data, including with NGBs. Anecdotally, the Center has heard that the additional information provided has enabled some NGBs to improve their safety planning. The Center was able to provide sub-category data for the first time in the 2024 Annual Report.

Enhanced Support for Minors in the Response & Resolution Process

- The Specialized Interview Team (SIT), who are trained in forensic interviewing of minors, now conducts most interviews involving Minor Claimants with a focus on those under the age of 13 and cases in which there is a Minor Claimant and Adult Respondent. In 2024, the SIT conducted 99 interviews with minors, 14 of which were completed at Child Advocacy Centers. In addition to the SIT, all relevant R&R staff have been trained in the Center's minor interview protocols, which are based on best practices.
- The Center continues to operate its Minor Response Team (MRT), which is responsible for determining how to best resolve a case that involves a Minor Respondent, including age-appropriate sanctions. MRT processes were formalized at the start of 2025 to implement a minor-specific set of sanctions and case outcomes with a focus on education and sport participation while prioritizing athlete safety. While the Center still needs more data to conduct a quantitative assessment, having an alternative track for Minor Respondents has improved the speed at which these cases are resolved while better supporting the unique needs of minors.
- The Center has started a quarterly peer review process led by an independent third party that is specific to the SIT and MRT. The peer review process supports continuous improvement, including the sharing of best practices related to interviews.
- The Center conducted a two-part training series for NGBs to include the importance and need for age-appropriate responses, the Center's new processes, and noteworthy process changes.

Opportunity to Review and Respond to Evidence

- The Center now offers Claimants and Respondents a 14-day opportunity to review and respond to evidence at the conclusion of a case. This was done to limit uncertainty for Claimants and Respondents, allow for a more thorough and transparent investigative process, improve trauma-informed practices, and limit the introduction of new information by Respondents during arbitration. Thus far, attorneys involved in the Center's arbitration process have complied with the updated policy, and have not attempted to submit "surprise" evidence during arbitration proceedings.