



CM 201 and CM 301

An Informal Process to Resolving Disputes

Once you see an issue, follow these steps.

Step 1 – Gather information from all sides of the dispute

Talk to people from the vendor’s organization as well as people in your Agency. Only in that way can you weigh all the information to get a fuller picture of the root cause of the problem. Ask open-ended questions to get the issue fully defined and understood by all the parties.

Step 2 – Create a safe meeting to talk about things

Then, create a safe setting in a meeting to talk about the problem and brainstorm a solution. A safe meeting means the parties cannot blame one another or show any anger. It’s your role to calm people to ensure that all parts of the problem are revealed, not just the parts that make your Agency look good and the vendor’s organization look bad.

Step 3 – Build your bridge to resolution through shared interests

Build common ground in the meeting. You will literally use words such as, *“we all can agree that . . . is important to both organizations.”* You may say something to this effect so often you’ll feel like a broken record but it is the best way to move people towards a workable solution.

Step 4 – Validate that the solution will functionally work

Before the parties can implement the solutions you are discussing, stop to validate that all your stakeholders and the vendor’s stakeholders can meet any newly agreed upon solution. This is an important step in the process. Too often, executives without enough functional knowledge make agreements that their organizations are literally not set up to perform. Since it is your role to ensure compliance to the new requirements, validate performance before any formal changes begin.

Step 5 – Document, document, document

The final step is to summarize the resolution in some written form. In very informal settings, the parties may document the issue, the solution and the target date for resolution in a memo attached to an email. Be sure to circulate the memo to all agency and vendor stakeholders. Other more complex circumstances will require a contract modification, change order, or amendment. In that circumstance, the Contract Manager will involve the Contract Professional.