

Should we handle this internally or bring in outside help?

One of the first decisions is whether to handle an investigation internally or bring in someone from outside. Both can be trauma-informed; a blended approach is possible too. Here are some key differences to consider:



Internal Investigation

External Investigation

Speed

Faster to start, but may slow down without enough support

Takes time to get up to speed; but moves quickly once hired

Best Use Cases

Lower-risk situations with minimal conflict concerns

Situations involving leadership, high risk, or need for credibility

Cost

Lower upfront cost (cost in staff hours, not dollars)

Usually brings a significant cost

Organizational Knowledge

Insider knowledge runs deep, but may color the investigation

Less familiar with the organization; will need information and documents provided

Independence & Objectivity

May appear or actually be biased to protect stake-holders or the organization (especially if leadership is involved)

Free to evaluate facts without prior involvement or fear of retaliation

Trust & Credibility

May raise concerns among staff or the public

Often seen as more credible and transparent

Experience with Investigations

Experience and expertise may be limited, especially for small organizations in complex cases

Usually have extensive experience and professional training

Handling Sensitive Situations

May struggle with sensitive/emotional or high-stakes legal issues

Should have experience handling difficult and sensitive matters

Risk to the Organization

Risky both legally and reputationally if something is missed or handled poorly

Can help reduce risk by using a clear, tested process

Crisis Response & Safety Planning

Depends upon expertise

Should be able to advise on crisis response and safety planning

