

STUDENT CONSUMER POWER

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The focus of this workshop was how a student consumer group can be organized and then contribute to the welfare of consumers. The Consumer Relations Board (CRB) is a campus oriented consumer group which serves the students and faculty at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas.

After considering alternatives, the students involved prepared a written proposal for the organization of a consumer group. It was submitted and approved by the Student Government Association. The Consumer Relations Board was formed in January 1971. The Student Government Association made available office and meeting space, equipment, secretarial assistance and a daily answering service.

The structure of the CRB is a Board of Directors, a Grievance Committee, a Board of Arbitration and a Research Committee. One of the main activities of the CRB is to help consumers with problems. Three kinds of complaints are handled; complaints about Manhattan merchants, landlords and businesses engaged in interstate commerce. A system of how to handle complaints has been established. The students work with local businesses and the Buyer Protection Division of the Attorney General's Office.

Consumer education is another activity of the CRB. The student newspaper the Collegian is used. One article was on fraudulent practices of salesmen on college campuses. The CRB is also involved in research. The first project of the Research Committee was the Kansas State Union. The efficiency, service and customer satisfaction were studied. Suggestions for improvement based on the research results were made to the Kansas State Union.

The following steps are suggested for others interested in forming an independent consumer group:

1. contact persons who share the belief that there is a need for consumer education
2. decide membership requirements and the procedure for handling complaints
3. organize a research committee, grievance committee, board of directors and executive secretary; each with specific duties designed to contribute to the unity of the organization
4. make citizens aware of the group's existence through the news media or publishing promotional materials