EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS POLICY

Policy No. 2.15
Section: Administration

Purpose

The purpose of this Complaints Policy is to provide a clear and formal process for external stakeholders of SOWINS, including donors, community volunteers, and others, to address any concerns or complaints regarding the services, policies, actions, or conduct of the organization or its representatives. This policy aims to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, promptly, and consistently, and that appropriate actions are taken to resolve issues and improve the quality of the services provided. By implementing this policy, SOWINS seeks to maintain transparency, uphold high standards of accountability, and foster positive relationships with its stakeholders.

Scope

This policy applies to all external stakeholders of SOWINS, including donors, community volunteers, and any individuals who may wish to file a complaint regarding the organization's activities, services, policies, procedures, or the conduct of SOWINS' representatives. The policy outlines the steps for submitting complaints, investigating issues, and resolving concerns in a timely and respectful manner. It also provides a protocol for appealing decisions and seeking external support if dissatisfaction persists. The policy is designed to address complaints in a fair and transparent way, contributing to continuous improvement within SOWINS and ensuring that stakeholder concerns are taken seriously and appropriately addressed.

POLICY

This policy provides a formal process for external stakeholders of SOWINS, including donors and community volunteers, to address any concerns or issues they may have.
SOWINS is committed to addressing complaints regarding the quality of services, the application of policies and procedures, or the conduct of SOWINS or its representatives.

When a complaint is received, SOWINS will make every reasonable effort to acknowledge and investigate the issue within 72 business hours. Complaints will be handled fairly and consistently; however, more complex issues may require a thorough investigation, which will be completed within 15 business days.

If the outcome of an investigation does not satisfy the complainant, they may request an appeal and a subsequent review by the Board of Directors. The Board's decision is final. Should dissatisfaction persist after the Board's review, complainants have the option to seek external support, such as from an Ombudsman, for further consideration. It is important to note that dissatisfaction with the process or outcome of a complaint is not grounds for filing a new complaint under this policy.

Complaints Procedures

Many problems can be resolved easily and quickly, often at the time they arise, by speaking with your SOWINS representative or by contacting SOWINS' general inquiries line.

- If a problem cannot be resolved in this way or if a member of the public wishes to make a complaint, the complaint should be submitted directly to our Executive Director at liz.g@sowins.com, or in writing to the address below:
  SOWINS #102 -1027 Westminster Avenue West, Penticton, BC V2A 1L4 SOWINS will acknowledge receipt of a complaint within 72 hours.
- Although a complainant is not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, a complainant should be able to demonstrate that he or she has made a report in good faith. If it has been determined a complainant has not acted in good faith progressive disciplinary action will be implemented.
- Complaints made to SOWINS will be handled by the Executive Director or designate.
- SOWINS shall investigate the complaint and may seek further information from any officer, director, employee, contractor, volunteer or stakeholder of SOWINS, as appropriate. The actions taken by SOWINS with respect to a particular allegation will depend on the nature of the reported violation.
- Each case is unique, however SOWINS will handle all allegations reported pursuant to this policy respectfully and with discretion. If the facts warrant, SOWINS will take legal, and/or corrective action as required.
- SOWINS will notify you within 5 business days after the matter has been reviewed and a determination has been reached.

Confidentiality

Anonymous Allegations

Thorough investigation often depends on the ability to gather all information available. SOWINS encourages complainants to identify themselves when making a complaint, however, recognizes for some this may be challenging. SOWINS will explore anonymous inquiries to the extent possible but will weigh the prudence of continuing an investigation against the likelihood of confirming the alleged facts or circumstances from attributable sources.

Appeal to the Board

The Board of Directors of SOWINS is a governance Board and not a management Board therefore, the Board will not become involved in programming related issues/changes and personnel related matters. The Executive Director provides oversight to programs and staff. The Board of Directors has the duty to ensure ethical stewardship and that the governance of the agency is maintained. Therefore, external complaints may be brought to the Board when the following conduct has been demonstrated by the Executive Director:

- Unethical conduct and conflict of interest
- Manipulation or falsification of data
- Theft, embezzlement, fraud

- Violation of laws or regulations

All communication will be in writing to the Board Chairperson. The complaint must be filed within six months of the last alleged occurrence. The written communication must contain sufficient factual information regarding specific instance(s) and the date(s) that the alleged incident occurred and the names of any witnesses.

The Board is accountable for creating a satisfactory resolution to the issue.

SOWINS will inform the Board of Directors annually of the number, type and disposition of external complaints received.

Continuous Improvement

SOWINS will keep a record of complaints received. The data will be reviewed to support quality improvement efforts and identify frequently recurring complaints of a similar type. Identified themes will be evaluated to determine whether there are systemic process issues within SOWINS that need to be addressed to eliminate reoccurring incidences. Complaints may be used to inform future policy, procedures and to improve services where applicable.