

## **External Complaints Policy**

### **U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities**

A robust complaints procedure is important for the Endowment to achieve and maintain its high standards of service, accessibility, openness and transparency. The Endowment takes all complaints, whether about procedures or personnel, very seriously. We have instituted procedures designed to yield satisfactory resolution of all complaints wherever possible. We are committed to ensuring that all persons making a complaint will not be subjected to discriminatory treatment or retribution by the Endowment as a result of making the complaint.

#### **Purpose**

To investigate external complaints made about the Endowment.

#### **Definitions**

“External complaints” are those complaints about the Endowment that are made by any person who is not an Endowment staff member or a member of the Endowment Board of Directors.

“Informal complaint” is a complaint that is not made in writing.

“Immediately” means within one work week (five business days) of receiving the complaint.

“The President” means the President of the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities.

#### **Provisos**

This policy relates to complaints that do not contravene any laws or legislation. Potentially unlawful behaviour will be addressed in keeping with relevant laws and regulations.

Where the complaint is made by an ex staff member and the complaint relates to an internal dispute during the period of that person’s employment the matter will be treated as an internal complaint and will be dealt with in keeping in the Employees’ Handbook.

#### **Procedure**

Complaints are to be in writing wherever possible. When a complaint is made against the Endowment either directly or indirectly through another body or person it shall be immediately brought to the attention of the President of the Endowment.

The President will first review the complaint and determine if the nature is such that it can be handled quickly and to the satisfaction of the complainant. In these cases no further action is necessary. Where a complaint is of such serious nature or cannot be resolved quickly and to the satisfaction of the complainant, the President will refer the matter to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors for action.

## **Complaint to be handled internally and by the President**

The President will:

- Immediately inform the complainant, in writing that the matter is being investigated and will explain the process and indicate a time frame for the complaint to be investigated; and
- Where personnel are involved, immediately inform the person or persons against whom the complaint has been made, in writing, of the nature of the complaint and the process and time frame for dealing with it.

*(Even in cases where the President is the subject of the complaint, this procedure will be followed as the first step to resolution.)*

The complaint will be investigated in a way which insures that:

- The President has access to any person or material information relevant to the investigation;
- All parties to the complaint are given the opportunity to speak directly to the President and to have a another person of their choice present;
- All documentation relevant to the complaint is reviewed by the President;
- With the written permission of the complainant, persons who may have relevant information will be contacted;
- All parties are kept advised of progress; and,
- Where necessary the President may seek external expertise as needed.

## **Complaint to be handled by the Executive Committee of the Board**

Where a complaint is especially troubling and/or where the President cannot resolve a complaint to the satisfaction of the complainant, the issue will be referred to the Executive Committee. The President will provide all relevant information to the Executive Committee and the Executive Committee may cause to be developed, such other information as may be necessary to review and render a decision. Any decision and action taken by the Executive Committee will be final from the perspective of the Endowment's internal processes regardless of whether or not it fully satisfies the complainant.

### **Timelines**

The Endowment undertakes to, as far as possible, investigate all complaints and have a response within thirty (30) days from the date of receipt of the complaint. Where a complaint is referred to the Executive Committee for investigation this timeframe could extend to as much as ninety (90) days. The President will communicate the status of the review and expected timelines to all parties to the complaint.

### **Complaint that cannot be handled internally**

In rare cases the Endowment Executive Committee may refer the complaint to external processes, e.g. mediation, or statutory complaints handling bodies. The President will advise the complainant in writing of the reasons for this decision, and of the proposed strategy for dealing with the complaint.

### **Retention of information**

Information about the complaint and how it was handled may be recorded i.e. nature of the complaint and changes in Endowment operations where appropriate. Complaints or policy files, staff training required or other action taken as a result of the investigation may be recorded on a staff member's personnel file, if appropriate.

### **Outcomes of the investigation**

The outcomes of the investigation could lead to:

- Change in policy and/or procedures;
- Staff training, counselling and/or disciplinary proceedings; or,
- No changes in Endowment's policy and/or procedures required, and no action required with respect to staff.

### **Quality assurance**

- The Endowment is committed to continuous improvement and monitors its operations and application of policy guidelines to ensure this commitment.
- The Endowment is responsive to legitimate complaints and willing to make necessary organizational changes as appropriate.
- Procedures are transparent and consistently applied.
- Processes and outcomes comply with human rights values and processes.
- All relevant laws and legislation are adhered to.

Adopted  
May 20, 2008