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Complaints and Grievances Policy

Introduction

Story Dogs is committed to a culture of continuous improvement to provide a program of the highest quality, however from time to time stakeholders may raise concerns about matters or issues relating to their experiences with Story Dogs. Relevant stakeholders, staff and volunteers can seek information and advice about matters of concern without being required to lodge a formal complaint. The aim is to resolve a perceived / potential complaint or grievance as early and effectively as possible and avoid any undue escalation.

Purpose

Where issues raised have not been resolved locally through normal day to day communication, a stakeholder may wish to lodge a complaint. The purpose of this policy is to provide for the fair and prompt resolution of complaints and to provide a clear framework under which complaints can be handled.

Policy

Story Dogs recognises its responsibility to provide an environment in which all stakeholders are treated fairly and with respect. Story Dogs is committed to maintaining an organisational culture in which a stakeholder's right to seek resolution of a complaint is recognised, supported and is without retribution.

This Policy provides a visible and accessible process for complaints resolution and encourages prompt attention to all complaints.

Story Dogs will, subject to principles of confidentiality and persons' rights to privacy, endeavour to provide updates to complainants and persons against whom a complaint is made. Story Dogs recognises, however, that there may be circumstances in which this would not be desirable and therefore reserves the right to decline to inform or update any persons on any complaint. Circumstances in which these updates are not desirable will be entirely at Story Dogs management/board discretion.

All parties to a complaint:

- i. must respect confidentiality;
- ii. have the right to seek independent advice.

A clear distinction between a Complaint and a Grievance is provided:

Complaint:

An expression of dissatisfaction that arises where a stakeholder considers that he or she has been disadvantaged because of an action, decision or omission within the control or responsibility of Story Dogs.

Grievance:

A written statement of dissatisfaction, where a Complainant believes that a Complaint remains unresolved after having been dealt with in accordance with Story Dogs Complaints Resolution Processes.



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Process

Complaints directed to Story Dogs may originate from various stakeholders. This Policy provides an overarching process under which complaints are handled.

Story Dogs will attempt to resolve the issue through one or more of the processes referred to as Stages below.

On receipt of a complaint, Story Dogs will attempt to resolve the issue locally, treating the matter as a Stage 1 Complaint. Should a resolution not be reached, the complainant may wish to progress the complaint to the next stage: Stage 2 Complaint. Should a resolution not be reached the complainant may seek to lodge a Stage 3 Grievance.

Where a complaint involves:

- i. the conduct of Story Dogs employees or volunteers, Story Dogs may raise the matter with the employee/volunteer concerned and may seek their comment and input into the resolution of the complaint. The complainant will not have the right to confront or examine those employees/volunteers.
- ii. the conduct of the CEO, a written complaint should be directed to the Chairperson of the Story Dogs Board.

Stage 1 Complaint:

The complainant is to make an initial approach to the staff member/ volunteer most directly concerned with their complaint, who shall make all reasonable efforts to resolve the issue and who shall provide information to the complainant on where to seek further information and advice regarding the availability and intent of this Policy.

The complainant shall make all reasonable efforts to familiarise themselves with this Policy and its processes.

If the matter cannot be directly resolved at a local level with the staff member/volunteer, the complainant may seek to escalate the complaint to be handled by the relevant Coordinator, Coordinator Manager, Board Member or CEO
If the complaint is not resolved locally at Stage 1, the complainant may lodge a written complaint as outlined in Stage 2 of these processes.



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Stage 2 Complaint:

A Stage 2 Complaint must be made in writing to any Story Dogs Director on the Story Dogs Board.

Complaints at Stage 2 must outline the details of the complaint and include sufficient information as to:

- i. the efforts taken by the complainant to resolve the complaint at Stage 1;
- ii. details of why the complainant is not satisfied with the efforts or the outcome of the efforts taken to resolve the complaint at Stage 1;
- iii. the desired outcome sought by the complainant. The complainant can indicate a preferred method for achieving the desired outcome, for example: negotiation, mediation, conciliation.

Complainants who do not provide sufficient information may be contacted by a Story Dogs Director, to request the supply of further information or to be offered the provision of assistance.

An investigation into the complaint will be undertaken.

A Stage 2 complaint will not be deemed to have been lodged until all relevant information has been provided and/or the complainant has demonstrated reasonable attempts in the circumstances to resolve the matter at Stage 1.

The complaint may be referred to an independent third party as nominated and agreed to by the complainant and a (if any) person against whom the complaint is made. If this agreement is not forthcoming, then a Story Dog Appointed Mediator will be chosen by the Story Dogs Board of Directors.

If the complaint is lodged against the conduct of a Story Dogs staff member/volunteer, the Story Dogs Board of Directors will seek comment from the staff member and encourage them to have input into the complaint resolution. The complainant does not have the right to examine or confront any Story Dogs staff member/volunteer.

The complaint may be referred to the Story Dogs Board of Directors, the complaint may also be referred to third parties, such as the Story Dogs legal advisers.

Further avenues of complaints depend on the nature of the complaint and the parties in dispute. The following should be noted:

- i. while the dispute and dispute resolution mechanism remains contained within the internal process of Story Dogs (those not involving independent third parties), agreed expenses (other than costs associated with the complainant obtaining legal advice) will be borne by Story Dogs.
- ii. at no stage will any legal or associated costs of the complainant be borne by Story Dogs.

The record of the complaint, from Stage 2 and all documentation received in respect of such complaint and its proceedings will be kept in a secure location by the Story Dogs Board of Directors. All files will be kept in accordance with the *Public Records Act 1973*.

Story Dogs is unable to deal with or investigate anonymous complaints, however a record of any anonymous complaints received will be kept.

The CEO/Board will provide a written report as to the findings of the investigation.



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If the complaint is substantiated Story Dogs will undertake appropriate agreed steps to resolve the complaint, address the complainant's concerns and/or prevent the problem from recurring.

Should the matter not be resolved at Stage 2 the complainant may advise of their intention to initiate a Stage 3 Grievance.

Stage 3 Grievance

In the event that the complainant believes that the Stage 2 process has not resolved the complaint or where no decision on the complaint is received from Story Dogs, the complainant may initiate the grievance process under this Policy.

To initiate a grievance additional written documentation is required to be lodged with the Story Dogs Board of Directors.

The Story Dogs Board will be notified immediately following the receipt of any Grievance (Stage 3).

Story Dogs will acknowledge receipt of the grievance within two working days.

Withdrawal of a Grievance must be noted by lodging a written statement of withdrawal to the Story Dogs Board of Directors.

The Story Dogs Board will make an assessment of the situation and determine the next steps.

The treatment of grievances will be guided by the principals of confidentiality, timeliness, transparency and procedural fairness.

The aggrieved person will be kept informed of process and advised of options by the Story Dogs Board of Directors or Story Dogs nominated representative.

Grievances are ideally to be resolved within an additional seven working days from the time all information is made available to Story Dogs.

More complex issues may require a longer period of time to resolve.

Any appeal against the grievance resolution determination must be lodged with the Story Dogs Board of Directors not later than ten working days following the notification of the outcome of the grievance.

Story Dogs will keep records of the grievance and outcome.