



IOA Concern and Complaint Policy Pilot Program

The International Ombuds Association (IOA) seeks to provide a safe and respectful environment for all Participants¹, regardless of IOA membership status. There are many ways to resolve complaints and concerns. IOA supports resolving issues at the lowest level possible, including self-resolution and informal resolution with the support of the IOA Ombuds. IOA also recognizes that certain behaviors and experiences require the support of a formal complaint process. The following policy is intended to address a variety of concerns². This policy and related procedures may also be viewed on the [IOA website](#).

I. Informal Resolution for Specific Behaviors

IOA encourages Participants to explore self-resolution and self-advocacy to the extent possible.

In addition, any Participant who would like to have a confidential, informal discussion may contact the IOA Ombuds. IOA created the position of IOA Ombuds for Participants who seek information, guidance, or a safe place to discuss their concerns about the behavior or conduct of other Participants in connection with IOA. For further information about this independent, informal, impartial, and confidential resource, see the [IOA Ombuds page](#).

The IOA Ombuds may be able to offer helpful information, guidance, and options for addressing an issue including IOA's formal Complaint Procedures. Discussing a matter with the IOA Ombuds is not a means of initiating a complaint, or a substitute for filing a formal complaint and the IOA Ombuds is not authorized to review or investigate complaints, receive notice of claims against IOA, or make any business or policy decisions. Participants do not lose the option of filing a formal complaint if utilizing the services of the IOA Ombuds.

II. Formal Complaint for Specific Behaviors

1. Scope

Any IOA Participant who reasonably believes that another Participant has engaged in the following behavior or conduct may pursue a more formal option by filing a formal complaint:

- Deliberate intimidation, bullying, threatening, stalking, or pursuing others,

¹ "Participants" includes all IOA Members (as defined by IOA Bylaws), attendees, staff, contractors/consultants (except for on-site security), volunteers, media representatives, speakers, exhibitors, sponsors, other vendors, organizers, and other guests who attend or participate in any IOA Activity. Participants' attendance at or participation in any IOA Activity will be deemed to be in agreement to abide by the program.

² This policy is not for use to address concerns or complaints against an ombuds at their own organization.



- Exhibiting behavior that is disruptive, or that endangers the health or safety of oneself or others including spam (verbally or in chats), or saying or reposting the same word/content repeatedly to disrupt the conversation,
- Sustained disruption of portions of any IOA Activity, regardless of whether the Participant has been directly asked to cease or stop the disruption,
- Invasion of privacy,
- Harassment: For purposes of this Policy, this includes conduct, comments, or displaying images that a person would reasonably find offensive, demeaning, or hostile; intimidation or threats, including sharing images or text to threaten; negative, unwelcome or offensive verbal, visual, or physical conduct directed at any Participant based on race, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, transgender status, age, national origin, language, disability, religion, marital status, veteran status, political affinity or any other characteristic protected by U.S. law; any activity meant to convey or cultivate hostility including ad hominem insults or other attacks; and encouraging any of the above behavior,
- Sexual Harassment: For purposes of this Policy, this includes unwelcomed, unsolicited, or unreciprocated sexual advances or sexual attention including sharing images or text especially to sexually harass; requests for sexual favors, other verbal, visual, or physical conduct or gestures of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or perceived to offend, humiliate, or intimidate another person,
- Discriminatory conduct based on race, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, transgender status, age, national origin, language, disability, religion, marital status, veteran status, political affinity, or any other characteristic protected by U.S. law,
- Actual or threatened pushing, shoving, or use of any physical force whatsoever against any Participant,
- Possession or use of a weapon or any other item in a way that may cause danger to or threaten others,
- Destruction, theft, dismantlement, defacement, abuse, or intentional misuse of property belonging to IOA, a Participant, or a contracted venue,
- Retaliation against any Participant for reporting activity that they reasonably believed to be in violation of this Policy,
- Knowingly and falsely reporting violations of behavior or conduct in bad faith,
- Activities that are dishonest, fraudulent, illegal, or that clearly are not professional or consistent with the mission and goals of IOA, its Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice including plagiarism,
- Theft, misappropriation and/or violation of property rights including intellectual property,
- Intentional failure to comply with directions of IOA staff, or venue personnel regarding operations or emergency response procedures. Participants in IOA Activities are expected to follow the reasonable directives of IOA Officers, the Executive Director, and the Managing Director who are authorized by the Board of Directors to take immediate action they deem necessary and appropriate, including refused admission or removal at an IOA Activity to ensure the safety, security, and well-being of Participants.

All formal complaints that are filed are taken seriously. IOA reserves the right to address any allegations of egregious behavior as it deems necessary including vexatious claims.



2. Immediate or Imminent Danger

If a Participant is in immediate or imminent danger, sees something suspicious, or wants to report a security issue or emergency, they should contact security at the venue of an IOA event or local law enforcement. Nothing in this Policy is intended to preclude a Participant from seeking immediate resolution from safety professionals.

3. Timing for Review of Formal Complaints

Any Participant(s) named in a formal complaint has the right to be informed of the nature of the complaint within 21 calendar days³ of the complaint being received by IOA. The name(s) of the Participants who filed the complaint will not be disclosed.

Every effort will be made to conduct a review and determine the outcome of the alleged misconduct within 60 calendar days of receiving the complaint.

4. Review Process

Procedures to address the review of any Formal Complaint are detailed in IOA's Concern and Complaint Procedures. At all times, the minimum number of individuals who will review a formal complaint will not be less than two and may comprise members and/or others outside the association who provide expertise.

5. Confidentiality

All Participants must respect the confidential nature of the complaint process and must maintain as much confidentiality as required to meaningfully conduct a fair and balanced review.

6. Measures to Address a Complaint

Informal and formal measures may be utilized to conduct the review and address the complaint, including but not limited to:

- i. restorative approaches including coaching and/or other facilitated discussions,
- ii. voluntary mediation,
- iii. an advisory letter or letter of expectation,
- iv. a letter of warning, and/or reprimand,
- v. revocation of member or participant benefits and/or privileges,
- vi. suspension or termination of membership.

³ A United States calendar will be used to determine dates. Should a complaint be received between December 15 and January 15, IOA may notify the complainants of a revised timeline to address any holidays. Although the permitted timeframe is 21 days, IOA recognizes the importance of earlier notification, and every attempt will be made to notify Participants as soon as possible.



IOA recognizes the strain that the filing of a formal complaint may bring to all involved. As a matter of policy, IOA will attempt to utilize informal measures to the extent possible and applicable to the allegation. However, IOA reserves the right to address allegations of egregious behavior as it deems necessary including vexatious claims.

6. Right to Appeal

Any Participant named in a complaint may appeal the decision to the full Board of Directors.

7. Post Review

The resolution of a complaint will not be publicized at the conclusion of the review, although the IOA will inform the Participant(s) who filed the complaint that the matter has been closed and a resolution achieved. This confidentiality is required to address the myriad of interests of all concerned.

8. Use of Policy

Discretion should be exercised when using the Concern and Complaint Policy. This Policy should only be used to address misconduct identified in Section II.1. above. It should not be used for minor disagreements or for reasonable differences in opinion, approach, and personal style. An individual found to have knowingly and in bad faith provided materially false information during the Complaint or a review may be found to be subject to a Concern and Complaint Policy and subsequent measures following a review.

III. Participant Behavior Outside the Association

If an IOA Member⁴ believes the conduct of another IOA Member outside the association is unbecoming to either the association or the profession, they may request a meeting with the Participant, facilitated by IOA's Ombuds. The IOA supports its Ombuds' facilitating understanding of the concern and providing an opportunity for a restorative approach.

⁴ This process is only available to IOA members and does not extend to IOA Participants.