

Whistleblower Policy

1. Introduction

The Board of Blue Mountains Regional Business Chamber Inc. (“the Chamber”) is committed to operating legally (in accordance with applicable legislation and regulation), properly (in accordance with Chamber policy and procedures), and ethically (in accordance with recognised ethical principles).

For the purposes of this policy document, the term “Employees” is defined to include Board members, the Executive General Manager, other paid staff, contractors and volunteers. Employees are expected to cooperate with the Chamber in maintaining legal, proper, and ethical operations, if necessary by reporting non-compliant actions by other people. Correspondingly, employees who do assist in maintaining legal, proper, and ethical operations should not be penalised in any way.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- (a) encourage the reporting of matters that may cause harm to individuals or financial or nonfinancial loss to the Chamber or damage to its reputation;
- (b) enable the Chamber to deal with reports from whistleblowers in a way that will protect the identity of the whistleblower as far as possible and provide for the secure storage of the information provided;
- (c) establish policies for protecting whistleblowers against reprisal by any person internal or external to the entity;
- (d) provide for the appropriate infrastructure;
- (e) help to ensure the Chamber maintains the highest standards of ethical behaviour and integrity
- (f) discourage complaints which are personal in nature or which are trivial or fanciful in scope.

3. Policy

3.1 Concerns regarding illegal or corrupt behaviour

Where an employee of the Chamber believes in good faith on reasonable grounds that any other employee, volunteer, or contractor has breached any provision of the general law, that employee must report their concern to:

- the Chamber's nominated Whistleblower Protection Officer (WPO), or, if they feel this to be necessary,
- the President, or, if they feel that the President may be complicit in the breach,
- the EGM, or, if they feel that the EGM may be complicit in the breach,
- a person or officer independent of the Chamber nominated by the Chamber to receive such information, or
- the duly constituted authorities responsible for the enforcement of the law in the relevant area.

The person making their concern known shall not suffer any sanctions from the Chamber on account of their actions in this regard provided that their actions:

- are in good faith, and
- are based on reasonable grounds, and
- conform to the designated procedures.

Any person within the Chamber to whom such a disclosure is made shall:

- if they believe the behaviour complained of to be unquestionably trivial or fanciful, dismiss the allegation and notify the person making the allegation of their decision;
- if they believe the behaviour complained of to be neither trivial nor fanciful, ensure that the allegation is investigated, a finding is made, and the person making the allegation is informed of the finding.

Any such investigation shall observe the rules of natural justice and the provisions of procedural fairness. Disclosures may be made anonymously, and this anonymity shall as far as possible be preserved by the Chamber.

3.2 Concerns regarding improper or unethical behaviour

Where an employee of the Chamber believes in good faith on reasonable grounds that any other employee, volunteer, or contractor has breached any provision of the Chamber's constitution, or its bylaws, or its policies, or its code of conduct, or generally recognised principles of ethics, that employee may report their concern to:

- the Chamber's nominated Whistleblower Protection Officer (WPO), or, if they feel this to be necessary,
- the President, or, if they feel that the President may be complicit in the breach,
- the EGM, or, if they feel that the EGM may be complicit in the breach,
- a person or officer independent of the Chamber nominated by the Chamber to receive such information.

The person making their concern known shall not suffer any sanctions from the Chamber on account of their actions in this regard provided that their actions:

- are in good faith, and
- are based on reasonable grounds, and conform to the designated procedures.

Any person within the Chamber to whom such a disclosure is made shall:

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Any such investigation shall observe the rules of natural justice and the provisions of procedural fairness. Disclosures may be made anonymously, and this anonymity shall as far as possible be preserved by the Chamber.

Whistleblower Procedures Template

1. Introduction

The Board is responsible for adopting the whistleblower policy, and for nominating the Chamber's Whistleblower Protection Officer (WPO).

The Whistleblower Protection Officer is responsible for:

- (a) coordinating an investigation into any report received from a whistleblower, and
- (b) documenting and handling all matters in relation to the report and investigation, and
- (c) finalising all investigations.

The President is responsible for the implementation of the whistleblower policy. All staff, including Board members, and all volunteers are responsible for reporting breaches of general law, Chamber policy, or generally recognised principles of ethics to a person authorised to take action on such breaches.

2. Definitions

- A whistleblower is a person (being a director, manager, employee, member, employee of a member or contractor of, or volunteer for, the Chamber) who, whether anonymously or not, makes, attempts to make or wishes to make a report in connection with reportable conduct and wishes to avail themselves of protection against reprisal for having made the report.
- Breaches of general law, Chamber policy, or generally recognised principles of ethics include:
 - corrupt conduct
 - fraud or theft
 - official misconduct
 - maladministration
 - harassment or unlawful discrimination

- serious and substantial waste of public resources
- practices endangering the health or safety of staff, volunteers, or the general public
- practices endangering the environment.

Complaints regarding occupational health and safety should where possible be made through the Chamber's occupational health and safety procedures.

3. Processes

3.1 External reporting entities

The board may nominate external persons to whom, or agencies to which, disclosures may be made under the protections offered under this policy. Where such a nomination is made, staff and volunteers should be informed by any appropriate method.

3.2 Reporting

Where an employee (including a Board member) of the Chamber believes in good faith on reasonable grounds that any other employee, volunteer, or contractor has breached general law, Chamber policy, or generally recognised principles of ethics, and wishes to report their concern, that employee must report their concern to:

- the Chamber's nominated Whistleblower Protection Officer (WPO), or, if they feel this to be necessary,
- the President, or, if they feel that the President may be complicit in the breach,
- the EGM, or, if they feel that the EGM may be complicit in the breach,
- a person or officer independent of the Chamber nominated by the Chamber to receive such information, or
- the duly constituted authorities responsible for the enforcement of the law in the relevant area.

These procedures do not authorise any employee to inform commercial media or social media of their concern, and do not offer protection to any employee who does so, unless:

- it is not feasible for employees to report internally, or
- existing reporting channels have failed to deal with issues effectively.

Any person reporting such a breach should be informed that:

- as far as lies in the Chamber's power, the person will not be disadvantaged for the act of making such a report; and
- if the complainant wishes to make their complaint anonymously, their wish shall be honoured except insofar as it may be overridden by due process of law; however, reporting such a breach does not necessarily absolve the complainant from the consequences of any involvement on their own part in the misconduct complained of.

Any such report should where possible be in writing and should contain, as appropriate, details of:

- the nature of the alleged breach;
- the person or persons responsible for the breach;
- the facts on which the complainant's belief that a breach has occurred, and has been committed by the person named, are founded;
- the nature and whereabouts of any further evidence that would substantiate the complainant's allegations, if known.

Evidence to support such concerns should be brought forward at this time if it exists. The absence of such evidence will be taken into account in subsequent consideration of whether to open an investigation into the matter. However, absence of such evidence is not an absolute bar to the activation of the Chamber's investigative procedures. The existence of such a concern is sufficient to trigger reporting responsibilities.

In contemplating the use of this policy a person should consider whether the matter of concern may be more appropriately raised under either the Chamber's constitutional grievance procedures or its disputes resolution policy.

3.3 Anonymity

If the complainant wishes to make their complaint anonymously, their wish shall be honoured except insofar as it may be overridden by due process of law.

The complainant should, however, be informed that the maintenance of such anonymity may make it less likely that the alleged breach can be substantiated in any subsequent investigation.

Where anonymity has been requested the complainant is required to maintain confidentiality regarding the issue on their own account and to refrain from discussing the matter with any unauthorised persons.

3.4 Investigation

On receiving a report of a breach, the person to whom the disclosure is made shall:

- if they believe the behaviour complained of to be unquestionably trivial or fanciful, dismiss the allegation and notify the person making the allegation of their decision
- if they believe the behaviour complained of to be neither trivial nor fanciful, put in motion the investigation process described below.

The person to whom the disclosure was made shall notify the EGM, who shall be responsible for ensuring that an investigation of the charges is established and adequately resourced. Terms of reference for the investigation will be drawn up, in consultation with the EGM, to clarify the key issues to be investigated.

An investigation plan will be developed to ensure all relevant questions are addressed, the scale of the investigation is in proportion to the seriousness of the allegation(s) and sufficient resources are allocated.

Strict security will be maintained during the investigative process. All information obtained will be properly secured to prevent unauthorised access. All relevant witnesses will be interviewed and documents examined. Contemporaneous notes of all discussions, phone calls and interviews will be made.

Where possible, interviews will be taped. The principles of procedural fairness (natural justice) will be observed. In particular, where adverse comment about a person is likely to be included in a report, the person affected will be given an opportunity to comment beforehand and any comments will be considered before the report is finalised. The person or persons conducting the investigation shall be as far as possible unbiased.

3.5 Findings

A report will be prepared when an investigation is complete. This report will include:

- the allegations
- a statement of all relevant findings of fact and the evidence relied upon in reaching any conclusions

- the conclusions reached (including the damage caused, if any, and the impact on the Chamber and other affected parties) and their basis
- recommendations based on those conclusions to address any wrongdoing identified and any other matters arising during the investigation.

3.6 Information to informant

Subject to considerations of the privacy of those against whom the allegations are made and customary practices of confidentiality, the whistleblower will be kept informed of:

- relevant progress of an investigation
- relevant outcomes of an investigation.

3.7 Protection of informant

Where the investigation has found that the person making the allegation acted in good faith on reasonable grounds, the EGM shall designate an officer to be responsible for ensuring that the person suffers no employment-related disadvantage on account of their actions in this matter and to provide additional support for the person where necessary.