

Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA)'s

Complaint Policy & Procedures For Member Organizations

Last updated: October 2019



Table of Contents

Complaint Policy	3
Our Guiding Principles	3
What is a Complaint?	5
Complaint Procedure	6
Conflict of Interest Policy	8
Appendices:.....	9
<i>Appendix I: Complaint Form</i>	10
<i>Appendix II: Complaint Process Flow Chart</i>	12
<i>Appendix III: Complaint Process Timeline</i>	13
<i>Appendix IV: Glossary of Terms</i>	15
<i>Appendix V: Commonly Asked Questions</i>	17

Questions and Requests

All questions regarding the IowaCASA complaint process can be directed to the Membership Specialist. It is the goal of IowaCASA to make sure all of our services, including this complaint process, are accessible to all individuals. If you would like to request accommodations or language services for any part of the complaint process, please contact us.

Membership & Sustainability Specialist
Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault
3030 Merle Hay Rd, Des Moines, IA 50310
Website: www.iowacasa.org
Email: membership@iowacasa.org
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Complaint Policy

Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA) is committed to ensuring that any person using the services provided by an IowaCASA [member program](#) or affected by its operations has the right to file a formal complaint.

Below, we outline a complaint procedure that:

- Is available to all clients, survivors, paid or volunteer staff members, board members, community members, or any other [stakeholders](#) of IowaCASA's member programs
- Ensures complaints are thoroughly processed and responded to promptly
- Follows our guiding principles (see below)

Our Guiding Principles

Ethical Communication

Though IowaCASA believes it is often ethical to resolve conflict directly, we understand that is not always possible due to power imbalances, organizational structures, or other circumstances. As the organization that oversees the complaint process, IowaCASA will practice respectful and thoughtful communication with all parties involved.

Equity

IowaCASA is committed to ensuring each party in the complaint process has an opportunity to address the concerns raised, and that the complaint receives a fair review from multiple perspectives. We understand that with each complaint, we must also realize the unique identities and experiences of the individual(s) involved.

Transformative Accountability

IowaCASA will work with both parties to create solutions that lend themselves towards healing and the improvement of sexual assault services. We will work with, not against, those who are willing to acknowledge harm and improve sexual assault services. Our process prioritizes actionable steps in holding people accountable.

Our Guiding Principles (Continued)

Transparency

We are committed to making sure all parties involved have a full understanding of the complaint process and what to expect. If anything is unclear, we will work to provide you with clarity. While some information must be kept confidential due to personnel issues, client confidentiality, or other reasons, we will provide you the most relevant information we can.

Trauma- Informed

Those that review and respond to complaints will employ the above principles in order to provide a process that respects the individuals involved and also takes into account their lived experiences. Our work, including difficult conversations regarding complaints, will be done so with understanding the different impact trauma plays in each of our lives.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction of the services or operations of an IowaCASA member program, including dissatisfaction with member program employees or services delivered by a member program. Anyone can file a complaint including but not limited to: paid or volunteer staff members, board members, survivors, clients, or community members.

Our policy covers complaints about:

- The standards of service community members should expect from member programs
- The behavior and ethical care of member programs in delivering those services
- [Workplace violence](#) experienced by member program staff and volunteers that directly or indirectly affect the services delivered by the member program

Our complaint policy does not cover:

- Internal/ personnel issues* that do not impact services to the program's community
- Dissatisfaction based on resources or policies outside the control of the program
- Matters that have already been fully reviewed through this complaint process
- Anonymous complaints

*Decisions of hiring, firing, or personnel sanctions on individual staff members are up to each individual program. IowaCASA does not have the authority to make these decisions on behalf of another organization.

Complaint Procedure

(See Appendix III for a complete timeline):

This Complaint Procedure is to be used when IowaCASA receives a complaint against one of its Member Programs.

Step One: Complaint Filed

Individual(s) that decide to file a formal complaint should submit the IowaCASA Complaint Form to the IowaCASA Membership Specialist or an IowaCASA director-level staff member. This form is also available online.

Step Two: IowaCASA Reviews Complaint to Determine Fit

The determination of whether a complaint fits IowaCASA's process is made on a case-by-case basis by the IowaCASA Membership Specialist and a director-level staff member. Staff will utilize information provided by the complainant to determine if the complaint fits the IowaCASA process.

If the complaint fits the IowaCASA process, the complaint will advance to step three of this process. If the complaint is not an appropriate fit for this process, the complainant will be given a letter of acknowledgement with other potential reporting options.

Step Three: Respondent Receives Complaint and Option to Respond

Should the complaint move forward to step three, the respondent(s) will receive a copy of the filed complaint. The respondent will then have 10 business days to submit an optional response and/or supporting documentation.

Step Four: Review of Complaint & Determination Made

The [IowaCASA Review Committee](#) examines the complaint packet, which includes: the formal complaint, respondent statement, and any other information provided by either party. Upon receiving the complaint packet, the Review Committee has 40 business days to request and gather additional information from either party.

The Committee, with the IowaCASA Executive Director or designee, will make a determination by the end of the 40th business day.

Step Five: Right to Appeal

Both parties will be notified of the complaint determination on the same day. If the determination is that no action is required by the respondent(s), the *complainant(s)* have seven days to appeal the decision to the IowaCASA Board of Directors. If the determination is that action is required by the respondent(s), the *respondent(s)* will have seven days to appeal the decision to the IowaCASA Board of Directors.

Appeals Process:

In order to submit a request for appeal, please include your reason for the request, and any new information you wish to provide to membership@iowacasa.org with “Attention: Board of Directors.” You may also mail or drop off a paper copy to the IowaCASA office at 3030 Merle Hay Rd, Des Moines IA 50310.

Within 30 days of the request, the Board of Directors will review the complaint, appeal, and any new information provided in order to make a final determination. Members of the Board who participated in the initial Review Committee will be excluded from the appeals process to avoid potential bias.

See Appendix III for the appeals process timeline.

Step Six: Respondent(s) and Coalition Action Plan

If the complaint determination was that action is required on the part of the respondent(s), the respondent(s) and IowaCASA representatives will meet in person to discuss an agreed upon action plan and timeline. The respondent(s) will be asked to submit two updates to IowaCASA about progress. The complainant(s) have the option to receive these updates via IowaCASA, if they choose.

Step Seven: Respondent(s) Complete Process

Once the respondents have satisfactorily fulfilled the IowaCASA action plan, they will receive a written notice that they have completed the complaint process.

Conflict of Interest Policy

Members of the Review Committee may recuse themselves or be asked by IowaCASA staff to recuse themselves from the complaint process should any conflicts of interest exist. Examples of conflict include (but are not limited to):

- The complaint involves a member program where someone on the committee works or previously worked.
- The complaint involves an individual who works or previously worked with someone on the committee.
- A survivor who has received services from a member of the committee or the committee member's workplace brings the complaint forth.
- The complaint involves someone who is a close associate of someone on the Review Committee.
- Anyone can decline the invitation to be on a Review Committee without giving a reason.

If members of the Review Committee must recuse themselves, an equal number of individuals will be brought on to the review committee from the IowaCASA staff and board. A minimum of six individuals should make up the Review Committee.

Appendices:

- I. Complaint Form
- II. Complaint Process Flow Chart
- III. Complaint Process Timeline
- IV. Glossary of Terms
- V. Commonly Asked Questions

Appendix I: Complaint Form

Online version is available at www.iowacasa.org/complaint-application

IowaCASA Complaint Form

Contact Information

Complainant Name *(person(s) filing the complaint):*

Email Address:

Phone Number:

Complaint Information

1. Respondent(s) Name *(person(s) or organization the complaint is against):*

2. Please check the type(s) of complaint:

- Breach of confidentiality
- Denial of services
- [Discrimination](#)
- Fraud
- Other: _____

Workplace Violence:

- [Discrimination](#)
- [Harassment](#)
- [Retaliation](#)

3. What is the approximate date(s) of the most recent event(s)?

4. Have attempts been made to address this complaint directly with the parties involved? If yes, please explain.

5. Summary of Complaint:

Use this section to describe your complaint in detail, to your degree of comfort. Include the names of persons, locations, and dates involved. Address each type of complaint. If you know of violations to the IowaCASA Service Standards or Code of Ethics, please cite them below. If you need additional space to describe the complaint or if you have any supporting documentation you would like to include in this complaint, please include them as attachments.

Please read:

I understand that if this complaint moves forward through the IowaCASA complaint process, the respondent will receive a copy of this complaint form (Your phone number and email address will be removed and will not be provided to the respondent at any time).

I understand that IowaCASA will follow the IowaCASA Complaint Policy and Procedures and that a copy is available to me for review. No outcome is guaranteed.

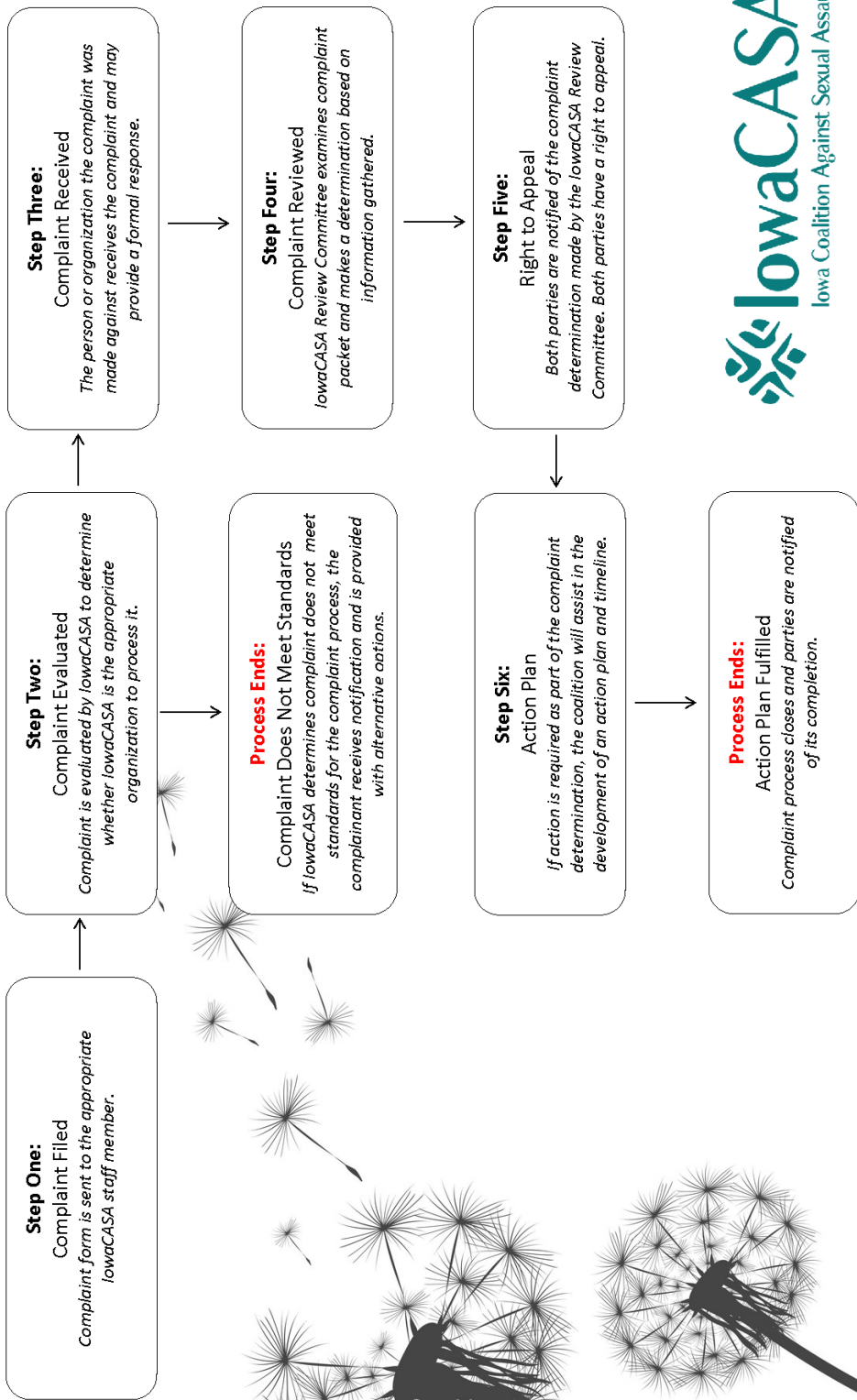
Signature

Date

Appendix II: Complaint Process Flow Chart

For larger-text PDF version, visit www.iowacasa.org/grievance-policy

Complaint Process Flow Chart



Appendix III: Complaint Process Timeline

Complaint Process Timeline

Day 1	Complaint Filed	<i>Complaint form is sent to IowaCASA staff or submitted online.</i>
Day 7	Complaint Evaluated	<i>Complaint is evaluated by IowaCASA to determine whether IowaCASA is appropriate organization to process it.</i>
Day 14	Notification to All Involved	<i>If complaint moves forward, the person the complaint was made against is notified and given copy of complaint. If complaint does not move forward, complainant sent acknowledgement letter.</i>
Day 25	Option to Respond	<i>The person the complaint was made against (respondent) has ten days to provide a response and any supporting documentation.</i>
Day 25 - 65	Complaint Reviewed	<i>IowaCASA Review Committee examines complaint packets, obtains any additional information, and discusses determination.</i>
Day 65	Determination Made	<i>IowaCASA Review Committee and Executive Director make determination. Letters of notification are sent to all parties, including instructions for next steps, if any.</i>

Appeals Process Timeline

Day 7	Right to Appeal	<i>Both parties are notified of the complaint determination made by IowaCASA. Both parties have seven business days to appeal.</i>
Day 8 - 38	Appeal Review	<i>The Board of Directors reviews the complaint packet, appeal request, and any new information in order to make a final determination.</i>
Day 38	Appeal Determination	<i>The Board of Directors makes a final determination. Letters are sent to all parties, including instructions for next steps, if any.</i>

Timeline Notes:

1. The days included in this timeline are business days; they do not include weekends or IowaCASA staff holidays.
2. Any follow up action required by the respondent(s) will be described in their determination letter. Timelines for follow up action vary considerably by complaint and are therefore not included in this timeline.
3. IowaCASA reserves the right to move up this timeline should the complaint in question be directly tied to the harm of survivors.

Appendix IV: Glossary of Terms

Complainant

The person or party that files a complaint through IowaCASA's complaint process will be referred to in this Complaint Policy and Procedure as the "Complainant(s)."

Discrimination

Refusal to provide services, provision of unfair service delivery, or refusal to provide reasonable accommodations to any person or group on the basis of color, race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, language, pregnancy, parental/marital status, age, disability, mental illness, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Workplace Discrimination

Unfair practices in hiring, discharge, promotion, referral, and other aspects of employment, on the basis of color, race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, language, pregnancy, parental/marital status, age, disability, mental illness, gender identity, or sexual orientation. This also includes discriminatory behavior and remarks that are subtle and often appears unintentional or goes unnoticed by colleagues with dominant identities (See: [Microaggressions](#)).

Member Program

IowaCASA is a membership-based organization that provides training and assistance to, and legislative voice for, comprehensive sexual assault programs and victim shelters throughout the state of Iowa. These programs, which provide direct services to survivors, apply for membership annually and are asked to comply with IowaCASA standards. You can find a list of our comprehensive member programs here: <https://www.iowacasa.org/victim-services-in-iowa>.

Respondent

The person or party that is alleged to have violated IowaCASA standards will be referred to in this Complaint Policy and Procedure as the "Respondent(s)".

Retaliation

A hostile action, such as firing or demotion, stemming from an employee's report of clearly defined employment or public policies such as: refusing to take part in or making a report of illegal activity, filing a worker's compensation claim, or obeying policies that promote survivors welfare such as anti-discrimination laws.

Harassment

Harassment is behavior that has the effect of humiliating, intimidating, or coercing someone through personal attack. It is behavior that will make someone uncomfortable or embarrassed, and cause emotional distress. Harassment frequently occurs when one person, discriminating against another, wants to exert power or control. Sexual harassment, specifically, is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. Harassment can be physical, verbal, written, or used with technology.

Stakeholder

Refers to anyone that has an interest in or is affected by a particular organization. It includes people such as: board members, people the organization serves, donors, funders, community partners, etc. Stakeholders can affect or be affected by the organization's actions, objectives and policies.

Workplace Violence

Workplace Violence is the actual or threat of violence against workers or the workplace. It can occur at or outside the workplace. Employees have the right to expect a work environment that promotes safety from violence. Discrimination, harassment, and retaliation are all forms of workplace violence.

Appendix V: Commonly Asked Questions

Is there a time limit on filing a complaint?

Normally complaints should be made within three months of the event(s) or within three months of the complainant(s) becoming aware of cause to complain.

Exceptions to this rule may be made by the IowaCASA Membership Specialist in discussion with Director-level leadership, and taking into account reasons for the delay (i.e. physical, emotional, sexual harm), and the practicality of reviewing the matter.

Who reviews the complaint?

Complaints are reviewed by a committee of IowaCASA board and staff members known here as “The Review Committee.” The committee is made up of six individuals: two IowaCASA staff members and four IowaCASA board members. Sometimes conflicts arise making individuals of the Review Committee unable to participate. Please see the section, “Conflict of Interest Policy” for more information.

If the member program of which I am filing a complaint against employs me, can IowaCASA protect me against job loss or other forms of retaliation?

Unfortunately, IowaCASA does not have the authority to protect your status as an employee or prevent any retaliation from occurring. IowaCASA urges employees who wish to file a complaint to review their agency’s personnel policies that may address grievances, whistleblowing, cause for termination, etc. and carefully weigh their options. If you feel that you have been retaliated against, you may have options outside of this complaint process (see below).

Is this process my only avenue of addressing concerns regarding an IowaCASA member program?

The IowaCASA formal complaint process is not for every situation or person. Persons wishing to address their concerns more informally may do so by calling, writing, or emailing the Membership Specialist to request more information.

Additionally, outside entities may be better suited for the complaint you wish to address. IowaCASA does not make recommendations to any one process, but rather provides options and resources so the complainant(s) can make their own decision.

Options may include:

- Local Civil and Human Rights Agencies - <https://icrc.iowa.gov/about-us/local-human-civil-rights-agencies>
- Iowa Civil and Human Rights Commission - <https://icrc.iowa.gov/file-complaint>
- Member program funding agencies - varies
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission - <https://www.eeoc.gov/employees/charge.cfm>

What are examples of complaint determinations?

According to our guiding principles, IowaCASA will work with those who are willing to acknowledge harm and improve sexual assault services. Our process prioritizes actionable steps in accountability. Examples of past complaint determinations include (but not limited to):

- Required training or coaching sessions
- Support in rewriting policies and procedures
- In-depth board training and consultation

In some instances, the Committee may recommend:

- Report to funding authorities
- Membership status probationary period
- Revocation of Victim Counselor Certification