

**OTTAWA COALITION TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
COMPLAINTS POLICY
APPROVED: 04 April 2016**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to set out a process for dealing with complaints from members and non-members directed at any of OCTEVAW's staff, board members, or volunteers, or at the organization in general.

OCTEVAW'S ROLE AND JURISDICTION IN RESPECT OF COMPLAINTS

If you wish to lodge a criticism or complaint with OCTEVAW you have two options: you may submit your comments—anononymously if you wish—on the “Feedback” section of our website, or you may file a formal complaint by filling out a complaint form.

The “Feedback” option will be put in place in May 2016 and will be available on our website to channel compliments, criticisms, suggested changes in policies and procedures and other important feedback from the community to OCTEVAW's board of directors. These will be brought to the attention of the board on a regular basis.

Formal complaints will trigger the process outlined below (Complaints Process), and complainants will be advised in writing of the outcome.

Please ensure that your complaint is relevant to the mission and scope of work of the organization, as outlined in the following two paragraphs—that it relates to something we can take action on. If it is not, we will try to assist by directing you to the appropriate organization(s).

What we do

OCTEVAW is a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to ending violence against women and, through leadership, education, advocacy and political action, to promoting a coordinated response to women and their children who have experienced abuse.

Practically speaking, this means we work with local organizations and in committee to **promote a coordinated response to violence** against women and gender-based violence; we **educate** different segments of the population (youth, men, and other discrete groups) on how to recognize violent behaviour and intervene appropriately; we **raise awareness** of the issues surrounding violence against women and gender-based violence; and, as a local umbrella group, we **advocate change** in areas where it is needed to more effectively address the violence.

What we do not do

- **We do not provide services to individual women or victims of violence.**
- **We do not take on an advocacy role in respect of individual cases.** We are concerned with the broad, systemic issues at play in violence against women and gender-based violence.

- **We do not provide a referral service for individuals**, although we do have a list of resources on our website for people in need of community services, and if someone contacts the office, we can support them in identifying some of the most suitable options for them (e.g. location of community resource).

Timeliness

Parties to a complaint are entitled to a timely procedure. Complaints will be acknowledged in writing. OCTEVAW commits to rendering a decision on complaints promptly, and to communicating with the Complainant as necessary to secure information and convey the outcome of the complaint.

Confidentiality

Complainants are entitled to confidentiality in making their complaint. This means that their name and any identifying information will be shared only with members of the Complaints Committee (those designated to receive the complaint and determine the appropriate response), who are all bound by the obligation to maintain confidentiality.

If a complaint is directed at an individual member of the staff, board member or volunteer (as opposed to the organization in general), that individual is entitled to know the substance of the complaint and to respond to it. Because complaints of this nature have the potential to affect an individual's membership in OCTEVAW or employment status, the principles of fairness demand that Complainants be prepared to reveal their name and contact information on a confidential basis.

Documentation

Complainants who pursue the formal complaints process are invited to submit their complaint in writing on the form provided. They may also enlist the help of another person in recording their complaint, including a member of OCTEVAW's board, staff or group of volunteers. Complainants may be contacted for further clarification or questions, and will be advised in writing of the outcome of their complaint.

All formal complaints and the responses to them will be documented and filed and all confidential information will remain protected.

Our commitment to a respectful environment

OCTEVAW is committed to communicating with Complainants in a respectful, professional and civil manner. Complaints should be made to the Complaints Committee or to the Executive Director at the address and/or telephone numbers provided below. Complainants are not entitled to contact OCTEVAW staff, board or volunteers to discuss their complaint via personal social media accounts; personal or non-OCTEVAW work phones; at their residence; or at places they may frequent for personal reasons (e.g. gym or local coffee shop).

Should you wish to make a complaint, we will provide you with the opportunity to present your case fully and, to the best of our ability, in the manner requested, taking

account of accessibility or other needs. Similarly, we expect the same courtesy from Complainants.

We understand that the complaint process and the circumstances that give rise to complaints can be stressful. However, we will not accept racist, discriminatory or harassing behaviour or profane communications and will take steps to protect our board, staff and volunteers from such behaviour.

Our commitment to a transparent process

Our complaints policies and procedures are posted on our website and are available in written form to anyone who asks for them. Complainants have the right to have their complaint reviewed and addressed without fear of embarrassment or reprisal. Respondents (those who are the object of a complaint) have the right to be informed of allegations, to be afforded the opportunity to respond to them, and to have the nature and validity of the complaint assessed fairly.

FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCESS

Responsibilities of the Complainant:

1. Fill out a complaint form, or organize your thoughts so as to be able to convey your complaint to a third party who can assist in filling the form on your behalf. Forms are available online at <http://www.octevaw-cocvff.ca/> or can be requested in hard copy by calling our offices: 613-237-1000.
2. Ensure the complaint contains all relevant information, including
 - your name, address, telephone number and other contact information.
 - the name of the person you are complaining about, if your complaint is directed at an individual;
 - full, accurate information about the incident that gives rise to the complaint, including what you feel the person did wrong and how it affected you;
 - what you would like to see happen as a result of your complaint;
 - copies of any documents that are related to or support your complaint;
 - names and contact information for any witnesses or other sources of information relating to your complaint.
3. When you are ready, sign the form and send it to OCTEVAW.

Complaints should be marked “Confidential” and either submitted on our website (<http://www.octevaw-cocvff.ca/>) where they will be received by our Executive Director, or mailed to:
OCTEVAW Complaints Committee,
250 City Centre, Suite 601
Ottawa, ON, K1R 6K7

Please note that these are the only points of contact for submitting complaints. Individual board members, volunteers, or part-time staff may, on request, assist in filling out your complaint form, but are not authorized to respond to or otherwise deal with formal complaints.

4. Provide additional information promptly if we need it to complete our consideration of your complaint.

Responsibilities of OCTEVAW:

5. The Complaints Committee, Executive Director, or other staff receiving an initial inquiry or complaint by telephone will acknowledge the concern in a respectful manner and offer information about the complaints process, including the complaint form (attached). Assistance in filling out the form will also be offered to those who request it.
6. All formal complaints will be considered by the Complaints Committee. The Committee's responsibility is to
 - a. assess the complaint and determine whether it will be handled by the Committee itself, or by delegated authority (e.g. the Executive Director);
 - b. ensure that OCTEVAW acquires all further information required to assess and address the complaint;
 - c. ensure that any individual who is an object of the complaint has an opportunity to respond.

The Committee or its delegate may consult other staff or board members with knowledge of the matter.

7. In determining its response to a complaint, the Committee will consider the materials provided by the Complainant and any supporting evidence; the materials provided by the Respondent and any supporting evidence; information gathered through any further research or inquiries conducted by the Committee or its delegate; any relevant policies (e.g. OCTEVAW's Code of Conduct and Conflict of Interest policies); and any earlier decisions the Committee may have made in comparable cases.
8. All communications surrounding the complaint will be documented and both the Complainant and the Respondent will be advised of the decision and the actions to be taken in respect of the complaint.
9. The official complaint and the decision with respect to it will be filed and kept on record. Confidential information will be protected.

10. All decisions of the Complaints Committee are final.

11. The Board will review the disposition of complaints once a year (generally through a report from the Complaints Committee) to ensure that all parties are being treated respectfully and that the process is working in accordance with the principles of fairness, timeliness, confidentiality, and transparency.