Amherst Survival Center
Feedback & Complaint Resolution Process

(Revised, effective 1/1/2025)

Participants and volunteers are critical to the mission of the Amherst Survival Center. One way that the Amherst Survival Center supports participants and volunteers is through an effective system for collecting, documenting, and responding to their complaints or concerns. This process ensures a fair, effective, timely, and transparent response.

The Amherst Survival Center is committed to high standards of practice in our work. We value feedback and complaints from all members of our community and continuously strive to improve our services. Our complaints process is guided by our Core Values of Inclusive Community, Compassion, Integrity, Continual Improvement, and Stewardship. Discrimination or retaliation against anyone for their part in presenting a complaint will not be tolerated.

Complainants may enlist assistance in submitting feedback or filing a complaint. If needed, they may request the Amherst Survival Center to assist directly.

We expect that people making complaints to our organization will treat our staff reasonably. Anyone reporting a complaint is expected to act in good faith and have reasonable grounds for believing the information is accurate. The act of making deliberate falsehoods in connection with the complaint process undermines the efficacy of the complaint process.

Feedback and Complaints

Feedback – We welcome your feedback–positive or negative! It helps us better respond to and more effectively serve our community. This can be something you wish was different, a suggestion, a concern, or something you love about ASC.

- ➔ ***Informal feedback*** can be shared with any staff in person, or sending an email or note.
- ➔ ***Formal feedback*** can be given using our feedback and complaint form, which can be found at the Reception Desk or online at amherstsurvival.org/feedback. We also solicit formal feedback during regular program surveys and similar means.

Complaint – A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or grievance, filed using the process outlined here. It can include a concern about the conduct of another participant, volunteer, or staff member; quality of service; or other programmatic concerns. Complaints must be submitted within six months of the event in question. The Amherst Survival Center will not respond to anonymous complaints.

There are 3 types of complaints that are handled differently.

- ➔ General Complaints (any complaint not specified below)
- ➔ Complaints specifically about the conduct of the Program Director
- ➔ Complaints specifically about the conduct of the Executive Director

***If urgent action is needed**, notify the Program Director immediately, in addition to completing the form. Depending on the nature of the complaint, it may be submitted for expedited resolution to an appropriate decision-maker for faster consideration and follow up.*

You can find this policy and the *Feedback & Complaint Form* at amherstsurvival.org/feedback

Complaint Procedure: General Complaints

STEP 1) Making a Complaint – Submit using the Feedback & Complaint Form, available:

- ➔ ***In-person:*** Ask at the reception desk for the form. Give completed form to the Reception Volunteer or Program Director.
- ➔ ***Online:*** amherstsurvival.org/feedback

STEP 2) Acknowledgement – All complaints will be acknowledged within 10 business days. This acknowledgement will include information about the complaint process, next steps, and applicable timeframes.

STEP 3) Assessment – The Program Director will conduct a preliminary assessment to confirm the issues raised by the complainant fall within the scope of this policy. The Program Director has the authority to dismiss a complaint for any of the following reasons:

- The issue is not within the control of or jurisdiction of the Amherst Survival Center, including any matters before the courts.
- The concerns raised have already been investigated, no new issue is reported.
- The incident in question took place more than 6 months ago.
- The complaint appears malicious, retaliatory, or deliberately false.
- The remedy sought by the complainant is not achievable.

When a complaint is dismissed for any of the reasons above, the complainant will be notified by email, phone or in person within 15 business days of receiving the complaint, with reasons provided for the decision to dismiss the complaint.

STEP 4) Investigation– Complaint investigations will be guided by the principles of administrative fairness and will be conducted in a fair, timely and impartial manner. The Program Director will look into the matter, including speaking with you further if needed (in person or by phone). The Program Director may also review relevant facts, history, and context; talk to others involved; or take other steps to reach a determination.

STEP 5) Determination– The Program Director will make a determination whether the complaint is substantiated or not, and any remedies or follow up actions to address the issue. The Program Director will send (email) a determination letter to the complainant within 30 business days (~6 weeks) of the original complaint. *(If the Complainant does not have email the Program Director will attempt to contact them by phone or in person.)*

Appeal and Review Options

After reviewing the response, if you are still unsatisfied, you may appeal to the Executive Director for a review of the decision. The appeal must be submitted in writing within 15 business days of the determination from the Program Director. You may submit this appeal either electronically (ED@amherstsurvival.org), in person at 138 Sunderland Road, North Amherst, or via mail at PO Box 9629, North Amherst, MA 01059.

The formal appeal must include 1) Detail as to why the Program Director's response is unsatisfactory; 2) Detail of the action or solution you are requesting; and 3) Any additional relevant facts or information you wish to have considered.

The Executive Director shall review all relevant information, gather additional information as needed, and respond in writing within 30 business days (~6 weeks) of receiving the appeal. The decision of the Executive Director is final.

Complaint Procedure: Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Program Director

STEP 1) Making a Complaint – Complaints can be submitted in the following ways:

- ➔ ***In-person:*** Ask at the reception desk for the form. Give completed form to the Executive Director.
- ➔ ***Email:*** ED@amherstsurvival.org (Please indicate "Complaint" in the subject line and include all information requested in the Feedback & Complaint Form.)

STEPS 2-5) See "General Complaints" All other aspects of the procedures are the same as for General Complaints except that the Executive Director will conduct the investigation.

Note: This process covers complaints regarding the conduct of the program director. If the issue is dissatisfaction with the determination made in response to a prior complaint, see General Complaints > Appeal and Review Options.

Appeal and Review Options

The Executive Director has authority over personnel matters, and determinations are final.

In the event you believe that the Executive Director failed to follow this complaint process, or that the decision was in some way discriminatory, you may appeal to the Resolution Committee of the Board for review on these grounds only. The appeal must be submitted within 15 business days of the determination. You may submit this appeal either electronically (email to: resolutioncommittee@amherstsurvival.org), in person at ASC, or via mail (send to: ASC Resolution Committee, PO Box 9629, North Amherst, MA 01059).

The formal appeal must include 1) Detail as to what aspect of this complaint resolution process was not followed and how that impacted the determination AND/OR why you believe the determination is discriminatory and on what grounds; 2) Detail of the action or solution you are requesting; and 3) Any additional relevant facts or information you wish to have considered.

Within 30 business days of your request, the Resolution Committee will consider and act on the appeal. The Resolution Committee may, at its sole discretion, affirm or deny your request, choose to investigate further, or choose to refer the matter to the entire Board of Directors. The decision of the Resolution Committee or the entire Board is final.

Complaint Procedure: Complaints Regarding the Conduct of the Executive Director

The Resolution Committee of the Board of Directors will consider the following complaints about the conduct of the Executive Director to be in scope:

- Discriminatory treatment of others, including that which is based on race, color, religion, creed, sexual orientation, national origin, ethnicity, class, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, or any other personal characteristics.
- Illegal activity.
- Misappropriation or mismanagement of funds or assets of the organization.
- Conflicts of interest.

The Resolution Committee will not consider complaints about operational matters not concerning the Executive Director. Concerns about operational matters should be submitted as

feedback or via the General Complaint Process. The Resolution Committee will review appeals of prior decisions, only as outlined above.

STEP 1) Making a Complaint – Complaints can be submitted in the following ways:

- ➔ ***In-person:*** Ask at the reception desk for the Feedback & Complaint Form. Return form in a sealed envelope, addressed to the *Resolution Committee*, to the Program Director or Executive Director to be passed along. It will not be reviewed by any member of staff.
- ➔ ***Email:*** resolutioncommittee@amherstsurvival.org (Indicate "Complaint" in the subject line and include all information requested in the Feedback & Complaint form.)
- ➔ ***By mail:*** Mail completed form to Resolution Committee, Amherst Survival Center, PO Box 9629, North Amherst, MA 01059

STEP 2) Acknowledgement – All complaints will be acknowledged within three weeks from receipt by email or phone (as long as one was provided). This acknowledgement will include information about the complaint process, next steps, and applicable timeframes.

STEP 3) Assessment – The Resolution Committee will conduct a preliminary assessment to confirm the issues raised fall within the scope of this policy (outlined above). The Resolution Committee has the authority to dismiss a complaint for any of the following reasons:

- The issue is not within the jurisdiction for review by the committee, including those that are outside of the scope of this policy, or any matters before the courts.
- The concerns raised have already been investigated, no new issue is reported.
- The incident in question took place more than 6 months ago.
- The complaint appears malicious, retaliatory, or deliberately false.
- The remedy sought by the complainant is not achievable.

When a complaint is dismissed for any of the reasons above, the complainant will be notified by email, phone or in person within one month of receiving the complaint, with reasons provided for the decision to dismiss the complaint.

STEP 4) Investigation– Complaint investigations will be guided by the principles of administrative fairness and will be conducted in a fair, timely and impartial manner. Before commencing a formal investigation of a complaint, the Resolution Committee will be responsible for developing an investigation plan (as outlined in the addendum). The Resolution Committee will investigate including reviewing the materials provided, offering an opportunity for both the complainant and Executive Director to be heard, and reviewing other relevant facts, history, and context. The Resolution Committee may talk to others involved or take other steps to reach a determination. At any time, and at its discretion, the Resolution Committee may refer an investigation to the full Board.

STEP 5) Determination– The Resolution Committee will make a determination regarding the complaint and any remedies or follow up actions. The Resolution Committee will notify the complainant by email of the determination within three months of the original complaint. (If the Complainant does not have email the Resolution Committee will attempt to contact them by phone or in person.) The decision of the Resolution Committee or the entire Board is final.

Appeal and Review Options

The decision of the Resolution Committee (or entire Board) is final. The Board will not consider any requests for review or appeal.

Addendum

Alternate Investigators – In the event the Program Director is unavailable, the Executive Director or a designee will handle review of general complaints. If initial investigation is conducted by the Executive Director, the complainant can, if unsatisfied, appeal to the program director for a secondary review.

Communication Methods –The Center will generally communicate with complainants via email, as long as one was provided. Communications via phone or in person will be documented in the investigation notes. In the event that no contact information is provided, the Center will attempt to contact the complainant in person, but may not always be able to do so.

Confidentiality –The Center commits to maintaining confidentiality and protecting privacy throughout the complaint process to the extent feasible, while fully investigating the matter. This applies to complainants, witnesses/involved parties, and any individuals accused of wrongdoing. Documents relating to a complaint investigation are securely stored and only accessible to the staff or Board members involved in the review, or as needed to inform remedies. When feasible, complaints and their outcomes will be anonymized when reviewed within our organization for continuous improvement. Please be aware that in order to complete an investigation, we cannot guarantee complete confidentiality with the person against whom the complaint is filed or with witnesses. Similarly, there may be information provided by witnesses or the person accused, that cannot be shared in detail with the complainant. Personnel information, including disciplinary history or actions, are strictly confidential.

Continuous Quality Improvement –The Amherst Survival Center monitors complaint trends and conducts regular reviews to identify any systemic service issues and make necessary improvements in our organization. We are committed to learning from the complaints we receive from our service users, volunteers, or other community members.

Delays – While the Amherst Survival Center will try to consistently complete investigation steps within the timeframes noted, there are occasions when additional time is needed. In the event of a delay, the complainant will be notified within the original timeframe.

Determination Letter – A final determination letter is provided by the investigator to the complainant. The investigator will attempt to explain the determination clearly and in accessible language. It will include (as relevant):

- The core issues raised by the complainant.
- The information or evidence considered during the review of the complaint. *If certain evidence was discounted in the review process, explain why (for example, issues with witness credibility or reliability of evidence).*
- The assessment of the situation in the context of the Center's rules and standard procedures.
- The determination of whether the complaint was substantiated or not.
- Any remedies offered or other action taken by the agency in response to the complaint.
- Information about any available appeal or review options.

Investigation Plan (Resolution Committee Only) – For complaints investigated by the Resolution Committee, the committee will develop an investigation plan including, as relevant:

- An assessment of the main issues raised in the complaint

- The outcome or remedy the person is seeking
- What evidence is required and how it will be gathered (including the names of witnesses and order in which they will be interviewed, if at all, as well as other records and evidence needed for the review)
- How maximum feasible confidentiality will be maintained throughout the investigation
- How people who are impacted by the investigation process will be notified of the outcome
- The investigation timeline
- Any other relevant requirements

Recording Complaints – The Amherst Survival Center will maintain a tracking system for complaints received. To maintain confidentiality of personnel matters, separate tracking documents will be maintained for general complaints, complaints regarding conduct of the program director, and complaints regarding conduct of the executive director. The following information will be documented:

- The complainant's name, contact information
- Date of complaint and method of submission
- The issues raised and facts provided by the complainant
- The outcome sought by the complainant (if known)
- Any barriers or additional support the person making the complaint may need, such as access to an interpreter
- Documentation of additional information gathering during the investigation (including notation of any interviews conducted)
- Any attempts made to resolve the complaint informally, including action taken by the staff member receiving the complaint
- The determination.
- Any additional notes needed to explain the analysis of the situation or determination reached.

Members of the Resolution Committee may periodically review the tracking system.

Remedies – If investigation of a complaint reveals that the Center has made an error in providing its services to the public, or handling of a challenge, we will take steps to fix the problem. The following remedies may be appropriate for substantiated complaints (for example):

- An acknowledgement and apology for the error
- Reconsideration of a previous decision
- Expediting an action
- Changing policies and procedures to prevent re-occurrence
- Disciplinary action, as deemed appropriate, in accordance with our Code of Conduct, Volunteer Handbook, or Employee Handbook
- Other remedy as deemed appropriate

Resolution Committee – In order to provide an avenue to appropriately assess and investigate complaints regarding the Executive Director, the Board President appoints a Resolution Committee, consisting of three people: the Board President and/or Vice President, a representative from the Governance Committee, and one other Board Member to be appointed by the Board President, as needed.