

Sarvodaya Ashram: Grievance Redressal Policy

Sikanderpur, Tandiyawan, District Hardoi, Uttar Pradesh, India

1. Policy Statement

Sarvodaya Ashram is committed to fostering a fair, transparent, and respectful environment for all individuals associated with it, including employees, volunteers, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. This Grievance Redressal Policy is established to provide a structured, accessible, and confidential mechanism for addressing grievances promptly, impartially, and effectively, ensuring that concerns are heard and resolved in a just manner. The Ashram believes that a robust grievance redressal system is crucial for maintaining harmonious relationships, promoting accountability, and continuously improving its operations and programs.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a clear and accessible process for individuals to raise grievances without fear of reprisal or victimization.
- Ensure that all grievances are treated seriously, confidentially, and with sensitivity.
- Facilitate prompt and fair investigation and resolution of grievances.
- Promote a culture of open communication, trust, and mutual respect within the Ashram.
- Reinforce the Ashram's commitment to ethical conduct, fairness, and adherence to its values.
- Comply with relevant legal provisions and best practices in grievance management.

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- **Employees:** All permanent, contractual, and temporary staff members of Sarvodaya Ashram.
- **Volunteers:** All individuals who volunteer their time and services to Sarvodaya Ashram.
- **Beneficiaries:** Individuals and communities receiving services or assistance from Sarvodaya Ashram's programs.
- **Partners and Stakeholders:** Individuals or organizations collaborating with or impacted by Sarvodaya Ashram's operations (where the grievance relates to the Ashram's conduct).

This policy covers grievances related to, but not limited to:

- Workplace issues (e.g., unfair treatment, harassment, discrimination, safety concerns, working conditions).

- Program-related issues (e.g., quality of services, beneficiary selection, program implementation concerns, staff conduct towards beneficiaries).
- Allegations of misconduct or ethical breaches by Ashram personnel.
- Non-compliance with Ashram policies, procedures, or legal requirements.

This policy does NOT cover:

- Matters that are explicitly covered by other specific policies (e.g., serious criminal offences that must be reported directly to law enforcement, unless the grievance specifically relates to the Ashram's internal handling of such matters).
- Anonymous grievances where there is insufficient information to investigate, unless the nature of the grievance is severe and can be credibly investigated without complainant identity.
- Suggestions for improvement that do not involve a specific complaint or perceived injustice.

4. Definitions

- **Grievance:** A formal expression of dissatisfaction, complaint, or injustice felt by an individual or group concerning an action, decision, or omission within the purview of Sarvodaya Ashram, impacting them directly or indirectly.
- **Complainant:** The individual or group raising the grievance.
- **Respondent:** The individual or entity against whom the grievance is made.
- **Grievance Redressal Committee (GRC):** A designated committee or individual responsible for receiving, investigating, and facilitating the resolution of grievances.
- **Confidentiality:** The principle of keeping sensitive information private and not disclosing it to unauthorized parties.

5. Principles of Grievance Redressal

- **Fairness and Impartiality:** All grievances will be handled without bias or prejudice, ensuring a fair hearing for all parties involved.
- **Confidentiality:** The identity of the complainant and respondent, and the details of the grievance, will be kept confidential to the extent possible, except where disclosure is necessary for investigation or required by law.
- **Timeliness:** Grievances will be addressed and resolved within reasonable stipulated timelines.
- **Accessibility:** The grievance mechanism will be easy to understand and accessible to all individuals, including those with limited literacy or special needs, where possible (e.g., through verbal submission options).
- **Non-Retaliation:** No individual will be subjected to any form of discrimination, harassment, or reprisal for raising a genuine grievance in good faith, or for participating in a grievance investigation.
- **Transparency (of Process):** The grievance redressal process will be transparent, ensuring that the complainant is informed of the steps being taken and the outcome of the investigation.
- **Accountability:** All individuals involved in the grievance process, including the GRC, are accountable for adhering to this policy.

6. Grievance Redressal Mechanism Structure

Sarvodaya Ashram will establish a **Grievance Redressal Committee (GRC)** or designate a **Grievance Officer** to handle complaints.

6.1 Grievance Redressal Committee (GRC) / Grievance Officer

- **Composition (if GRC):** The GRC will comprise at least three members, including:
 - A senior member of the Ashram's management/staff.
 - At least one female member.
 - An external independent member (optional, but recommended for serious cases or for impartiality).
 - Members should be selected based on their integrity, impartiality, and understanding of Ashram operations and values.
- **Designation (if Grievance Officer):** Secretary of the organization will be appointed as the Grievance Officer, responsible for managing the entire process.
- **Roles and Responsibilities of the GRC/Grievance Officer:**
 - Receive and acknowledge grievances.
 - Maintain strict confidentiality of all grievances.
 - Conduct fair and impartial investigations.
 - Gather relevant information and evidence.
 - Interview concerned parties and witnesses.
 - Facilitate resolution or recommend appropriate actions to the Director/Governing Body.
 - Maintain detailed records of all grievances and their resolutions.
 - Ensure compliance with this policy.

7. Grievance Redressal Procedure

The grievance redressal process involves several stages:

7.1 Stage 1: Informal Resolution (Optional but Encouraged)

- For minor grievances, individuals are encouraged, where comfortable and appropriate, to first attempt to resolve the issue directly with the concerned person or their immediate supervisor/program coordinator.
- This stage emphasizes open communication and finding a mutually agreeable solution.
- If informal resolution is not possible, or if the grievance is serious, the formal process should be initiated.

7.2 Stage 2: Formal Grievance Submission

- **Method of Submission:**
 - **Written:** Complainants can submit their grievance in writing (handwritten or typed) and submit it directly to the Grievance Officer/GRC members.
 - **Email:** Grievances can be sent via email to kusum@sashram.org

- **Verbal:** For individuals who may have difficulty with written communication (e.g., beneficiaries with limited literacy), a verbal grievance can be lodged with the Grievance Officer/GRC member, who will then assist in documenting it. The documented verbal grievance should be read back and acknowledged by the complainant.
- **Required Information:** The grievance should ideally include:
 - Name and contact details of the Complainant (unless choosing to remain anonymous, though this may limit investigation).
 - Date of submission.
 - Clear and concise description of the grievance, including relevant dates, times, and locations.
 - Names of individuals involved (if any).
 - Any supporting documentation or evidence.
 - Desired outcome or resolution (if any).

7.3 Stage 3: Acknowledgment and Assessment

- Upon receipt of a formal grievance, the Grievance Officer/GRC will acknowledge its receipt within **3 working days**.
- The GRC/Grievance Officer will assess the nature and severity of the grievance to determine the appropriate course of action and the need for a full investigation.
- If the grievance falls outside the scope of this policy, the complainant will be informed accordingly with reasons.

7.4 Stage 4: Investigation

- The GRC/Grievance Officer will initiate a thorough and impartial investigation within **7 working days** of acknowledgment.
- **Steps in Investigation:**
 - Interviewing the Complainant to gather full details.
 - Notifying the Respondent of the grievance, providing them an opportunity to respond and present their side of the story.
 - Interviewing relevant witnesses.
 - Collecting and reviewing all pertinent documents, records, and evidence.
 - Maintaining detailed and accurate records of all investigative steps.
- **Confidentiality during Investigation:** All parties involved in the investigation are required to maintain strict confidentiality.

7.5 Stage 5: Resolution and Recommendation

- Upon completion of the investigation, the GRC/Grievance Officer will prepare a report summarizing the findings and conclusions.
- The GRC/Grievance Officer will then recommend appropriate action(s) for resolution. These actions may include:
 - Mediation or conciliation.
 - Formal apology.
 - Corrective action (e.g., training, counselling).
 - Disciplinary action against the respondent (as per HR Policy, if applicable).

- Policy or procedural changes to prevent recurrence.
 - No action, if the grievance is found to be unsubstantiated.
- The recommendation will be submitted to the **Director/Governing Body** for approval, especially for serious cases or those involving disciplinary action.

7.6 Stage 6: Communication of Decision

- The Complainant will be formally informed of the outcome of the grievance and the action(s) taken within **15 working days** from the date of formal submission (or within a reasonable timeframe, depending on complexity, with updates provided).
- The Respondent will also be informed of the decision, as appropriate.
- The communication will be in a clear, respectful, and understandable manner.

7.7 Stage 7: Appeal Mechanism (Optional but Recommended for Transparency)

- If the Complainant is dissatisfied with the resolution, they may appeal the decision to the **Governing Body/Board of Trustees** (or a designated higher authority) within **7 working days** of receiving the initial decision.
- The appeal must be in writing, stating the reasons for dissatisfaction.
- The Governing Body will review the appeal and the original investigation report, and may conduct further inquiries if deemed necessary.
- The decision of the Governing Body on appeal will be final and communicated to the Complainant within **15 working days**.

8. Timelines

- **Acknowledgement of Grievance:** Within 3 working days.
- **Investigation Start:** Within 7 working days of acknowledgment.
- **Investigation Completion & Recommendation:** Within 15-30 working days (depending on complexity).
- **Communication of Decision:** Within 3 working days of approval by authority.
- **Appeal Review & Final Decision:** Within 15 working days of appeal submission.

Note: These timelines are indicative. Complex grievances may require more time, but regular updates must be provided to the complainant.

9. Confidentiality and Non-Retaliation

- **Confidentiality:** All information related to a grievance, including the identity of the complainant, respondent, and witnesses, will be kept strictly confidential. Information will only be disclosed on a "need-to-know" basis for the purpose of investigation and resolution, or if required by law.
- **Non-Retaliation:** Sarvodaya Ashram strictly prohibits any form of retaliation against individuals who:
 - Lodge a grievance in good faith.
 - Participate in a grievance investigation as a witness or by providing information.

- Support someone who has lodged a grievance. Any proven act of retaliation will be treated as a serious disciplinary offense.

10. Record Keeping and Reporting

- The Grievance Officer/GRC will maintain detailed and confidential records of all grievances received, including:
 - Date of grievance submission.
 - Name of complainant (if not anonymous).
 - Nature of grievance.
 - Investigation steps taken.
 - Findings and recommendations.
 - Action taken and resolution.
 - Date of resolution.
- These records will be kept securely for a minimum of 5 years or as per legal requirements.
- Anonymized statistical reports on grievances (e.g., number of grievances, types of grievances, resolution rates) may be periodically shared with the Governing Body to identify systemic issues and facilitate continuous improvement, ensuring no individual identities are revealed.

11. Review of the Policy

This Grievance Redressal Policy will be reviewed periodically (e.g. annually or biennially) by the Governing Body/GRC to ensure its effectiveness, relevance, and compliance with prevailing laws and best practices. Any necessary amendments will be communicated to all stakeholders.

12. Awareness and Training

- All new employees and volunteers will be informed about this policy during their onboarding process.
- Information about this policy will be prominently displayed at the Ashram premises and included in relevant manuals.
- Periodic awareness sessions will be conducted for staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries (where appropriate and feasible) to ensure they understand their rights and the process for lodging grievances.

