



# Service Complaints, Allegations, and Appeals Policy

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## Introduction

### Purpose of this Document

Fairtrade America recognises the importance of and value of listening and responding to concerns and complaints. We are committed to achieving the highest standard we can in every area of our work and to continuous improvement. Fairtrade America is also committed to maintaining its responsiveness to the needs and concerns of its licensees, the public and the producers it supports.

This policy is designed to provide guidance on the way Fairtrade America receives and handles complaints made against the organization and its employees. The goal of the policy is to assist the organization and employees in resolving complaints in an efficient, effective and professional manner.

This policy applies to all our people - employees and volunteers – and they are familiarised with it. Those with relevant responsibilities are trained in its application. We make clear the value we place on receiving concerns and complaints in all relevant communications. We advise how a copy of this policy may be obtained, and we provide clear information on how complaints may be made.

## What are Complaints, Allegations, and Appeals?

**A complaint** under this policy is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction made to the organization, related to its services, or the complaints-handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

Any person or organization (the complainant) who is dissatisfied with a service provided by the organization may contact Fairtrade America to complain. At times, complaints can be by way of negative feedback, which may not require a resolution or formal follow-up. While this type of feedback is valuable to the organization, the policy does not apply to feedback of this nature.

**An allegation** is submitted by a third party, claiming that a Fairtrade operator is violating Fairtrade America's policies and procedures, is damaging Fairtrade America's reputation, or is misusing the FAIRTRADE mark.

**An appeal** may only be brought forward by a party about which a licensing decision was made, in the circumstance that party feels the licensing decision was made wrongly. All decisions related to the status of the applicant, operator, or licensee remain in force until the appeal is settled.

### Scope of our Policy

In order for Fairtrade America to review a complaint, allegation or appeal, the subject of the complaint must fall within Fairtrade America's scope, such as:

- Complaints regarding the conduct of personnel, including all staff, Board members, volunteers, and contractors;
- Complaints regarding confidentiality, conflict of interest, and non-discrimination;
- Complaints or allegations regarding Fairtrade America's licensees;
- Complaints or appeals regarding Fairtrade America's licensing decisions.

### Guiding principles of effective complaints handling

Partners and employees should consider the following guiding principles of effective complaints handling:

Visibility	Our Complaints Handling Policy is available on the Fairtrade America website and internally.
Accessibility	Our Complaints Handling Policy is readily accessible to all partners, employees and licensees. The Policy is easy to understand and includes details on making and resolving complaints.
Responsiveness	Receipt of each complaint is acknowledged to the complainant immediately. Complaints will be handled in an efficient and effective manner. Complainants will be treated courteously and kept informed of the progress of their complaint throughout the complaint-handling process.
Objectivity	Each complaint is addressed in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner through the complaints-handling process.
Charges	There will be no charge to the complainant for making a complaint.
Confidentiality	Personally identifiable information concerning the complainant is actively protected from disclosure unless the complainant expressly consents to disclosure.  The information received through the Allegations and Complaints procedure is handled as confidential information.
Customer focused approach	All partners and employees of Fairtrade America, including the members of the Board, the Executive Director and the senior management team, are committed to efficient and fair resolution of complaints. We actively solicit feedback from our licensees and producer partners on a regular basis and acknowledge their right to complain.
Accountability	All partners and employees accept responsibility for effective complaints handling. The Executive Director will ensure that, where appropriate, issues raised in the complaints handling process are reflected in partner and employee performance evaluation.
Continual Improvement	Our complaints handling process will be reviewed periodically, to enhance its efficient delivery of improvement effective outcomes.

## Handling a Complaint

### How a complaint may be made

Where a complaint, allegation, or appeal is about a particular engagement, service, partner or employee and the complainant is familiar with the team working on the relevant matter, the complainant should address his/her complaint, allegation, or appeal to the manager of that team. The complaint, allegation, or appeal should be made in writing and provided by hand, email or post. Where possible complaints, allegations, or appeals should be made in writing so that the details of the complaint are clear and complete.

If the complainant is not sure who to address the complaint, allegation, or appeal to, or if the complainant feels it is inappropriate to address the complaint, allegation, or appeal to a particular person, the complaint can be addressed to:

Private and Confidential  
Executive Director, Fairtrade America  
1101 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 350  
Washington, DC 20005  
email: [complaints@fairtradeamerica.org](mailto:complaints@fairtradeamerica.org)

If your complaint is about the Executive Director, your complaint should be addressed to:

Private and Confidential  
Board Chair, Fairtrade America  
1101 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 350  
Washington, DC 20005  
email: [boardchair@fairtradeamerica.org](mailto:boardchair@fairtradeamerica.org)

What information is required when making a complaint, allegation, or appeal?

When making a complaint, allegation, or appeal providing as much of the following information as possible will make it easier for us to resolve matters:

- Your name, position and contact details
- Your relationship with Fairtrade America (for example: are you a licensee?)
- The nature of the complaint
- Details of the Fairtrade America partner or employee involved (if applicable)
- Relevant dates
- Copies of any documentation supporting the complaint

## Complaints, Allegations, and Appeals Procedure

We will endeavour to deal with inquires and minor complaints which are made orally by telephone or in person, during that initial phone call or meeting. If we cannot adequately deal with a complaint, the complaint will be assigned to a relevant staff member as outlined below for further investigation.

We will acknowledge in writing all complaints, allegations, and appeals within 7 days of receipt, unless the complainant declines to provide contact details or where the nature of the complaint is such that it is not possible acknowledge in writing.

## Investigation Process

Your complaint, allegation, or appeal will be assigned to a relevant staff member (or depending on the nature and seriousness of the complaint, a Board member) for investigation. For example, if your complaint relates to an issue of licensing, a member of the Commercial Relations Team will conduct the review. Any person with a conflict of interest in relation to the complaint shall be excluded from the review and decision-making process.

Each complaint, allegation, or appeal (other than those determined by the relevant staff member to be frivolous or vexatious) will be investigated. The person handling the complaint will make reasonable effort to:

- Establish the facts and gather the relevant information regarding the complaint; and
- If necessary and/or practicable, interview those involved.

The level of investigation will be commensurate with the seriousness and frequency of the complaint. If necessary, A corrective action plan for the complaint, allegation or appeal is submitted for review by the Leadership Team.

Once we have investigated your complaint, allegation, or appeal we will provide you with a written response.

If you are dissatisfied with Fairtrade America's response, you have the right to ask for review of the response by the Executive Director, or if the complaint is in regard to the Executive Director to the Chair of the Fairtrade America Board. Such a request should be made in writing and forwarded by post, email or fax to the address provided above.

If you are still dissatisfied with Fairtrade America's response you may ask the Fairtrade International Oversight Committee to review the complaint, allegation, or appeal. You should address your complaint, allegation, or appeal to the Fairtrade International Assurance Manager, [assurance@fairtrade.net](mailto:assurance@fairtrade.net).

### Your rights during the complaint process

- You have the right to inquire as to the status of your complaint, allegation, or appeal by contacting the staff member who has been identified to you as handling your complaint.
- Your personal information will be protected from disclosure unless you expressly consent to disclosure.
- Your complaint, allegation, or appeal will be addressed in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.

- There will be no charge for making a complaint, allegation, or appeal.

#### **Assistance with making a complaint, allegation, or appeal**

If you need assistance in formulating or lodging a complaint, allegation, or appeal please contact any member of Fairtrade America. If this is not appropriate, please contact the Executive Director (contact details as above). In particular, a member of staff can assist you to identify the information which should be provided to establish the facts of the complaint and identify the outcome you are seeking in relation to the complaint, allegation, or appeal.

#### **Further action**

If you are a licensee and the matter comes within the terms of the License Contract, please refer to the dispute resolution clause in the License Contract if you are dissatisfied with the response from Fairtrade.

#### **Timeframes**

We aim to resolve complaints, allegations, and appeals as quickly as possible and within 14 days unless there are exceptional circumstances. If a complaint is not able to be resolved within 14 days, we will inform the complainant of progress and keep them informed of progress every two weeks.

## **Our Quality Controls**

A register of complaints will be kept. Complaints, allegations, and appeals will be analysed by the Executive Director for the identification of systemic or recurring problems. If such problems are identified, the organization will consider what actions it may need to take to address these problems.

The complaints handling process will be reviewed periodically to enhance its delivery of efficient and effective outcomes. This review will be performed by the Executive Director or an appropriate appointee. The organization will consider what actions it may need to take to address any deficiencies identified in the review.

Where appropriate, issues that arise as a result of the complaints handling process may be incorporated in the process for monitoring and evaluating employee performance.