



## Model Staff Procedure for Handling Harassment

This document is intended for internal use.

It is important to ensure that meeting staff are fully trained (not just handed a written policy) on how to respond to reports of harassment. Training should include role-playing scenarios that give staff an opportunity to practice each step in the procedure. If you choose to train a few members of staff, make sure that all staff (and contractors or volunteers as needed) know the policy and know whom to contact if a participant approaches them to report an incident. Make sure that enough staff are fully trained to provide around-the-clock coverage. Make sure that their contact information is provided with the publicized policy.

**NOTE: is crucial that a trustworthy and trained staff member or, preferably, an independent ombudsman, be the first point of contact for taking reports on incidents of harassment.** This helps avoid a situation in which the harasser is also the first point of contact for reporting harassment. (Of course, not all leaders are harassers, however harassment by those in positions of power is not unusual and should not be unexpected.)

### HOW TO ADDRESS INCIDENTS THAT VIOLATE THE ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY

“Participant” in these procedures refers to anyone present at [MEETING NAME], including staff, contractors, vendors, exhibitors, venue staff, members, and all attendees. “Reporter” refers to anyone who reports an incident of harassment, including targets, bystanders, and witnesses.

#### **KNOW THE POLICY**

Be sure to have a good understanding of our Anti-Harassment Policy, which can be found here [link to policy].

The safety of participants at our meetings begins with our making every effort to stop and prevent harassment of any kind. Dealing with incidents of harassment requires quick and decisive action to restore a sense of safety for the targets and the witnesses of harassment, and safety of participants must take priority.

#### **HAVE RESOURCES AT THE READY**

Create a form or format for collecting incident reports.

Determine the best way to locate and contact meeting participants, so that individuals can be identified be located quickly. For example: have access to mobile phone numbers for text messaging or calls,

**\* HELPING YOU  
GET FROM POINT A  
TO POINT B**

include a paging system in the meeting mobile app, allow for podium announcements requesting that individuals report to the meetings office, use walkie-talkies to alert staff.

Compile information specific to the meeting locations, such as:

- Printed list of contact information for meeting staff (in case the target wants to contact someone after providing the incident report)
- Contact information for venue security
- Hotline number for the nearest rape crisis center. In the event of a physical assault of any kind, rape crisis centers can provide counseling, an advocate to accompany the target if the target wants to notify police, and access to emergency care and evidence collection.

### **WHEN YOU WITNESS A VIOLATION OF THE ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY**

Any member of staff who witnesses behavior that violates the Anti-Harassment Policy may issue a verbal warning to the harasser. State that the behavior violates the policy, request that the behavior stop immediately, and state that any more incidents of harassment may result in the harasser being asked to leave the meeting. Report verbal warnings to [DESIGNATED SENIOR STAFF PERSON or OMBUDSMAN] as soon as practical. The report should include the information listed below.

### **WHEN A PARTICIPANT REPORTS AN INCIDENT**

When a participant in [MEETING NAME] approaches you about a harassment incident:

- Offer the victim a private place to sit
- Ask "Is there a friend or trusted person who you would like to be with you?" If so, arrange for someone to fetch this person.
- Assure them (and repeat as needed) that the incident and any reports will be kept strictly confidential. This is crucial, because the primary reason targets are reluctant to report harassment is fear of being labeled a complainer or troublemaker.
- Ask them "How can I help?" DO NOT ask questions that imply or suggest a particular action, for example "Should I call security?" or "Should I call the police?"
- Provide them with your list of emergency contacts in case they need help later
- If everyone is physically safe, involve law enforcement or security only at a victim's request or with the victim's consent.
- If a physical assault is reported, provide information on how to contact the nearest rape crisis center. The target should be the one to make the decisions about contacting this resource.
- If emergency help is needed, or if there is an immediate or emergent threat to attendees or the safety of anyone, including conference staff, summon security or police.

It is important to get as much information about the incident as possible, and soon after the incident as possible. Ask the reporter to provide this in writing, or transcribe it yourself as it was told to you. Be sure to note the date and time that the report was made.

The important information to gather includes the following:

- Identifying information (name, badge number, physical appearance) of the participant doing the harassing
- The behavior that was in violation
- The approximate time of the behavior (if different than the time the report was made)
- The location and circumstances surrounding the incident
- Other people involved in or witnessing the incident

Prepare an initial response to the incident. Depending on the severity/details of the incident, please follow these guidelines:

Do not make any invitation or suggestion to them to withdraw the complaint. Do not mention that withdrawal is OK. This suggests that you want them to do so, and is therefore coercive.

If the person taking the report is not [DESIGNATED STAFF MEMBER or OMBUDSMAN] say, "If you're OK with it [pursuing the complaint], I'll take this to [DESIGNATED STAFF MEMBER or OMBUDSMAN] for action." This suggests that you are by default pursuing it and is not coercive. Remind them that [DESIGNATED STAFF MEMBER or OMBUDSMAN] will keep the information confidential.

Listen to what they have to say, and

- DO NOT assume that the target was under any obligation to attempt to stop the behavior. It is NOT reasonable to assume that if they did not object to the harasser's behavior or resist the harasser, they implicitly consented to it.
- DO NOT ask for their advice on how to deal with the complaint. This is a staff responsibility.
- DO NOT ask for their input into penalties. This is a staff responsibility.

Ask them if they would like to be informed when action is taken, and if so, write down their preferred method of contact (face-to-face, email, phone call, text, etc.)

### **TAKE ACTION ON THE REPORT**

Once something is reported to a staff member, that staff member must immediately meet with [DESIGNATED SENIOR STAFF PERSON, OMBUDSMAN, or small group of staff]. The main objective of this meeting is to determine:

- What happened?
- What are we doing about it?
- Who is going to do those things?
- When are they going to do them?

After the staff meeting and discussion, have [DESIGNATED SENIOR STAFF MEMBER or OMBUDSMAN] meet with the harasser to inform him of what has been reported about him, and what actions will be taken as a result.

Keep in mind that your intent is to end the harassing behavior. Describe the behavior, explain how it constitutes harassment under the Anti-Harassment Policy, and ask that he stop. Do not engage in debates about the validity of the policy or other definitions of harassment.

If he insists, allow the harasser to give his side of the story, and pay attention to whether he:

- claims that he was not harassing the target, while admitting he did what the reporting target says he did
- expresses no remorse or understanding that what he did was wrong
- refuses to accept the consequences of his behavior and continues to defend his behavior
- has a pattern of unacceptable behavior (at this or at previous meetings)

These are signs that the harasser will not stop the behavior, and he should be asked to leave the meeting immediately.

After this point, the report stands. Let the harasser know what actions will be taken against him.

## **OPTIONS FOR ACTION ON HARASSMENT REPORTS**

### OFFENSIVE SLIDES OR STATEMENTS IN PRESENTATIONS

Presentations or similar events should not be stopped for one-time gaffes or minor problems, although a member of staff should speak to the presenter afterward.

However, if a presenter seriously or repeatedly violates the anti-harassment policy, staff should take immediate action to politely and calmly stop the presentation or event. For example, simply say "I'm sorry, this presentation cannot be continued at the present time." with no further explanation. Other sanctions may include

- not publishing the presentation in any format (print, video, or otherwise)
- banning the presenter from presenting at future meetings

### OTHER INCIDENTS

Depending on the severity of the incident, these and other sanctions may be applied:

- Warn the harasser to cease their behavior and that any further reports will result in more serious sanctions
- Require that the harasser avoid any interaction with, and physical proximity to, their target for the remainder of the meeting

- Immediately end any volunteer responsibilities and privileges the harasser holds. (If the harasser is a Board member or officer this may require post-meeting follow-up on procedures for removal.)
- Require that the harasser not volunteer or serve as a contract employee or vendor for [MEETING PRODUCER], either indefinitely or for a certain time period.
- Require that the harasser immediately leave the event and not return
- Require that the harasser forgo or refund any travel grants and similar funding or financial support they received (note: this would need to be a condition of the grant at the time of being awarded)
- Ban the harasser from future events (either indefinitely or for a certain time period). Any behavior that includes physical assault (including groping), real or implied threat of physical harm, or the real or implied threat of professional or financial consequences should trigger this level of sanction.
- Remove and ban the harasser from membership in [MEETING PRODUCER]. (This may require post-meeting follow-up on procedures for removal.)

Keep in mind that it is not necessary, nor is it a good idea, to attempt to extract an apology from the harasser.

Give the harasser information about a post-event grievance procedure if there is one, but in the meantime the report and the staff decision on sanctions stands.

### **WHOM TO TELL ABOUT THE INCIDENT AND ACTIONS TAKEN**

How we deal with the incident publicly is extremely important.

Our policy is to make sure that everyone aware of the initial incident knows that it was treated as a violation of policy, and what official action has been taken, while still respecting the privacy and confidentiality of individual participants.

When speaking about the incident to individuals who are aware of the incident, but were not directly involved with it, give as few details as possible.

Monitor and, if necessary, moderate posts to social media to protect the confidentiality of those involved.

Depending on the incident, [DESIGNATED SENIOR STAFF PERSON] may decide to make one or more public announcements. If necessary, this will be done with a short announcement either during the plenary and/or through other channels. No one other than [DESIGNATED SENIOR STAFF PERSON] or someone delegated authority from [DESIGNATED SENIOR STAFF PERSON] should make any announcements.

If some participants were angered by the incident, it is best to apologize to them on behalf of [MEETING PRODUCER] that the incident occurred to begin with. If there are residual hard feelings, suggest that they send an email to the CEO or the meeting manager and they will respond as quickly as possible.