

Ethics Committee (SOP)

Montezuma Valley Volunteer Community Service Organization (MVVCSO)

Effective Date: June 28, 2025

Purpose

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) outlines the formation, operations, and responsibilities of the MVVCSO Ethics Committee to ensure impartial investigation of complaints, protection of whistleblowers, and upholding of ethical standards. It aligns with the 2025 Bylaws to promote transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in serving the Ranchita community, while supporting MVVCSO's grant-readiness and compliance with applicable laws.

The Ethics Committee is formed as needed to address suspected misconduct, conflicts of interest, or violations of MVVCSO policies, fostering a culture of integrity and trust.

Scope

This SOP applies to:

- All investigations of complaints related to MVVCSO activities, including but not limited to violations of the Code of Ethics and Conduct Policy, Good Standing Policy, or Bylaws.
- Reports from Directors, Officers, Volunteers, Committee Members, Voting Members, or community stakeholders.
- Whistleblower complaints, ensuring confidentiality and non-retaliation as per Article XI of the Bylaws.

This SOP does not apply to criminal matters, which must be referred to appropriate law enforcement authorities.

Committee Composition and Appointment

- **Formation:** The Ethics Committee is formed on an as-needed basis by a majority vote of the Board of Directors, as outlined in Article VI, Section 1 of the Bylaws. It may be activated upon receipt of a complaint or at the Board's discretion to review ethical concerns.
- **Composition:**
 - At least three (3) members, including:
 - One (1) Director (to ensure Board oversight).
 - Two (2) Voting Members in good standing (to promote community representation and inclusivity).
 - Members must be impartial and free from conflicts of interest related to the matter under investigation.
 - The Committee shall reflect MVVCSO's inclusivity goals (e.g., diverse backgrounds, accessibility considerations) as per Article VI, Section 2.
- **Chair Appointment:** The President appoints the Committee Chair, who must be a Voting Member in good standing with experience in ethical or governance matters.
- **Term:** The Committee serves until the resolution of the specific matter(s) for which it was formed, or as otherwise determined by the Board.
- **Training:** Upon appointment, members shall review the Code of Ethics and Conduct Policy, Bylaws, and this SOP. Basic training on confidentiality, impartiality, and investigation basics shall be provided by the Board or an external advisor if needed.

Responsibilities

The Ethics Committee is responsible for:

- Investigating complaints of misconduct, ethical violations, or policy breaches with impartiality (Bylaws, Article VI, Section 1).
- Reviewing appeals related to member good standing, including misconduct determinations (Good Standing Policy, Section 2.5).
- Handling whistleblower reports confidentially and prohibiting retaliation (Bylaws, Article XI).
- Reporting findings to the Board and, where appropriate, publicly (excluding confidential details) to maintain transparency.

- Recommending corrective actions, such as policy updates, training, or disciplinary measures (e.g., suspension of membership per Good Standing Policy).
- Ensuring all activities comply with MVVCSO policies and legal requirements, including accessibility (e.g., large-print documents) and data protection (CCPA).

The Committee does not have decision-making authority on disciplinary actions; recommendations are forwarded to the Board for approval.

Procedures

Receiving Complaints

- Complaints may be submitted verbally, in writing, or anonymously via:
 - Email to a designated MVVCSO address (e.g., ethics@mvvcso.org, if established).
 - Mail to the principal office (37370 Montezuma Valley Rd, Ranchita, CA 92066).
 - In-person to any Director or Officer, who must forward it to the President.
- All complaints must include:
 - Description of the alleged misconduct.
 - Relevant dates, individuals involved, and supporting evidence (if available).
- Upon receipt, the President (or designee) shall acknowledge the complaint within 7 days and notify the Board to form the Ethics Committee if not already active.

Investigation Process

- **Step 1: Initial Review (Within 7 Days of Formation)**
 - Assess if the complaint falls within the Committee's scope. If not (e.g., criminal), refer to appropriate authorities and notify the complainant.
 - Declare any conflicts of interest; affected members recuse themselves.
- **Step 2: Gathering Information (Within 14-30 Days)**
 - Interview relevant parties (complainant, accused, witnesses) in a confidential, respectful manner.
 - Review documents, records, or evidence (e.g., financial statements, communications).

- Ensure accessibility (e.g., virtual meetings for remote participants, accommodations for disabilities).
- Maintain detailed, confidential records of all steps.
- **Step 3: Analysis and Findings**
 - Evaluate evidence against the Code of Ethics and Conduct Policy principles (e.g., integrity, transparency).
 - Determine if misconduct occurred, using a preponderance of evidence standard.
- **Step 4: Reporting (Within 7 Days of Completing Analysis)**
 - Prepare a written report including: findings, evidence summary, and recommendations.
 - Submit to the Board for review and action.
 - Publicly report non-confidential findings (e.g., via community bulletins, website) as per Bylaws Article VI, Section 1.
- **Whistleblower-Specific Procedures:**
 - Maintain strict confidentiality.
 - Prohibit retaliation; any suspected retaliation triggers a separate investigation.
 - Protect the whistleblower's identity unless disclosure is required by law.

Appeals

- Per the Good Standing Policy, appeals of misconduct decisions are reviewed by the Ethics Committee.
- Appellants may request an in-person, virtual, or written hearing.
- The Committee renders a final recommendation to the Board within 14 days of the hearing.

Meetings and Documentation

- Meetings: Held as needed, virtually or in-person, with quorum (majority of members). Minutes recorded by the Chair or designee.
- Documentation: All records stored securely at the principal office or in approved digital formats, retained for at least 7 years per California Nonprofit Integrity Act.
- Confidentiality: Breaches may result in removal from the Committee and further review.

Monitoring and Review

- The Board shall review this SOP annually or as needed to align with Bylaws updates or legal changes.
- Committee performance shall be evaluated in the annual report (Bylaws, Article VII, Section 3).
- Feedback from community forums (Bylaws, Article VI, Section 1C) may inform revisions.

Enforcement

Violations of this SOP may result in referral to the Board for action, including removal from the Committee or loss of good standing. All actions prioritize the Ranchita community's best interests.

This SOP builds on previous efforts in the MVVCSO Project Space to develop grant-ready governance documents, ensuring ethical operations that empower community resilience.