Logo, company name

Description automatically generated**International Guide Dog Federation (IGDF)**

Company no: 2376162. Registered Charity no: 1062441

## **Policy for the Investigations, Suspension and Termination of Members**

## **Scope of Policy**

This policy sets out the process for the investigation of alleged breaches of the IGDF Standards and the suspension or termination of IGDF membership which could result from such investigations. IGDF’s aim will always be to work with members to help them achieve and maintain full compliance with the Standards. However, occasionally it will be necessary to suspend or terminate an organisation’s membership in order to protect the integrity and rigour of the Standards themselves and the value of IGDF membership.

## **Assessments**

If a Member Organisation fails an assessment, the Board may decide to suspend their membership while an agreed action plan is completed. This option should only be used if the severity or nature of the issues identified exceeds those that can be addressed through an action plan alone. IGDF will still endeavour to work with the member to help them address the issues identified.

If serious breaches of the Standards are identified during an assessment, it may be appropriate to terminate the membership of the organisation. Termination should be viewed as a last resort and should only be considered if the nature of the breach is so serious that it is not possible to work with the organisation to address the issues identified. These could include instances of fraud, the abuse of dogs or clients, repeated breaches of the same Standard, or deliberate attempts to deceive IGDF.

## **Investigation Process**

Any breaches or alleged breaches of the IGDF Standards shall be discussed by the Board. This process shall be followed whether the alleged breach comes to light as the result of a complaint from a third party or by any other means, including, but not limited to; IGDF’s surveillance mechanisms, annual return response, media coverage, concerns raised by stakeholders.

If an investigation is launched as the result of a complaint, the IGDF Complaints Policy sets out the process for responding to the complainant and keeping them informed of progress.

In matters relating to breaches or alleged breaches of the IGDF Standards, the IGDF Board shall use the following process:

1. All relevant information shall be reviewed by the Company Secretary and passed to the Board for discussion
2. The Board shall consider the seriousness of the alleged breach and agree whether a formal investigation is required. This decision shall be based on the seriousness of the alleged breach and the ease and speed with which it could be addressed.
3. An informal approach is appropriate when it can be achieved but if concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved quickly, the following process shall be used;
4. The Board may appoint a Board or AC Member, or small working group composed of Board or AC Members, to conduct the investigation.
5. The organisation in question shall be advised that a formal process will be started to investigate a potential breach of the IGDF Standards, and name the individual(s) who shall be conducting the investigation. This letter shall include full details of the relevant Standard(s), and a detailed description of the issue(s). The organisation shall be invited to respond to the concerns and provide relevant information, by a given date.
6. The Board, or their delegated representative, shall review the response and examine all available evidence. The Board, or their delegated representative, may invite someone from the organisation to speak or provide written clarification, and they may wish to carry out further interviews and/or examine additional documents in order to determine the harm, risk, or impact of the breach.
7. The Board shall review the findings of the investigation and agree the action to be taken. This decision shall be communicated to the organisation in writing.
8. If the member is not satisfied with the decision, then it must inform the Board in writing within 2 weeks of receiving the decision. The rationale for the appeal must be clearly stated, with reference to any documentation or other evidence that the organisation feels has not been given due consideration.
9. The Board shall review the appeal and may wish to carry out further interviews, or review documents. The matter shall be discussed at the next Board meeting and the decision communicated to the organisation in writing. This decision is final.
10. All documentation relating to the investigation, including the initial complaint or basis for the investigation, letters, and all documents submitted, shall be held on file by IGDF and shall be passed to the IGDF Assessor ahead of the organisation’s next assessment.
11. All decisions made by the IGDF Board shall be clearly recorded in the minutes of the Board meeting. These items shall be marked as confidential and shall be removed from the summary minutes prior to their publication on the members-only website.

## **Suspension**

If, as a result of the investigation process, the IGDF Board agrees to suspend the membership of an organisation, the following shall apply:

* The reason for the suspension shall be clearly stated to that organisation in writing
* The conditions necessary to end the suspension, including the date(s) by which such conditions must be achieved, shall be clearly stated
* The membership or other benefits to be suspended shall be clearly stated in writing. When deciding which benefits should be suspended, the IGDF Board shall consider the nature and seriousness and nature of the relevant issues. The following membership benefits may be suspended: use of IGDF logo, access to IGDF member-only website and Discord, access to IGDF webinars, attendance at IGDF Conferences, networking events or other events or workshops whether virtual or in-person.
* During a period of suspension, IGDF membership or other fees shall apply and be incurred as usual. An organisation whose membership is suspended shall not be eligible for any reimbursement, waiver, or other reduction to the sums owed as a result of the suspension.
* Failure to comply with the terms of a suspension or achieve the required improvements within the stipulated timescale shall result in immediate termination of IGDF membership
* The fact of the suspension shall be published (see below for details)
* All documentation relating to the investigation and suspension shall be passed to the IGDF Assessor ahead of the organisation’s next assessment. The Assessor shall give particular scrutiny to the issues which led to the suspension and compliance with the relevant Standards and detail this in their assessment report.
* If an organisation is suspended 3 times during a 3-year rolling period, that organisation’s membership shall be terminated.

## **Termination**

If, as a result of the investigation process, failure to comply with the terms of a suspension, or other cause listed in this policy, the Board agrees to terminate the membership of an organisation, the following shall apply:

* The reason(s) for the termination shall be clearly stated to the organisation in writing. The letter shall also clearly state the following facts:
* The organisation shall immediately remove the IGDF logo and references to IGDF membership from its website, documentation, promotional materials and social media. IGDF shall monitor compliance with this and failure to comply shall result in consequences which could include legal action.
* The IGDF Office shall immediately; remove the organisation from the list of members on the IGDF website, remove the organisation from the members contact list, delete all IGDF website accounts belonging to the organisation’s employees, and remove any of the organisation’s employees from the IGDF Discord Channel.
* An organisation whose membership has been terminated shall not be eligible for any reimbursement or waiver of fees.
* If the organisation wishes to re-join IGDF, it must submit a new application and go through the usual process for new organisations wishing to join IGDF and pay any associated enrolment or initial assessment fees.
* The fact of the organisation’s termination shall be published (see below for details)

**Publication of Decisions**

All decisions to suspend or terminate the membership of an organisation shall be published on the IGDF website and in the next issue of E-News and Visionary. The notice shall include the full name of the organisation and the date of the decision. The reasons for a suspension or termination decision shall not be made public by IGDF.

**Version Control**

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| **1.0** | **Approved by IGDF Board 6 October 2022** | **David Maynard & Tim Stafford** |  |
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