



Code of Conduct for the operation of the Wexford Public Participation Network (PPN)

Ratified at Plenary on 081019

What is a Code of Conduct?

A code of conduct for board members seeks to outline the standards of behaviour expected of them and is an agreement between individual board members and the organisation.

Who does the Code of Conduct apply to?

The Code applies to board members who are defined as:

- Members of the Secretariat,
- PPN staff and
- Those representing the PPN on committees and boards.

Upon joining, board members will sign up to the code. Through this action they agree to uphold the standards as set out in the code.

The code of conduct for board members also seeks to establish organisational principles such as integrity, accountability and transparency and is designed to put these principles into practice.

A code of conduct for board members is useful for improving the quality of board governance and performance, helps to define inappropriate behaviour and how to handle such behaviour and is a quality assurance towards governance compliance.

In respect of the Wexford PPN it would apply to Secretariat members and representatives of the Wexford PPN serving on committees and Boards affiliated to the PPN as well as staff of Wexford PPN.

What is the Wexford PPN?

Wexford PPN is a collectives of environmental, social inclusion, community and voluntary organisations across County Wexford which;

- Facilitates the participation and representation of communities in a fair, equitable and transparent manner through the environmental, social inclusion, community and voluntary sectors on decision making bodies, including Wexford County Council
- Strengthen the capacity of communities and of the environmental, social inclusion, community and voluntary groups to contribute positively to the community in which they reside/participate
- Provide information relevant to the environmental, social inclusion, community and voluntary sector and acts as a hub around which information is distributed and received.
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In doing so PPNs' operate under the following guiding principles:

Independent
Participatory
Inclusive
Values diversity
Transparent
Accountable

They were introduced under the Local Government Reform Act 2014, following recommendations contained in the 2014 report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government, for more extensive and diverse input by members of the public into the decision-making processes at local government level.

This Code of Conduct underpins the standards of behaviour and operations of Wexford PPN.

What else guides a PPN?

PPNs' are guided by and comply with the User Guide of March, 2017, as issued by the Department of Rural and Community Development as well as with legislative requirements for Health and Safety, Data Protection and other Charity Regulator Codes of Governance or such amendments and updates as issued by the relevant authorities.

These guide both the Secretariat of PPN and PPN Representatives on Linkage Groups under the auspices of PPN. Their roles are set out in Appendix A attached.

Code of Conduct for Board Members: Undertakings by Board Members.

The following are the fundamental undertakings by each Board Member which they agree to sign up and adhere to.

Organisational Values

As a board member of Wexford PPN I promise to abide by the fundamental values that underpin all the activities of our organisation.

Accountability.

Everything Wexford PPN does will be able to stand the test of scrutiny by members of the public, the media, members, beneficiaries, stakeholders and the regulatory authorities.

Integrity and Honesty.

These will be the hallmarks of all conduct within Wexford PPN when dealing with colleagues (board and staff) , external individuals and agencies and other stakeholders.

Openness and Transparency.

Wexford PPN will strive to promote an atmosphere of openness and transparency throughout the organisation in order to promote confidence to members of the public, staff, beneficiaries and regulators.

In addition to the above I agree to the following:

Law, mission, policies:

In my role as board member I will not break the law or go against any regulation in force.

I will support the organisation's mission and actively promote it.

I will abide by organisational policies and procedures.

Conflicts of Interest and Conflicts of Loyalty:

- I will always act in the best interests of the organisation.
- I will declare any conflict of interest or loyalty or any such circumstance as may be viewed by others as conflicting as soon as it arises.
- I will submit to the judgement of the board and do as it requires regarding potential conflicts of interest or loyalty.

Person to Person:

I will not act in disregard of organisational policies in my relationships with fellow board members, staff, volunteers, beneficiaries or anyone I come into contact with in my role as board member, staff or representative.

Guardian of the organisation's reputation

I will not speak as a board member to the media or any public forum without the prior knowledge and approval of the Secretariat or in cases of urgency, the Secretariats meetings Facilitator.

When I am asked to represent the organisation any comments I make will reflect current policy even if I do not agree with them.

When speaking as a private citizen I will aim to uphold the reputation of the organisation and those who work and volunteer for it.

I will respect organisational, board and individual confidentiality.

I will take an active interest in the organisation's public image.

Personal Gain

I will not personally gain from my role as a board member nor will I permit others to do so as a result of my actions or negligence. I will disclose cases where I am concerned that others may be gaining as board members.

I will document expenses and seek reimbursement according to agreed procedure.

I will not accept any gifts or hospitality without the consent of the Secretariat.

I will use organisational resources responsibly, when authorised in accordance with procedure.

At board level / secretariat level.

I will embody the principles of good governance in all my actions and live up to the trust placed in me by Wexford PPN.

I will abide by the board governance procedures and practice and User and other Guidance and documents.

I will strive to attend all board meetings.

I will strive to prepare for meetings by forwarding any reports to the meetings administrator in a timely fashion.

I will examine agenda items sent to me in good time and be prepared to contribute my opinions during meetings.

I will respect the role of the Meetings Facilitator.

I will listen and treat with respect the opinions and views of others.

I will accept a majority vote.

I will maintain confidentiality unless authorised to speak on matters outside board meetings.

Enhancing governance.

I will participate in appropriate induction, training and board development activities.

I will support and treat with respect and dignity the Facilitator, the Secretariat, appointed staff and others in their administrative, management, leadership and support roles.

Adherence to this Code.

Should I breach this Code I accept the enforcement processes as set out in Appendix B up to and

including removal from Office.

Leaving the board.

Should I wish to resign I will inform the PPN in writing, stating my reasons for resigning from the board.

I will participate in an exit interview if necessary.

I will return all PPN related records and documents and delete all PPN records held electronically in order to comply with Data protection requirements.

I will continue to adhere to the confidentiality requirements, even when no longer a member of the PPN.

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

Board member position: _____

of Wexford PPN.

Appendix A

PPN Secretariat Role

The Secretariat is the elected administrative body of the PPN, the purpose of which is to monitor and co-ordinate PPN activities between Plenary (County Membership) meetings.

The Secretariat is an **administrative body only**, and its role is to;

- Facilitate the implementation of the decisions of the Plenary.
- Ensure the proper functioning of the PPN in between Plenaries.
- Coordinate activities of PPN.
- Communicate extensively and regularly with all PPN members and in this process share information concerning all PPN activities as widely as possible.
- Maintain accurate records of PPN Business (hard and soft copies), including minuting meetings and circulating agendas.
- Act as a point of contact for the PPN in relation to the LA, DRCD, other PPNs and all third parties.
- Handle all correspondence on behalf of PPN, through distributing copies and drafting agreed responses.
- Manage the PPN resource worker (PPN Support Officer).

PPN Representative Role

A representative is elected for a fixed term to represent the issues of PPN members on a particular Board or Committee. A PPN Representative does not represent the group they are a member of, they represent the entire PPN and are guided by the Linkage Group – that is the group of members with an interest in the work of the committee the Rep attends.

The job of a PPN Representative can be summarised in four key action areas: Listen, Discuss, Represent, & Feedback. These four key action areas are the foundation of what a PPN Representative is all about. Effectively the PPN Representatives is the voice of the members at the meeting. To represent the members there is a need to prepare in advance by listening to and discussing issues with members, to represent members at the meeting, and then to feedback through Rep reports for members.

While the representative meeting frequency is circa four times per year for each of the committees the committees may utilize sub-committees for some work which may be an additional commitment for meeting attendance.

Wexford PPN may also ask reps to attend PPN meetings during the year

County Membership Meetings – usually two per year

District Meetings (meeting of members in a district) – usually two per year per district.

Rep Roundtable (a meeting of all PPN reps) - usually two per year

At the initial stages of your Representation Wexford PPN may ask you to attend an induction session for up to one day.

Outside of meeting attendance there would be the requirement to prepare for the meeting and to write a short report for PPN members following the meeting.

The **Reps Charter** further sets out the role and you should read this before signing the code of conduct. This is available here http://wexfordppn.ie/?page_id=102

Appendix B: Actions following any breach of this Code.

Wexford PPN seeks to ensure that Board members behave appropriately and in full adherence to this code. It also takes any complaints seriously, whether it is about someone's conduct or behaviour or because someone has not adhered to agreed policies and procedures and this code of conduct.

Values and principles:

Anyone interacting with Wexford PPN has the right to complain. No one should be harassed, bullied or put at a disadvantage because of making a complaint.

Equality: PPN will issue a proper response to a complaint, regardless of one's age, gender, disability, race, religion, nationality, social status, sexual orientation or political persuasion.

Fairness: PPN will deal with complaints fairly and openly. Unless it would put other people at risk, those affected by a complaint should have a chance to contribute and respond to any investigation.

Safety, health and welfare take priority: PPN will always give priority to concerns that affect safety, health and welfare. Issues affecting children will be treated very seriously.

Confidentiality: PPN will treat all complaints as confidentially as possible. Sometimes it has to discuss complaints with other organisations. If we are worried about a risk to a person or to the public, we might need to pass on our concerns to the right authorities. If necessary, we will get advice from appropriate organisations.

How to make a Complaint to Wexford PPN.

Wexford PPN is committed to providing a comprehensive and high-quality service to volunteers and organisations involving volunteers. We endeavour to ensure that these services are delivered to a high standard. In delivering these services we aim to treat anyone who accesses our services with dignity and respect.

We hope that the majority of cases can be resolved by means of a simple apology or explanation. Occasionally this is not the case and the reasons we have this code of conduct and complaints procedure is because:

Wexford PPN believes it is only right that anyone who accesses our services has the opportunity to complain if they feel let down and for that complaint to be heard and investigated.

We also see this as one of many ways by which problems with a service may be identified and lead to improvements.

For the purposes of this document, the following two definitions are provided as examples:

"An expression of dissatisfaction, either written or spoken". A complaint may be made by an individual or a group. You may wish to complain if you are not satisfied with the way you have been treated or the service you have received...' (National Mind 2009)

Or more simply;

"Any expression of dissatisfaction that needs a response." (Cabinet Office 1998)

Third Party Complaint.

In some cases, a person may wish to complain on behalf of someone else. This is known as by a third party. Careful consideration will be given in these cases to ascertain why the person does not wish to complain directly. Consideration will also be given to issues of confidentiality.

In all cases of third-party complaints, Wexford PPN may choose not to accept them as valid. We accept anonymous complaints, but it is often very difficult to investigate these properly. It is easier for us to handle your complaint if you provide as much detail as possible.

The procedure has 4 stages:

Stage 1: Informal Complaint.

Stage 2: Formal Complaint (including investigation).

Stage 3: Appeal.

Stage 4: Other actions which may include:

- Formal disciplinary action against a board member or staff
- Changes in formal contracts or policies put in place by Wexford PPN
- A decision to refer the case to another organisation such as the Garda Siochana
- Closure of your complaint without action

Who to contact to make a complaint?

Complaints will usually be handled by the Secretariat of Wexford PPN. In the instance where the complaint is made against a staff member, Wexford County Council's Complaints Policy may be adhered to.

Stage 1: Informal Complaints.

It is anticipated that the majority of complaints can be addressed at this stage. The Board member or staff should be able to respond to straightforward or simple complaints, while more specific or detailed complaints may be better addressed by the Secretariat itself.

Informal complaints can largely be made verbally and receive an immediate response. However, this does not preclude the person placing this in writing, or the response being made after time to consider it has elapsed. Unless there is good reason, all informal complaints should be responded to within 5 working days.

Example:

Someone accessing our service asks a staff member why they failed to meet for an agreed appointment/visit. The staff member apologises and explains the reason and an alternative time is arranged. The person complaining accepts this and no further action is taken.

What are the possible outcomes or results of my complaint?

In many cases, we are able to resolve problems informally. This might include:

- A change in the way we work
- An explanation or apology
- An agreement to communicate or act differently in future

Stage 2: Formal Complaint.

Any complaint that cannot be resolved informally can be addressed by a formal investigation if the complainant wishes to pursue this route. The process of the formal complaint should be completed

within 15 working days unless there is good reason for the delay. If the matter is urgent, we will respond more quickly. We will investigate your complaint fairly. This means that we will discuss the complaint with all of the relevant people. We reserve the right to seek advice from other appropriate organisations

We will try to gather any information that may be relevant to handling your complaint. Sometimes we will ask to show copies of information from the investigation to other people to allow them to respond, in an open, fair and transparent manner. We will not share information if we think that this will endanger someone's safety or welfare.

A Formal Complaints procedure has the following stages to it:

1. Receipt of the Complaint.

It is preferable but not essential that the complaint is made in writing and assistance should be offered to do so by someone not directly involved in the matter. If the complaint is made verbally this should be a brief description of the matter and should not preclude stage 3 for a more thorough discussion.

2. Acknowledging Receipt of the Complaint.

This will be made in writing and detail the following:

- The name and contact details of the complaint's investigator.
- A request to make contact to arrange a meeting.
- An explanation of the stages of the formal complaints process. This may be a copy of this document.
- An inquiry as to if they have any particular support needs such as an interpreter or emotional support of a friend.

3. Meeting the Complainant

The main aim of this is to gain a better understanding of the nature and circumstances surrounding the complaint. Notes will be made by the investigator and these must be signed by both parties to say they are a true reflection of the meeting. This should be done within 3 working days of the meeting.

It may be possible to resolve the matter at this stage. If so, this should be put in writing to the complainant and any other individuals concerned. The letter should also make it clear that no further action needs to be taken.

If it is not possible to resolve the matter then the investigation moves onto the next stage. The complainant should be informed in writing that this will require their initial complaint and subsequent minutes of meetings about the complaint being shared with others involved in the matter.

4. Investigations

Anyone involved in the complaint and any relevant witnesses will be given a copy of the complaint and subsequent minutes and to then provide a written statement responding to this. Support will be offered where necessary.

The investigator may then choose to make a decision based on this information or to follow these up by interviewing some or all of those who have made statements. Notes will be kept of such meetings and signed and dated by the investigator.

5. Decision on the Outcome of the Investigation

The investigator will then make a decision as to whether or not there are grounds for the complaint and what, if any, action is recommended.

6. Letter to the Complainant.

A letter will be sent to the complainant and will address the following items:

- A historical summary of what the investigation entailed.
- A response to each and every item of complaint, indicating whether or not the complaint was upheld and the reasons for this.
- A summary of any action or change of practice that will arise from the investigation.
- Where appropriate, an apology.
- An explanation of what steps the complainant should take if they are still dissatisfied and wish to take the matter further (The Appeal).

7. The Appeal Process.

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation then they have the right to appeal to the Secretariat which may establish a Complaints Panel to examine the appeal.

Membership of the panel will be restricted to people who have had no previous involvement in the investigation of the complaint.

The panel may review the evidence gathered so far and may also, if they choose, conduct further enquires in a similar manner to the initial investigation.

The process should be completed within 21 working days.

Following the conclusion of the appeal process a letter will issue to the complainant setting out its findings.

The upholding of a complaint may result in the dismissal of a Board member.

If it finds the complaint is without substance it will explain that the internal complaints procedure is now exhausted and no further correspondence will be entered into.

All written complaints should be sent to:

The Secretariat,
Wexford PPN,
Co. Hall,
Carricklawn,
Wexford.