

IFOAM Accreditation

Procedure for Complaints Against Accreditation Bodies Conducting IFOAM Accreditation

1. Scope of complaints accepted

Complaints submitted to IFOAM under this procedure shall be limited to issues regarding the conduct of IFOAM Accreditation by Accreditation Bodies (ABs) authorized to operate IFOAM Accreditation. Conduct of IFOAM Accreditation includes:

- the general representation of IFOAM Accreditation by ABs to the public, clients and prospective clients;
- the activities of accepting applications, reviewing applicants, making accreditation decisions and maintaining accreditation according to
 - the requirements of ISO Guide 17011 General Requirements for Accreditation Bodies Accrediting Conformity Assessment Bodies, or in the case of ABs not peer reviewed to ISO 17011, then to the relevant normative requirements of the peer review which IFOAM has accepted as a proof of qualification to operate IFOAM Accreditation and,
 - IFOAM's scheme requirements for conducting IFOAM Accreditation.

2. Who may register complaints

Complaints may be registered by any person or organization (hereinafter referred to as the complainant), provided that if the complainant is an IFOAM Accreditation client of the AB, the AB has had the opportunity to handle the complaint through its own complaints and appeals procedure. The client complainant is responsible to submit documentation to IFOAM to demonstrate that the complaint has already been subjected to the AB's complaint and appeals procedure. Other complainants may be encouraged by IFOAM to first use the complaints and appeals procedure of the AB, but will not be precluded from registering the complaint with IFOAM without first using the AB's complaints procedure.

3. Submission of Complaints

Complaints shall be submitted in electronic format, to the IFOAM Value Chain Manager, who shall promptly acknowledge the receipt of the complaint. Within a reasonable time period (normally 21 days), the Value Chain Manager shall notify the complainant if the complaint is accepted for further investigation, if further information is needed, or if it is rejected for:

- falling outside the scope of complaints as described in 1., or
- failing to document the resolution of the complaint/appeal through the AB's complaint and appeal process as described in 2.

The Value Chain Manager shall ensure that the substance of the complaint is clearly understood and documented, and that relevant claims or statements made by the

complainant can be authenticated. Authentication means that information can be verified through a source other than the complainant. The complainant is responsible to submit authenticated information in the complaint. The Value Chain manager shall notify the complainant if further information is necessary in order to investigate the complaint.

4. Notification of Complaints

Upon accepting a complaint, the Value Chain Manager shall notify the AB of the complaint, including the identity of the complainant, and request the AB to provide within 30 days, a response to the complaint, including the process for dealing with it and the result. If the response, when notified to the complainant, does not resolve the complaint for the complainant, the Value Chain Manager shall notify the IFOAM Executive Director of the complaint and submit the complaint file.

5. Investigation of Complaints

The Executive Director shall submit the complaint to the IFOAM Executive Board. The Executive Board will determine if further investigation is needed. If such investigation is needed the Executive Board may designate an investigator with no conflict of interest, who shall have up to 90 days to complete and report on an investigation. Alternatively, the Executive Board may investigate the complaint without designating an investigator, subject to the 90 day time period. During the investigation the Executive Board may request further information from the complainant, third parties furnishing authenticated information, or anyone else. The Investigator or the Executive Board shall document the investigation of the complaint. A designated investigator shall prepare and submit to the Executive Board a written report and recommendation for resolution of the complaint.

6. Resolution of Complaints

When the investigation is complete, the Executive Board shall resolve the complaint, including instructions for remedial action if any. Decisions of the Executive Board are final, and there is no further appeals process.

7. Notification of Resolution

The Value Chain Manager shall notify the AB and the complainant of the resolution of the complaint, including the rationale for the resolution.

8. Confidentiality

All persons involved at every stage of the complaint process shall take necessary measures to preserve the confidentiality of information obtained during the investigation of the complaint. A complainant may request to remain anonymous to other parties involved in providing information for the investigation and the designated investigator, Executive Board or staff shall take adequate steps to preserve this confidentiality.