

## ISE Guidelines for Addressing Grievances

### Introduction

One of the ISE's core mandates is to facilitate an 'ethical space' where different worldviews can interact and share information across geographical and cultural boundaries, creating an interactive forum for cross-cultural exchanges. This must extend to the culture of the ISE Board as well. Conflicts and differences of opinion are normal and sometimes even healthy for a Society. Board members, as well as Society members at large, should feel free to respectfully express differences of opinion and strive to constructively address and resolve them. While most conflicts can be, and ideally are, resolved informally, some are more difficult and may require a facilitated process in order to ensure all involved find resolution.

### Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a mechanism for resolving disputes among the ISE Board or grievances brought against Board members. The procedure outlined below is intended to guide the process for hearing grievances, disputes or claims arising from differences in interpretation of, or digressions from, the ISE Constitution, or from Board conduct that is deemed unprofessional or unacceptable. The higher goal of this process is to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement resolving the dispute by carefully exploring not only the relevant Articles of the ISE Constitution, but also the underlying interests, needs and priorities of the Society. These guidelines are intended to be invoked only when conflicts cannot be resolved by direct communication among those involved, or by the Board.

### The Neutral Party

The Council of Elders (hereafter referred to as the Council) is considered to be the neutral party that will hear the grievances. The Council is currently made up of six long-term ISE members, three of whom are past ISE presidents. This is not a closed group; they currently comprise the Council because each of them is willing to make the time to assist the ISE through the current issues. In principle, the Council will not be filled through elections, but rather a wide pool of Elders will be formed who can be called upon when needed. This takes into account different schedules and availability, as not everyone is likely to be available all the time or when a need presents itself. It also avoids putting the burden on just a few individuals. This larger version of the Council will likely be comprised of past ISE presidents, past Board members, longstanding engaged ISE members, Indigenous elders and advisors, etc. When these guidelines are invoked, a selection of three to five individuals from this wider pool will form the Neutral Party; this will ideally allow for prompt action (i.e., individual schedules and availability will not be an obstacle) and also for selection of individuals without demonstrable biases in the grievances brought forward. Guidelines for both the composition and duties of the Council are being developed and will be brought to the membership for vote at the General Assembly in 2012.

For the immediate purposes, the current Council has the sanction of the Board and membership as an ex-officio committee of the ISE. As the Neutral Party, the Council will strive to achieve the following:

- Reduce the hostility between the parties and help them to engage in a meaningful dialogue on the issues raised;
- Identify and clarify the central issues in dispute (if needed);
- Probe the strengths and weaknesses of the grievance(s), especially when the ISE Constitution is referenced;
- Provide a "reality check" on the issues raised;
- Communicate positions or proposals in understandable or more palatable terms;

- Help each party to better understand the other party's view, without violating confidences;
- Narrow the issues and each party's positions, and deflate extreme demands;
- Explore alternatives and search for solutions.

### **Process**

1. Any person with grievances is invited to present a succinct written summary to the Council outlining the specific grievance(s).
2. As a general rule, the following principles should be followed by the person(s) bringing grievances forward:
  - Clearly define the issues involved and provide sound reasoning to support the positions;
  - Identify possible resolutions;
  - Be respectful of all the parties involved; and
  - Keep an open mind and be prepared to reach a compromise.
3. The Council will acknowledge receipt of the grievance as quickly as possible.
4. The Council may take up to two weeks to review the written submissions before replying.
  - In the case that multiple grievances come forward within a short period of time, it is at the Council's discretion to prioritize the order in which they will address the grievances. In this case, the persons with grievances will be notified if there will be a delay in addressing their grievance.
5. The Council will seek clarification if needed, and explore possible paths for resolution with the person lodging the grievance, prior to contacting the person(s) against whom grievances are brought.
6. It is at the Council's discretion to identify and dismiss frivolous or vexatious grievances. Frivolous or vexatious grievances are complaints that are so weak and/or unsubstantial that they lack any real merit, or for which there is no identifiable or appropriate remedy sought by the person bringing the grievance. Should this occur, a written decision will be provided to the ISE Board setting out the reasons for the decision and the recommended action. Once the Board has considered the matter (and made further inquiries if considered appropriate), the aggrieved party shall be notified of the Council's opinion and the Board's final decision. There will be no appeals from this decision.
7. The person(s) against whom grievances are brought will be informed of the issues by the Council and be given the opportunity to respond in writing.
8. If possible, the grievance will be settled by clarification of actions and/or differing points of view via email copied to all involved. Otherwise, a conference call with no fewer than two Council members and all person(s) involved in the grievance will be scheduled.
9. The ISE Board will be notified of the grievance(s) and the resolution.
10. In the event that resolution cannot be reached among those directly involved (within 6-8 weeks from beginning this process, dependent on the schedules of the involved persons), the Council will provide an assessment of the merits of the issues raised to the full Board for further consideration, with recommendations for action where appropriate.
11. If the Council provides an assessment of unresolved grievances to the ISE Board, it then falls to the ISE Board to consider any recommendations from the Council and to conclusively determine what actions are required to bring full closure to the matter(s) and to enable the Board to functionally resume business. Decisions in these instances will be made by consensus and include all ISE Board members except those directly involved in the grievance(s) or those who have demonstrable biases.