

GRIEVANCE POLICY



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I. INTRODUCTION

New Empowerment Initiative-Sierra Leone (NEI-SL) is an independent, youth-led, non-profit, Non-Governmental Organisation based in Sierra Leone, focused on rural community development. NEI-SL is non-sectarian and politically and religiously impartial, and it does not discriminate on the basis of tribe, race, sex, nationality, religion, social status, financial capacity, political belief, or educational background. NEI-SL's work is guided by the principles of Peace and Tolerance; Participation and Inclusion; Transparency and Accountability; Non-violence and Non-Selective Justice; Equity and Fairness; Sharing and Openness; and Diversity and a Non-Xenophobic Resource Management System. These principles shape how we design programmes, allocate resources, and engage with communities and partners.

Driven by a clear mission to improve individual lives and strengthen community resilience across Sierra Leone and beyond, NEI-SL seeks to influence practice and policy in humanitarian and development settings. We produce and promote practical knowledge, tools, and evidence-based approaches to enable more effective decision-making among humanitarian and development stakeholders. By prioritising inclusive participation, impartial resource management, and measurable outcomes, NEI-SL aims to ensure that programmes deliver sustainable benefits for the people and communities we serve.

The commitment of NEI-SL is guided by four core values:

1. Peace and Tolerance

Peace means actively promoting stability, safety, and non-hostile relations in all our work. Tolerance means respecting different beliefs, cultures, and opinions and creating spaces where disagreements are managed constructively. Together this principle commits NEI-SL to prevent conflict, reduce tensions, and foster respectful dialogue in communities and partnerships.

2. Participation and Inclusion

Participation means ensuring people affected by our programmes have meaningful opportunities to shape decisions that affect them. Inclusion means removing barriers so that women, youth, persons with disabilities, minorities, and other marginalized groups can engage equally. This principle guides NEI-SL to design processes that listen, empower, and reflect the voices of all stakeholders.

3. Transparency and Accountability

Transparency means sharing clear, timely information about decisions, resources, and outcomes. Accountability means taking responsibility for actions, answering to communities, donors, and partners, and learning from feedback. Together they ensure NEI-SL operates openly, reports honestly, and corrects course when needed.

4. Non-violence and Non-Selective Justice

Non-violence commits NEI-SL to reject and prevent physical, structural, or verbal harm in all activities. Non-selective justice means applying rules, protections, and remedies impartially—without favoritism or discrimination. This principle ensures our interventions protect people's safety and uphold equal treatment under the law and practice.

5. Equity and Fairness

Equity focuses on allocating resources and opportunities according to need so that disadvantaged groups can reach comparable outcomes. Fairness means decisions and processes are impartial, consistent, and just. NEI-SL uses this principle to prioritize those most vulnerable and to design programmes that reduce, rather than reinforce, inequality.

6. Sharing and Openness

Sharing means exchanging knowledge, resources, and best practices with partners and communities to multiply positive impact. Openness means being receptive to new ideas, constructive critique, and collaborative solutions. This value drives NEI-SL to build partnerships, disseminate learning, and scale what works.

7. Diversity and Non-Xenophobic Resource Management System

Diversity recognizes the value of different backgrounds, skills, and perspectives in strengthening programmes and decision-making. Non-xenophobic resource management commits NEI-SL to allocate funds, goods, and services without prejudice toward nationality, ethnicity, or origin, and to manage resources in ways that respect cultural differences. This principle ensures inclusive, merit-based resource decisions that reinforce social cohesion.

A. Policy Statement

NEI-SL adopts a zero-tolerance approach towards inappropriate misbehavior and is committed to respecting the highest standards in terms of efficiency, responsibility and transparency in its activities. To this end, NEI-SL's Grievance Policy:

- Encourages prevention;
- Promotes detection;
- Sets out a clear investigation procedure;
- Sets out a mechanism of sanctions.

The purpose of the policy is aimed at guiding NEI-SL staff and must be considered together with:

- NEI-SL's Code of Conduct;
- NEI-SL's Grievance Policy;
- NEI-SL's Child Protection Policy;
- NEI-SL's Conflict of Interest Prevention Policy;
- NEI-SL's Anti-Fraud, Bribery & Corruption Policy;
- NEI-SL's Policy Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse;
- NEI-SL's Data Protection Policy;
- NEI-SL's Anti-Terrorism and Anti-money laundering Policy;
- NEI-SL's Environmental Safeguarding Policy;
- NEI-SL's procedures, manuals and handbooks;
- NEI-SL's Code of Conduct;
- U.N. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Six core principles relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

II. INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION

Article 1 – Scope of Application

This policy applies to all NEI-SL staff and governance members.

Article 2 – Definitions

1. Grievance: Under the terms of this policy, the term “grievance” means a serious dissatisfaction or complaint raised by staff (including interns) which may relate to (i) their employment conditions, (ii) their professional situation, (iii) their professional relations, (iv) their working environment or (v) any action that NEI-SL has taken or intends to take with regard to the staff.

2. NEI-SL Staff: Under the terms of this policy, “NEI-SL staff” refers to any person employed by NEI-SL. NEI-SL’s interns and volunteers are considered to fall within this category for the purposes of this policy.

3. Governance: Under the terms of this policy, the term “governance” refers to any Member elected by decision making bodies to participate in NEI-SL’s managerial and administrative governance bodies. In particular, NEI-SL’s Committee Administrators are Governance members

Article 3 – Information and adherence to the policy

1. This policy is published under the authority of NEI-SL. NEI-SL staff and governance members are required to conduct themselves in accordance with this policy and must therefore be aware of and have understood its provisions and of any changes. When they are unsure of how to proceed, they should seek the advice of a competent person, notably their line manager.

2. NEI-SL staff who are responsible to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment of any NEI-SL staff, must ensure that staff is aware of and commits to the full respect of this policy.

3. It is the responsibility of NEI-SL staff with managerial responsibilities to ensure that staff under their supervision comply with this policy; and to take or propose appropriate disciplinary measures as sanction against any violations of its provisions.

4. This policy shall form part of the working conditions of NEI-SL staff from the moment they certify that they have read it.

5. NEI-SL will review the provisions of this policy at regular intervals.

Article 4 – Purpose of the Policy

1. The purpose of this policy is to specify the rules which relate to grievances that may be raised by NEI-SL staff and governance members; and the rules of conduct that NEI-SL staff and governance members must observe in order to meet these rules.

2. This policy is intended to ensure that NEI-SL staff and governance members have an effective means of reporting grievances as defined in this policy.

3. This policy promotes, to the extent possible, local amicable resolutions of grievances as defined in this policy.

III. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Article 5 – Neutrality

NEI-SL staff and governance members must fulfil their duties in a politically neutral and apolitical manner, in accordance with the law, legitimate instructions and ethical rules relating to their roles.

Article 6 – Impartiality

In the context of their professional roles and/or their missions, NEI-SL staff and governance members must act in accordance with the law and exercise their discretionary power in an impartial manner, taking into consideration only relevant circumstances.

Article 7 – Confidence of stakeholders

NEI-SL staff and governance members have a duty to conduct themselves at all times in a way that reflects and upholds NEI-SL's values of integrity, impartiality and efficiency and contribute to strengthen the confidence of all stakeholders.

Article 8 – Hierarchical responsibility

NEI-SL staff report to their immediate line manager and/or the head of their functional department, unless otherwise provided for by law.

Article 9 – Confidentiality

Duly considering the stakeholders' potential right to access information, NEI-SL staff and governance members must process all the information and all the documents acquired during or as part of the exercise of their duties with the necessary confidentiality.

Article 10 – Protection of privacy

All the necessary measures must be taken to ensure that the privacy of NEI-SL staff and governance members is appropriately respected; as a result, the declarations provided for this policy must remain confidential, unless otherwise provided for by law.

Article 11 – Information held

1. Considering the general framework of international law regarding access to information held by private individuals, NEI-SL staff and governance members should disclose information only in respect to the rules and requirements applicable to NEI-SL.

2. NEI-SL staff and governance members must take appropriate measures to guarantee the security and confidentiality of the information for which they are responsible or of which they are aware.

3. NEI-SL staff and governance members must not seek access to information which would be inappropriate for them to have. NEI-SL staff and governance members must not make inappropriate use of the information they may obtain in or as part of the exercise of their duties.

4. In the same way, NEI-SL staff and governance members must not retain professional information that may or should be legitimately circulated, or circulate information they know, or have reasonable grounds to believe, is inaccurate or misleading.

Article 12 – Responsibility of line managers

1. NEI-SL staff in charge of managing or supervising other NEI-SL staff must do so in accordance with the policies and objectives of NEI-SL. They must respond to the acts and omissions of their staff which violate these policies and objectives, if they have not taken the due diligence measures expected from a person in their position to prevent such acts or omissions.

2. NEI-SL staff tasked with managing or supervising other NEI-SL staff must take the measures necessary to prevent their staff from engaging in acts likely to generate a grievance. These measures may be: to draw attention to and implement the laws and regulations; to ensure adequate training on grievance resolution for staff; and to set an example of integrity through their personal conduct.

IV. GRIEVANCE RESOLUTION MECHANISM

Step 1: Informal resolution and/or during appraisal process

Most grievances can be resolved quickly and informally through informal talk with the person(s) involved and/or with the line manager (N+1) and/or during formal appraisals.

Therefore, NEI-SL expects staff members to try, as far as possible, to raise their grievances informally with their line manager (N+1) and/or during formal appraisals.

It is the responsibility of the line manager to discuss in complete confidence the concerns raised by the staff involved and to try to address those concerns. The line manager may have to conduct some investigations before making a decision, if one is required.

One can request HQ Human Resources to provide further advice and guidance on the informal resolution of grievances raised.

The line manager and/or HQ Human Resources must inform the staff concerned verbally or in writing of the result.

Step 2: Mediation

The second step takes place only if the first step fails.

Either party can request that the grievance be tackled by mediation between the parties via third party NEI-SL staff.

The parties must then meet to attempt to resolve the issue with the assistance of the designated third-party mediator.

If the mediation process reaches an acceptable outcome by all parties, the formal grievance process may be closed, which is confirmed by the mediator in writing to the staff concerned.

If no mutually acceptable outcome is reached through mediation, Step 3 of the grievance resolution mechanism will be implemented.

Step 3: Arbitration

If steps 1 and 2 do not resolve the issue or are inappropriate, the staff concerned must submit their grievance in writing, dated and signed and complete the Individual Grievance Form, with relevant documentation, to their line manager (N+1) and/or the NEI-SL Program Coordinator / Representative and/or (only when necessary) to HQ Human Resources in a timely manner following receipt of notification of the outcome of the step 2 of the process.

The written declaration of grievance should include the nature of the grievance, the type of request and must comprise:

1. Indication that the formal grievance procedure is invoked;
2. What informal measures, if any, have been taken by the employee to resolve the issue;
3. A brief description of the reasons for the complaint, in particular the details, dates and names of the persons involved;
4. Indication of the result expected by the staff concerned.

Upon receipt of this information, the line manager and/or the Program Coordinator / Representative must organise a meeting with the staff concerned to discuss the grievance. A representative of HQ Human Resources can be involved if this is requested and relevant.

If the grievance is not resolved, the grievance may be referred to the next level and the HQ Head of Human Resources will be available for any questions or concerns regarding the grievance raised.

Step 4: Internal investigation

After receipt of the written grievance, an investigation regarding the grievance will be launched by the NEI-SL Program Coordinator / Representative; the process being supported by a representative of HQ Human Resources.

The modalities of the investigation will depend on the nature of the grievance.

The investigation is impartial and objective, and may include:

1. Gathering relevant information by interviewing the complainant, or the person(s) with the grievance, any line manager involved in previous phases and potential witnesses.
2. Gathering relevant documentary evidence and collecting statements, as appropriate.

The investigation will normally include a meeting with the complainant as soon as possible after receipt of the formal written grievance.

NEI-SL staff must ensure that any supporting evidence of the grievance is provided to the NEI-SL Program Coordinator / Representative in charge of grievance as soon as possible.

At the end of the investigation process and once the conclusions have been reported to the person examining the grievance, the latter will decide, in conjunction with HQ Human Resources, what measures to take, if any, and will organise a close out meeting on the grievance with the staff concerned.

The Program Coordinator / Representative and/or HQ Human Resources will confirm the decision in writing to the staff who raised the grievance as soon as possible following the close out meeting regarding the grievance. If the grievance concerned another member of staff, he or she will also be informed of the decision within the same timeframe.

The HQ Head of Human Resources will ensure that specific action decided is implemented, monitored and reviewed as required.

Depending on the circumstances and complexity/details of the investigation, the Program Coordinator / Representative and the HQ Head of Human Resources may find it necessary to produce a report summarising the findings of the investigation, with the agreement of the parties.

Where relevant, because of the nature of the report's content (for example, where a grievance is directed against more than one person or where the report contains personal information about the employee or other persons), an extract only of the report may be provided. Any recommendations for further action will be clearly indicated in this report. These recommendations should indicate, where appropriate, who is responsible for ensuring that any further action is implemented within the timeframe set.

In some circumstances, during the investigation, it may become apparent that a formal disciplinary measure is needed, for example where there is evidence following the investigation that a breach of the code of conduct took place.

Step 5: Information for NEI-SL HQ

If the previous steps fail or are not appropriate, NEI-SL staff can also send their grievance through NEI-SL's global grievance mechanism to grievance@newempowermentinitiative-sl.org who will review the case, classify the grievance according to the internal typology and decide what action to take, especially in case of a sensitive issue.

Writing to grievance@newempowermentinitiative-sl.org is a last resort.

V. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

Article 13 – Implementation date of the policy

This Grievance Policy comes into effect after approval by the Committee of NEI-SL on 1st May 2023.

Article 14 – Adherence to the policy

NEI-SL staff and governance members certify that they adhere to these principles by signing the NEI-SL Policy Acceptance Form and/or by signing their employment contract.