

**Wildlife Conservation Society**  
**Belize Program**  
**Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) Policy**  
**Revised June 2025**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FPIC	Free Prior and Informed Consent
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
IPs	Indigenous Peoples
LCs	Local Communities
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society

## INTRODUCTION

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) recognizes that delivering on our conservation mission requires that our personnel honor the trust and confidence placed in us by our partners, donors, governments, guests, and local communities. Therefore, WCS is committed to maintaining the highest standards of ethical conduct. These standards are documented in the WCS Code of Conduct, the WCS Conservation and Human Rights: A Framework for Action, the WCS Safeguarding Policy, and other policies and procedures that apply worldwide to WCS trustees, officers, employees, volunteers, interns, externs, and fellows of WCS (collectively “WCS personnel”). WCS also takes reasonable measures to ensure that consultants, recipients of WCS funding, and others acting for WCS or under our direction act in compliance with the standards of conduct reflected in WCS’s policies. The Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) described in this document is an important component of WCS’s commitment to ethical conduct. It ensures accountability and responsiveness to concerns raised about the impact of WCS’s projects and the conduct of its personnel in Belize.

## **SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

The Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) applies to projects or activities undertaken or sponsored by the Wildlife Conservation Society (Belize Program) that are reasonably believed to contribute to or cause human rights abuses, safeguarding violations, or violation of the human rights of individuals or communities, and it also encourages positive feedback and suggestions for improvement.

The purpose of the GRM is to:

- a. provide a mechanism for affected individuals or communities, and others with knowledge of the circumstances, to raise good faith grievances about the impacts of projects or activities undertaken or sponsored by WCS, and/or provide positive feedback and suggestions.
- b. provide a structure to ensure that human rights and safeguarding grievances are handled, responded to, and documented in a fair and timely manner.

## **WHAT IS A GRIEVANCE REDRESS MECHANISM?**

A Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) is a transparent and unbiased system where credible grievances are tracked in a confidential, secure database across standardized procedural steps to assess, address, and mitigate or resolve concerns. A GRM enables Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs and LCs), WCS staff, project staff, and any other affected stakeholders, to submit grievances and seek resolution when they experience or perceive an impact arising because of the organization's activities. It is a key way to mitigate, manage, and resolve potential or realized impacts, and to keep organizations and their staff accountable for their actions, inactions, or for the outcomes of their projects. A GRM is a social safeguards tool through which IPLCs can exercise their voice and claim their rights.

It also serves as a platform for positive feedback; it encourages stakeholders to share their positive experiences and suggestions for improvement. This dual function not only helps resolve issues but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement and recognition within the organization. By valuing both grievances and positive feedback, the mechanism promotes a more engaged and satisfied community.

## **WHAT IS A GRIEVANCE?**

A grievance is any good faith report about a project or activity undertaken or sponsored by WCS that is reasonably believed to contribute to or cause human rights abuses, safeguarding violations, or violation of the human rights of individuals or communities.

The term “human rights” refers to the rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and described in WCS’s policies. The term “safeguarding” includes child safeguarding, adult safeguarding, and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, as defined in the WCS Safeguarding Policy.

Other kinds of grievance are outside the scope of this GRM. For example, the GRM is not an appropriate mechanism to raise routine internal WCS workplace concerns or matters unrelated to WCS projects or activities reasonably believed to contribute to or cause human rights or safeguarding abuses or violations.

Certain grievances may be more suitable for initial review and redress through local sites, organizations, or project-based mechanisms. In such cases, an individual will be referred to appropriate agencies for further support. Examples of such agencies may include legal aid services, national human rights institutions, local law enforcement, or governmental organizations specializing in human rights or safeguarding issues.

## **LIKELY GRIEVANCES ON A PROJECT**

The following list, which is by no means exhaustive, provides examples of the grievances that are likely to be encountered:

- Lack of information on a project
- Inaccessibility of project resources for persons with a disability
- Disagreement with the location of community meetings/consultations
- Use of intimidating language, threats or force
- Limited opportunities for youth, women, and elderly engagement in project planning
- Lack of community involvement in decision-making
- Lack of employment opportunities for the community members
- Disagreement with property/location of the project implementation
- Inappropriate or culturally insensitive provisions (e.g., food)
- Restrictions on community access to traditional fishing grounds

## **RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE GRM**

The Country Director holds ultimate responsibility. The Community Resilience Coordinator coordinates the collection of grievances from all submission points, investigates all grievances, and obtains assistance from respective staff members. Staff members will help to resolve grievances and implement recommendations related to their specific projects. This engagement is a crucial aspect of their interactions with community members.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Country Director:**

- Holds ultimate responsibility
- Point of contact for grievances
- Consults with Community Resilience Coordinator to develop resolutions to grievances
- Ensure that the GRM procedures are maintained

### **Staff:**

- Point of contact for grievances
- Document oral/written grievances in Kobo Toolbox
- Assists in resolution of grievances and implementation of recommendations
- Consults with Community Resilience Coordinator to develop resolutions to grievances
- Ensure that the GRM procedures are maintained.

### **Community Resilience Coordinator:**

- Coordinates the GRM process
- Point of contact for grievances
- Investigates grievances
- Consults with staff to develop resolutions to grievances
- Follow-up on all reports
- Ensure that the GRM procedures are maintained
- Maintains grievance log
- Conduct awareness sessions

## **SUBMISSION OF A GRIEVANCE**

### **WHO CAN SUBMIT A GRIEVANCE?**

Anyone who believes that they have been or may be negatively affected by a WCS project activity can make a submission and anyone who is willing to provide positive feedback and suggestions.

### **WHEN SHOULD THE SUBMISSION BE MADE?**

As soon as a negative impact is noticed or perceived.

### **WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD THE GRIEVANCE INCLUDE?**

A grievance should contain sufficient detail about the alleged conduct or activity to permit an investigation to be conducted and an appropriate response implemented. Grievances should include, at a minimum, the following information:

- i. Name(s), affiliation(s), address(es) and other contact information of the individual(s) and/or their representative(s)
  - a. Representatives must identify the person(s) on whose behalf the grievance is made and provide evidence of the authority to represent such person(s); or individuals may remain anonymous. Anonymous submissions are welcome, however submissions may limit WCS's ability to properly investigate and respond to the grievance.
  - b. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible.
- ii. A description of the specific facts, circumstances and events giving rise to the grievance: location, date, time, names and descriptions of individuals involved, statements made including exact quotes where possible, actions observed or witnessed, and names or descriptions of any witnesses. The more specific and detailed information provided in support of the grievance, the more thoroughly and effectively the grievance can be investigated and addressed.
- iii. An explanation of the harm suffered and how the rights of an individual or community were violated. The individual may refer to codes of conduct, standards, policies or other frameworks (e.g., FPIC) pertinent to the case and, where applicable, should describe any efforts to resolve the grievance through other available redress mechanisms.

- iv. A description of the relief requested, where relevant or appropriate.

### **HOW TO SUBMIT A GRIEVANCE?**

Grievances can be submitted through multiple accessible formats by any individual, including oral and digital submissions, and non-digital options. In establishing the GRM, people living in the project area, must be informed about the project activities, as well as, where they can lodge their concerns and who will be responsible for the relevant redress.

The methods for submitting a grievance:

Telephone number: 223-3271 / WhatsApp: 628-2692

Email address: [speakupbelize@wcs.org](mailto:speakupbelize@wcs.org)

Kobo Toolbox: <https://ee.kobotoolbox.org/x/FGjYMjVV>

Website: <https://belize.wcs.org/en-us/About-Us/Grievance-Redress-Mechanism.aspx>

On site: 1755 Coney Drive, Belize City, Belize

### **HOW IS A GRIEVANCE HANDLED?**

All grievances obtained are documented on Kobo Toolbox, which submits the data to Asana program attached to the Belize GRM account. Asana is the ultimate management for all grievances, providing a streamlined and organized approach to tracking and resolving issues efficiently. It will include all relevant documents, information about the complaint, the resolution requested, and the resolution provided, taking into consideration that referring individuals' identities can be kept anonymous if requested.

Submissions are reviewed/deliberated by the Communities and Climate Coordinator. The Communities and Climate Coordinator obtains assistance from appropriate staff members, when grievances are specific to their respective projects/post and together develop a grievance plan. The grievance plan outlines the process for investigating and responding, with the person who submitted the grievance. This also includes special considerations for the rights, safety, and well-being of survivors of suspected safeguarding violations consistent with the WCS safeguarding policy.

A survivor-centered approach will be employed for all Gender Based Violence (GBV) and other serious grievances from initial submission to resolution. A survivor-centered approach will put the rights of each survivor at the forefront of all actions and ensure that each survivor is supported and treated with dignity and respect.

Grievance review and response typically includes the following steps:

- I. Referral: The referring individual will be notified within fifteen (15) calendar days of receipt of the grievance, and claims will be filed and included in project monitoring processes within the Asana account. The referring individual will be notified that the grievance has been received by the Communities and Climate Coordinator.
- II. Screen eligibility: Upon receipt, the validity and severity of the complaint will be immediately assessed. If the referral is not relevant to the project, intervention such as providing an explanation or education session to the referring individual will be provided. When the referring individual accepts the explanation, he/she will need to sign a Resolution Form as an indication of the acceptance of the explanation.

If the complaint is project-related, the necessary next steps will be applied.

- III. Investigation: If the complaint is assessed as valid and project-related, within fifteen (15) working days from the date the complaint is received the investigation process will commence. This may include interviews with the aggrieved, WCS personnel, witnesses and affected individuals (to the extent feasible and appropriate), reviewing relevant documentation and other materials, taking photographs, as well as other information-gathering to ascertain factual basis of the grievance. Claims determined to be false, frivolous or submitted with malicious intent will be dismissed and excluded from further consideration.

Based on the initial meetings, the grievance will be categorized on a 6-point scale. The categorizing of the grievance will automatically alert the WCS Global GRM for category 4 and 5 grievances, after which arrangements for an external investigation will be made. For less serious grievances, work will be done to resolve the case, offer mitigation options to the aggrieved party, and seek his/her consent to implement such mitigation measures.

**Table 1**  
*GRM Grading Sheet*

Grade	Type
<b>0</b>	<b>NOT A GRIEVANCE</b> Positive Feedback Suggestions/Ideas Request for Information
<b>1</b>	<b>REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>NO SAFETY RISK/NOT SENSITIVE</b> Expressed minor dissatisfaction with WCS/site regulations or program activities. Requests to access natural resources. Tips or information on natural resources misuse.
<b>3</b>	<b>LOW TO MEDIUM SAFETY RISK/SENSITIVE</b> Expressed major dissatisfaction with WCS/site regulations or program activities, OR action/inaction of WCS/site personnel or partner staff. Tips on illegal activities. Potential human rights issues related to natural resource access.
<b>4</b>	<b>MEDIUM to HIGH SAFETY RISK/SENSITIVE</b> Major complaints or alleged human rights violations/abuses related to the action or inaction of WCS/site personnel or partner staff.
<b>5</b>	<b>HIGH SAFETY RISK/HIGHLY SENSITIVE</b> Major complaints or alleged serious human rights violations/abuses committed by WCS/site personnel or partners, which have or may have resulted in serious injury or death.

- IV. Documentation: All grievances under the GRM will be documented using Kobo Toolbox and tracked using Asana. The results of the investigation and any recommendations for resolution or corrective action will be logged in Asana.
- V. Resolution: If the referring individual agrees with the mitigation measure/resolution, the office shall implement the agreed resolution. The Resolution Form shall be signed by the referring individual.
- VI. Monitoring: If recommended, WCS will monitor the implementation of any remedial actions taken and document progress on implementation.
- VII. Communication: Individuals will be notified that the grievance has been received. The results of the investigation and actions will be communicated to the individual at the end of the investigation.

### **ARE GRIEVANCES KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Yes. Non-public, sensitive, and/or personally identifiable information disclosed in a grievance will be treated as confidential to the extent possible under the circumstances. In cases when reporting a grievance entails risks to the person who submitted the grievance, WCS will make every effort to respond in a way that protects people's privacy and ensures the confidentiality of information provided, while allowing any confirmed wrong to be appropriately remedied. In certain circumstances, WCS may be legally compelled to disclose information provided under the GRM.

### **CONTACT LIST**

Department of Human Services: 227-7451/822-2161

Department of Human Services Hotline: 615-5179/ 0 800-776-8328

Gender Based Violence Response and Investigative Unit: 202-2222

Ombudsman Office: 822-3198/ 8223593/ WhatsApp: 663-3594

Productive Organization for Women In Action (POWA): 622-8671

WCS Belize City Office: 501 223-3271

Family Support and Gender Affairs Department: 227-7397/ 822-2161/822-2246

**END**