



SOP TITLE:	General Complaint Resolution Process
SOP NO.:	1 – 106 First Part Numerical Designator: 1 = General and Administration 2 = Consensus Standards Development Program (CSDP) 3 = National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP) 4 = Proficiency Testing Program (PTP) 5 = National Environmental Field Activities Program (NEFAP)
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1.0 Purpose and Applicability

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) describes TNI's process for accepting and resolving complaints. The SOP applies to all TNI programs and can be used by TNI members and the public. This SOP applies to any complaints regarding TNI decisions, procedures, or operations except those complaints regarding decisions by an accreditation body to grant or deny accreditation to conformity assessment bodies, decisions by a council or recognition agency to grant or deny recognition to accreditation bodies, consensus standard activities covered by SOP 2 – 100, and consensus standards interpretation requests.

2.0 Summary

This SOP describes the general process TNI will follow to address complaints. Complaints are submitted electronically using a standardized form. Received complaints are reviewed to determine if they can be accepted under this process. Accepted complaints are assigned for investigation to appointed teams. Investigating parties offer recommendations to deciding parties that then determine the disposition of a complaint. A complaint's disposition may be appealed by the complainant. The SOP discusses TNI's philosophy for solving complaints, sets principles for conducting investigations, and establishes expectations for communicating with complainants.

3.0 Related Documents

POL 1 – 108, [Complaints](#)

4.0 Definitions

Accepted complaint	A complaint that TNI staff or the Policy Committee determines falls within the scope of this SOP. Complaints determined to be related to accreditation and recognition, activities covered by SOP 2 – 100, and interpretation of consensus standards cannot be accepted complaints.
Assigned complaint	An accepted complaint referred by TNI staff or the Policy Committee for investigation.
Deciding party	A body authorized by a TNI program to issue a final disposition on an assigned complaint. Deciding parties include, but are not limited to, a program's Executive Committee, the Policy Committee, the NELAP Accreditation Council, the TNI Executive Committee, or the TNI Board of Directors.
Disposition	A decision by a deciding party in favor of or against a complainant.
Investigating party	A committee, council, board, or team, assigned by TNI staff or the Chair of the Policy Committee to investigate an assigned complaint.
Intake	Procedure for registering complaints related to TNI programs or operations.

5.0 Complaint Resolution Philosophy

- 5.1 This standard operating procedure is designed to be consistent with the principles and management philosophy for complaints outlined in TNI Policy 1 - 108.
- 5.2 This complaint process may be used by any person or group of persons who believe they have a complaint to be addressed by TNI. Membership in TNI is not required to access the process.

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- 5.3 Before engaging in this complaint process, TNI encourages parties involved in a complaint to attempt to resolve it informally with the least amount of intervention at the earliest point of disagreement.
- 5.4 In addition to this process, there may be additional processes available within a TNI program that is directly involved with a complaint.
- 5.5 TNI views complaints as opportunities for improvement and strives to work with all parties towards a successful resolution.

6.0 Complaint Intake

- 6.1 Official complaints are submitted electronically on a form available on TNI's website.
- 6.2 The form requires the following information:
 - 6.2.1 The name of the person or group filing a complaint. If the complaint is submitted by a group, the submission must include a contact name for the group. TNI will attempt to maintain confidential the identity of the complainant, but cannot guarantee confidentiality in all cases. TNI will not accept anonymous complaints under this process.
 - 6.2.2 A description of the circumstances leading to filing the complaint.
 - 6.2.3 References to applicable documents and sections when a complaint is related to the application of a TNI requirement or procedure.
 - 6.2.4 A description of any actions previously taken by the complainant to attempt to resolve the complaint and the outcome of those actions.
 - 6.2.5 A description of the remedy sought by the complainant.
- 6.3 TNI staff will review in a timely manner all submitted forms for completeness, inform the complainant of the receipt of the form, and advise the complainant if required information is missing.

7.0 Complaint Acceptance

- 7.1 TNI staff will review all complete complaint forms and determine whether the complaint falls within the applicability of this SOP.
- 7.2 If TNI staff determines the complaint falls within the applicability of this SOP, TNI staff will decide which party will address the complaint and will inform the complainant that the complaint has been accepted.
- 7.3 If TNI staff determines the complaint does not fall within the applicability of this SOP, TNI staff will consult with the Policy Committee for concurrence with the determination.
 - 7.3.1 If the Policy Committee concurs that the complaint does not fall within the applicability of this SOP, TNI staff will inform the complainant that the complaint has not been accepted and of his or her right to request reconsideration of the decision.
 - 7.3.2 If the Policy Committee does not concur with the determination made by TNI staff and believes the complaint can be accepted, the committee will consult with TNI staff and decide jointly how to address the complaint.

8.0 Assignment for Investigation

- 8.1 If TNI staff determines that an accepted complaint falls within the scope of a committee's or council's complaint SOP, TNI staff will refer the complaint to that group.
- 8.2 If TNI staff determines that an accepted complaint cannot be addressed by a committee's or council's complaint process, TNI staff will consult with the Policy Committee for assigning the complaint for investigation.
 - 8.2.1 If the Policy Committee determines that existing complaint resolution processes within TNI programs cannot address the complaint, the Policy Committee Chair shall appoint a team to investigate the complaint.
 - 8.2.1.1 The team shall consist of at least three TNI members and at least one of them shall be a member of the Policy Committee.

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- 8.2.2** If TNI Staff determines that the complaint involves more than one TNI program, multiple committees or councils, the chair of the Policy Committee shall appoint a team to investigate the complaint.
 - 8.2.2.1** The team shall consist of at least three TNI members and shall include at least one member of the Policy Committee and at least one representative from each of the program's committees or councils involved in the complaint.
- 8.2.3** The Policy Committee shall consult with the TNI Executive Committee or the TNI Board of Directors for guidance when it is not able to make a clear assignment of an accepted complaint.

9.0 Complaint Investigation

- 9.1** Accepted complaints assigned for investigation shall be addressed in a manner commensurate with the nature and scope of the complaint. Investigations shall honor the following principles:
 - 9.1.1** Timeliness. Investigating parties shall ensure to the extent possible that investigations are initiated and concluded within timelines that are mindful of a complainant's circumstances and do not render irrelevant the possible resolution of a complaint.
 - 9.1.2** Confidentiality. When an investigation cannot ensure a complainant the degree of confidentiality requested, the investigating party shall inform the complainant and seek the complainant's permission before continuing with an investigation under this SOP.
 - 9.1.3** Impartiality. Investigating parties shall conduct their activities without prejudice, preconceptions, or predetermination of an outcome.
 - 9.1.4** Completeness. Investigating parties shall collect and consider all information necessary to arrive at a sustainable decision.
 - 9.1.5** Ethical behavior. All investigations shall be conducted in a manner consistent with the codes of ethic for TNI members and agents.
- 9.2** Parties assigned a complaint for investigation may delegate parts of the investigation to others as long as the delegated party follows the principles in paragraph 9.1. The party to which the complaint was assigned is the only one allowed to make a recommendation regarding the disposition of the complaint.
- 9.3** Investigating parties shall have authority to conduct any activities including, but not limited to, interviews, document examinations, consultations with experts, and review of relevant past decision records to arrive at a conclusion regarding an assigned complaint.

NOTE: Approval by the TNI Finance Committee is required for investigating activities requiring expenditure of TNI funds.
- 9.4** Investigating parties shall document or assemble documents and evidence necessary to arrive at a decision and that enable recreating the decision from the retained information by an independent party conversant with the complaint's subject matter.
- 9.5** A complaint investigation concludes with a decision by the investigating party recommending an action to an assigned complaint.
 - 9.5.1** The investigating party shall recommend an action in favor or against a complainant.
 - 9.5.2** The investigating party may recommend remedies different from the ones sought by the complainant when it recommends an action in the complainant's favor.
- 9.6** Investigating parties shall offer their recommended actions to the applicable deciding party for disposition.
 - 9.6.1** When the TNI Policy Committee has undertaken or been assigned the investigation of a complaint, the recommended action is presented to the entire Policy Committee.
 - 9.6.2** When the assigned complaint involves more than one TNI program, committees, or councils, the Policy Committee shall refer the recommended action to the TNI Board of Directors.

10.0 Disposition of Complaint

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- 10.1** The deciding parties identified in paragraph 9.6 shall take timely action on recommendations received regarding an assigned complaint.
- 10.2** On occasions when members of a deciding party are a direct party to a complaint, the involved members shall remove themselves and shall not be involved in any decisions regarding the disposition of the complaint.
- 10.3** The deciding parties may or may not endorse the recommendations received.
 - 10.3.1** Endorsing a recommendation on the disposition of a complaint requires at least a simple majority.
 - 10.3.2** Deciding not to endorse a recommendation on the disposition of a complaint requires no less than two-thirds majority.
- 10.4** If a deciding party endorses the investigating party’s recommendation, the deciding party shall notify the complainant about the disposition of the complaint, including the remedies, if any, offered to address the complaint.
- 10.5** If a deciding party does not endorse the investigating party’s recommendation, the deciding party shall communicate to the investigating party the reasons for the lack of endorsement and allow the investigating party an opportunity to provide additional information. After considering additional information, the deciding party shall make a disposition of the complaint, document the decision, and notify the complainant.

11.0 Appeal of Disposition

- 11.1** A complainant may, within 30 days of receipt of a complaint’s disposition, request an appeal of the disposition to the TNI Executive Committee.
- 11.2** The TNI Executive Committee shall review the complaint’s case and any additional information provided by the appellant.
 - 11.2.1** If the TNI Executive Committee was the deciding party of the complaint, the TNI Executive Committee shall appoint, in consultation with the Policy Committee, a committee of at least three TNI Directors to review the complaint’s case and offer a recommendation to the TNI Executive Committee.
- 11.3** If the TNI Executive Committee affirms the disposition of the complaint, the TNI Executive Committee shall notify the appellant. The decision of the TNI Executive Committee is final and may not be further appealed.
- 11.4** If the TNI Executive Committee decides in favor of the appellant, the TNI Executive Committee shall recommend appropriate action to the TNI Board of Directors for endorsement.

12.0 Communication with Complainant and Tracking Complaints

- 12.1** Complainants shall be informed of the progress made by TNI in addressing their complaints. At a minimum, complainants shall be notified of the receipt, acceptance, assignment, and disposition of a complaint. Complainants shall be notified of the progress of assigned complaints that for unforeseen reasons await disposition beyond six months.
- 12.2** Complainants shall be provided contact information of a TNI staff member that can answer questions regarding submitted complaints.
- 12.3** The Policy Committee shall provide annual reports to the TNI Board of Directors on the progress of complaints received through this general process.
- 12.4** The TNI programs shall include in their annual reports to the TNI Board information on complaints received and investigated.
- 12.5** The Policy Committee shall monitor trends in complaints and may recommend global changes to operations as a result of complaints.

13.0 SOP Approved Changes

Prev. SOP No.	New SOP No.	Date of Change	Description of Change
Rev 0	Rev 0.1	9/2/2011	Reformat to 2010 Organizational change

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APPENDIX A
Complaint Resolution General Process Flowchart
