

Old Farmer's Ball

Complaint Policies and Procedures

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Introduction

Purpose

The Old Farmers Ball (OFB) sponsors a variety of traditional dance and music events. The OFB has established Organizational Values as well as Dance Behavior & Etiquette Guidelines, which are available separately from this document. Central to our values is respect for individuality, including gender expression, sexual identity, race and cultural heritage, religious affiliation, physical dis-/abilities, and more. This document details the OFB's policies and procedures for responding to complaints when our behavior guidelines are broken or when an incident detracts from our values. The purpose of the Guidelines and these procedures is to keep our community safe and to help heal through tough times.

Guiding Philosophy

We support victims. If a complaint is lodged against someone, we take it seriously. We aim to be sympathetic and sincere to the complainant and to take appropriate action in a timely way.

At the same time, we recognize that many situations have conflicting perspectives of what happened. We recognize the possibility of false accusation, or an accusation based on mis-perception, and that being falsely accused is another form of victimization.

Note: throughout this document, the person named in a complaint is referred to as "the accused." This is strictly for succinctness. We acknowledge and emphasize that in many cases, a complaint is not an accusation but merely an effort to raise awareness and help another dancer improve. In public documents (forms, summary, etc.), we use the term "person-named" to avoid any pejorative connotation.

We aim to model best practices for resolving disputes in a positive and constructive manner.

Inappropriate behavior is defined as behavior that injures, intimidates, harasses or otherwise harms people in our community. Such behavior falls on a continuum of severity, ranging from mild offenses that simply require education and awareness to more serious offenses, which require more severe responses. These may include patterns of repeated offense with little indication of remorse or intent to improve. The corrective actions listed in this document follow this continuum. OFB will take appropriate and prompt action in response to complaints or knowledge of policy violations to the extent needed and within our ability to protect our community from future harm, and to help individuals recognize and improve their interactions. OFB action is not intended to provide redress or compensation to individual complainants.

Scope of Guidelines and Policies:

The Response Policies address interactions between community members that fall within a certain range of behaviors. The behaviors/interactions addressed are those more serious than personal disputes and less serious than those requiring the involvement of law enforcement. The OFB is not a public judiciary body and reserves the right to resolve complaints in whatever way they determine appropriate. However, transparency and accountability are prime among the values of the organization and are reflected in this document.

Section 1. Inappropriate Behaviors

We categorize complaints into three levels: Low, Medium, and High. The OFB responds to each level according to the seriousness of the incident. Lower level complaints are generally considered those interactions that can be corrected with education leading to increased awareness by the accused. Medium level complaints call for a more flexible response and can be treated as either High or Low level. Higher level complaints may warrant an immediate suspension of the accused, and a follow-up period where the OFB will decide on future consequences.

1.1 Low-Level Complaints

(Bad Dance Etiquette)

- Lifting and dipping without permission
- Dancing too closely/intimately without permission
- Hand grabbing/leading too forcefully/holding onto hands too long
 - This includes spinning too forcefully or forcing a spin
 - Continuing to lead moves that have been verbally or nonverbally declined
 - Dancers throwing themselves into moves that not led
- Flourishes that are disruptive to others (using too much space, “selfish” dancing, etc.).
- “No”s for dance requests being met with negative reactions. i.e. not taking no for an answer, pressuring/complaining about response

1.2 Medium Level Complaints

(Can be treated as Low or High Level on a case-by-case basis)

- Unwanted flirting or attention
- Pursuing romantic relations between a minor and someone over the age of 18
- Interfering with dance hosts, musicians, staff, or volunteers at an event.
- Dancing While Impaired
- Disrespecting someone’s individuality
- Harassment on social media platforms, text spamming, or other forms of harassment that do not occur at a specific OFB event location.

1.3 High-Level Complaints - at or outside of dances

(Personal Harm, Destruction of Property)

- Stalking
- Sexual harassment
- Threats of violence or other harm
- Physical/sexual assault
- Criminal activity, theft, vandalism

Section 2. Statements of Policies

(note: bold font is used simply to help a reader who is scanning quickly to pick out the essence of the text. At this time, it is not necessarily for emphasis).

The Board shall establish a standing committee to facilitate any Board action described below, and to liaise with the Leaders of the various OFB events.

The OFB encourages participants to report discomforting, offensive, or harmful behavior (at the time of the incident) to the Dance Host or event Leaders; or after-the-fact by email/website to the Board.

2.1 As stated above, we support victims. If a complaint is lodged against someone, we take it seriously. We aim to be sympathetic and sincere to the complainant and to take appropriate action in a timely way.

2.1.1 At the same time, **complaints must be specific enough to identify an offending behavior.** Complaints about general demeanor, for example, should be received with sincerity, and perhaps advice to the complainant (e.g., it's ok to say no, to switch lines to avoid someone, etc.), but non-specific complaints are not considered actionable. However, such reports should be documented. It is valuable for dance leaders to be aware that someone is putting people off, even in a general way. Although it may not be actionable, leaders can help guide newcomers away from such an individual, to help protect the dance from losing new participants.

2.1.2 **If the complainant wishes to remain anonymous, it may make the complaint unactionable.** OFB Leaders will not accuse someone of bad behavior without being able to provide details of the specific behavior that resulted in a complaint. The complaint can be documented and maintained for organizational memory, but if details cannot be given to the person named, action may not be possible. If a complainant wishes to keep their identity anonymous, but agrees that the behavior may be discussed with the accused, the Leader will follow up accordingly. (See 3.3.3 for application)

2.2 Accused individuals shall be informed of the specifics of the accusation against them, and they shall have the opportunity to respond in full. The procedures specified below are intended to ensure that all parties involved in an incident are offered the opportunity to have their perspective heard when the incident is considered and/or action is taken by the OFB Board or representatives.

2.3 High level offenses may lead to immediate suspension at the discretion of the dance Leaders, and possibly a permanent ban after review by the Board. As much as possible, we aim to give warnings and opportunities to improve before being permanently banned. Low level offenses should result in multiple warnings before any penalties are applied. However, a pattern of offenses, whether high or low level, with little or no improvement, may be cause for suspension or ban.

2.3.1 A pattern of repeated behavior starts with a first warning. **If multiple low-level complaints are lodged after-the-fact** (as a "me-too" result of an initial complaint), the accused individual should be informed of all of the complaints against him/her, but **the collected accusations constitute a first warning, unless there is evidence that previous warnings and improvement efforts have been made by other Leaders**, either at other OFB events, or in other traditional music/dance communities. For high-level complaints, the merit of after-the-fact accusations is determined by the Board, and may warrant immediate suspension.

2.3.2 Becoming volatile during discussion of a Low-level incident may immediately escalate the complaint to a High-level, with immediate consequences, including a temporary suspension and follow-up by the Board.

2.4 The OFB Board is not a forum to resolve personal disputes that occur outside of dance events except in situations where the dispute directly impacts an OFB event. If deemed appropriate for involvement, **Board response is for the purpose of protecting participants at future OFB events from potential harm.** The OFB does not impose consequences for the purpose of personal redress.

2.4.1 For High-level issues, the **accused may be temporarily suspended** from participating in OFB events while the Board receives relevant information and considers the complaint. The Board or designated committee **should make every effort to resolve a referred complaint within 30 days.** Except in extraordinary circumstances, temporary suspensions should not extend beyond 30 days.

2.4.2 **Legal Action:** If any legal action is taken as a result of the incident, **a suspension will remain in place until the legal process is resolved. Final OFB resolution of the incident will take the result of legal action into consideration.** (e.g., if a restraining order is issued against the accused, the suspension would likely become a permanent ban).

2.4.3 Scope of OFB Review

- The OFB is not an investigative body and does not have the staff or other resources to conduct an investigation. **It is the responsibility of the parties involved to write, collect, and submit information to the Board if they wish it to be considered** in the resolution of a complaint.
- Information from both parties (the complainant and the accused) should be requested by the Board or a designated committee, and should be duly considered. On a case-by-case basis, written information from additional individuals may be considered, at the request of the Board or any of the parties. In general, a deadline of **14 days from the time of request** should be included. This gives the parties reasonable time to submit information, and also gives the Board reasonable time to review information and meet to discuss it, within the 30-day goal for reaching resolution.

2.4.4 While the above policies guide decision-making, **the OFB Board has the right to immediately suspend or permanently ban someone from OFB events if the Board believes they pose a harm to the community.**

2.5 **Appeal Procedure:** A complainant, or the accused in a complaint, may submit a request in writing for a review of any action taken to resolve a complaint. **The request should include any new information** provided by any party that is relevant to the initial complaint. If any agreements were made to resolve a complaint, the person making the appeal should detail how the agreements have been completed.

2.5.1 **Withdrawn Complaint:** **If a complaint is withdrawn, the Board will reconsider the complaint, and may lift a ban or suspension.**

2.6 **All** complaints, responses, and other relevant **information should be documented** using the Complaints Form(s) provided in Appendix D, **and saved for organizational memory.**

2.7 Non-Admit List for Events

- The Board Committee Chair shall maintain a list of all individuals who are banned or currently suspended from OFB events. This list shall contain only the names, date of the suspension, and if the action is a suspension or ban. All other details should remain confidential. This list shall be provided to the leaders of each OFB event (Thursday contra, ECD, Roots, etc).
- As changes to the list occur (i.e., someone is newly suspended or banned, or is readmitted), leaders of each event shall be informed accordingly so they may keep their lists up to date.
- This list should be made available to leaders and volunteers staffing admission points at all OFB events, as a non-admit list.

2.8 Public Disclosure

- Upon inquiry, the non-admit list (see 2.7 above) may, at the discretion of the Board, be made available to **leaders** of other traditional dance and music communities. **The list shall not be made available to the general public.**
- Upon inquiry, the OFB Board may confirm whether or not an individual has been banned or suspended, but will not elaborate on details of the action. Inquiring parties will be advised to approach those involved to ask for additional details.
 - If an inquiry is made about an individual who has NOT been banned or suspended, but was the subject of a former complaint, the Board may exercise discretion regarding whether or not to confirm that a complaint was made. They may not elaborate on specifics. Inquiring parties will be advised to approach those involved to ask for additional details.

2.9 This complaint response process is a “living” document / policy which is continually fine-tuned as needed. The OFB Board welcomes feedback about the process. If anyone is dissatisfied with how an incident was handled, or has suggestions for improving these policies or procedures, feedback should be submitted via the OFB website: <http://oldfarmersball.com/policy-feedback/>

Section 3. Implementation: Managing Complaints

This section has not yet been formally adopted by the OFB Board. It is a work in progress.

3.1 Flow Chart. The diagram in Appendix B summarizes the steps to be taken by Hosts/Leaders/Board of OFB events in receiving and responding to complaints. Keep the Flow Chart handy to refer to along with the remainder of this document.

3.2 System Overview – Use of Forms & Log to Document Complaints

A Basic Complaint Form is used to document any level of complaint made at an event in progress, and for a low-level complaint, whether made at an event or after-the fact. See Appendix D.

For higher-level complaints, when confidentiality is requested, and when we aim to secure signatures of those involved as higher-level documentation, a series of forms is available. See Appendix D. These are to be used by the Board or designated committee to document details in following up on a complaint, outside of an event in progress.

All forms are to be saved for organizational memory. A log of suspended/banned individuals who should not be admitted to events will be maintained for door volunteers.

See Section 4 for full details regarding use of forms, confidentiality, and maintenance of organizational memory.

3.3 Receiving a Complaint - The Complainant's Experience

3.3.1 Responding to the Complainant:

- We listen to everyone's story and respect everyone's perspective.
 - Listen sincerely. Express sympathy and regret that this happened at an OFB event.
 - Request the complainant's suggestions for resolving the issue.
- Convey an overview of our process – what will happen and when. Give them a copy of the **Old Farmer's Ball Complaint Policies and Procedures SUMMARY**.
- As appropriate, provide the handout for community resources for emotional and/or legal support. (See Appendix F).

(Event Hosts should receive training in this complaint response process. The training should include more details in how to be supportive, including appropriate language, resources available, etc.)

3.3.2 Document the Complaint -- first section of the complaint form -- see Section 4.

3.3.3 Complainant wishes to remain anonymous

Discuss the distinction between revealing someone's identity and discussing behavior. The Board will not accuse someone of an offense without being able to provide details of the specific behavior (see 2.1.2). If describing the nature of the complaint to the accused will reveal who the complainant is -- they may be the only one with whom the described behavior has happened -- and if the complainant does not grant that permission, the complaint can be documented and maintained for organizational memory, but no action will be taken with the accused. If the complainant agrees that the behavior may be discussed,

just without identifying the complainant, then the Leader can follow-up with the accused according to the nature of the behavior (low vs high level response). Discuss pros and cons of anonymity with the complainant and document clearly their decision regarding how much information they agree may be shared with the accused.

See training materials, scenario #x (*to be developed*).

If Leaders receive multiple complaints about an individual (i.e., a pattern emerges), and all complainants request anonymity so that specific incidents cannot be discussed, Leaders should make a point to observe the accused to identify the behavior first-hand. They can then address their own observations with the accused.

3.3.4 Immediate Response or Referral to the Leader / Board

- If the complaint is low-level, the Host/Leader may address it with the person named, if they are trained, feel comfortable doing so, and it will not detract from their other duties. If this is not possible, they should simply document the complaint and forward it to the dance Leader or Board for follow-up. (See section 4 regarding chain of command for referring complaints for different OFB events).
- If the complaint is high-level, the host/leader receiving the complaint should address only immediate safety issues -- i.e., if the situation is volatile, with threat of immediate harm, any volatile individuals should be immediately removed from the event. (see 3.4.1 below).

Once the situation is stabilized, the complaint should be documented and addressed by the appropriate person with due process and consideration. (See section 4 regarding chain of command for referring complaints for different OFB events).

- In any case, if the issue is referred to the dance Leader or the Board to be addressed at a later time:
 - Assure the Complainant that the issue will be addressed soon by the event Leader or the Board. The summary sheet they just received has contact info for follow-up.
 - Forward the complaint form and inform the Board as needed (see Section 4).
 - THANK the Complainant for coming forward.

3.4 Responding to the Complaint - Experience of the accused

3.4.1 **If an incident involves a volatile individual(s)**, remove them immediately. Seek assistance from other Leaders present, or from outside authorities, if necessary. Emergency phone numbers should be on-hand at all events (see Appendix F).

- Offer refund of admission fee.
- Try to get a name and contact info. Tell them they are temporarily suspended (as stated in section 2) and we need their contact info to follow up, to work to resolve the incident in order to allow them back to the dance.

- If possible, offer the **Old Farmer's Ball Complaint Policies and Procedures SUMMARY** - what will happen, and when.
- Note: As stated in Section 2, becoming volatile during discussion of a Low-level incident may immediately escalate it to a High-level incident, including immediate suspension.

3.4.2 Discuss the complaint with the accused.

This may be an immediate conversation at the event, for low-level issues, or a follow-up conversation by the event Leader or the Board for issues that are referred, whether low-level or high-level:

- Conversations should include 2 Leaders -- a lead person and a witness.
- Use positive communication techniques -- *see Flow Chart and training documents!*
- Seek permission. Don't blindside them. Set up a time to talk.
- Reiterate respect. Separate the person from the problem.
- Describe the problem. Acknowledge that the problem may be the result of mis-matched thresholds, mis-perception, etc., especially for low-level issues. Set the groundwork to enable a resolution and allow them to save face.
- Clarify community norms & boundaries: **Give them OFB Behavior Guidelines** – (*see Appendix C*).
- Discuss options for resolving the complaint, including any suggestions offered by the Complainant. For incidents outside the dance, mediation may be suggested.
- Document the response of the accused, either on the Basic complaint form, or using the appropriate form from Appendix D for higher-level issues.

3.4.3 Resolution

- A) For first-time incidents (or additional warnings), especially for low-level issues, resolution should include acknowledgement of the complaint by the accused, stated understanding of the changes needed, and a stated commitment to improve.
- B) Resolution may or may not include an apology or other efforts aimed at healing toward the complainant. If the problem is a result of mis-matched thresholds or perceptions, it is a no-fault situation. Give the accused the **Old Farmer's Ball Complaint Policies and Procedures SUMMARY** with expression of the hope that better awareness will prevent any repeat of this problem in the future.
- C) Document the resolution: fill out the remaining items on the form(s). See Section 4 for what to do with the form.

3.4.4 Non-Resolution

3.4.4.1 No Danger:

- A) For first-time incidents if the accused does not acknowledge any need for change:
 - If they are not volatile and do not pose a likely harm to the community (e.g., a first-time personal dispute), the incident can be left in a status of "agree to disagree," with a clear **warning**. They do not have to agree with the complaint, but should know that we are documenting it, and if complaints of this nature become a repeated pattern, it can be cause for suspension or banning.
 - Reiterate the Behavior Guidelines they just received.
 - Give them the **Old Farmer's Ball Complaint Policies and Procedures SUMMARY**
- B) For repeat incidents in which the accused continues to express sincere remorse and intent to change (clueless but harmless):

- The Board will need to decide how much tolerance will be granted. If banning is not justified, then community education is needed to help participants know how to respond to this individual, and to help that person continue to work on improving their dance etiquette.
- Give them the **Old Farmer's Ball Complaint Policies and Procedures SUMMARY**. Continue to give warnings. Continue to document each incident for organizational memory.

3.4.4.2 Likely Danger:

A) Applicable situations:

- The accused is defiant and volatile; positive communication techniques do not work; no acknowledgement of the problem; no sincere commitment to improve.
- Repeat incidents that have become an unacceptable pattern -- failure to improve in spite of stated good intentions.
- High-level issues that pose an immediate harm to the community.

B) Protection against false accusation and unjust suspension:

If a complaint concerns a high-level offense which took place outside of the dance, and is serious enough in nature to warrant OFB involvement, yet essentially involves conflicting perspectives with little evidence for support (he said/she said), the policy of providing warnings and opportunity for improvement should be a strong guideline. If it is a first-time incident, with no pattern of dangerous behavior, the accused should not be deemed an immediate danger to the larger community. See Section 3.4.4.1-A (no danger; agree-to-disagree; issue a warning). Also see Section 2.3.1 regarding multiple complaints that are lodged after-the-fact, as a "me-too" result of an initial complaint.

C) Suspension or Ban: With all constructive efforts exhausted, and the accused fully informed of the issues and his/her response duly considered, if no positive resolution can be reached and the situation poses a likely danger, the only recourse for protection of the community is to suspend or ban the individual from future participation.

- Suspension may be for a discrete period of time, or a ban may be permanent.
- Inform the individual in writing, with a copy retained for organizational memory. See Appendix D for samples.

3.4.5 **Document the result:** The Board or designated Committee should continue to use the family of forms in Appendix D to complete documentation of all the relevant information and decisions for the incident.

3.4.6 - Appeal Process -- see Section 2.5.

Section 4. Documentation, Organizational Memory, Enforcement

4.1 Completing Forms -- See Forms in Appendix D!

- **At an event:** Use the basic form. Fill out the top half after listening to the Complainant. Summarize the details and read it back to them and make sure they agree that it's accurate. Get their contact info, so the Leader or Board can follow up. If Host/Leader is able to address the issue immediately, fill out the response portion similarly.

- The Host/Leader receiving the complaint is responsible for completing the form. Each OFB event (Thursday dance, ECD, etc) should establish their own protocols for handing off complaint forms to the event Leader, and then to the Board, as needed.
- Leaders of each event have authority to immediately suspend someone as needed. A permanent ban must come from the Board.
- **Outside of an event:** Use the Basic form for low-Level complaints; use the family of forms for higher-level complaints (see Appendix D), or just take notes and use the family of forms as a checklist to make sure you have covered all necessary details.

4.2 Informing the Board

Regardless of who responds to a complaint, Leaders of each OFB event (Contra, Roots, ECD, etc.) should inform the Board of any complaints that are raised at their event. The Board should inform leaders of other OFB events.

4.3 Storage of completed complaint forms:

- The Board Committee should maintain the original forms for all complaints. Leaders of various events (Thursday dance, ECD, Roots, etc.) may retain their own copies, if they wish.
 - As leadership changes, both event leadership and Board chairmanship, complaint files should be handed off to new leaders. If an event folds, all copies of complaint files should be returned to the Board.
 - Files should not be stored online. They should be kept as hard copies or may be scanned and stored on a USB drive or similar electronic storage, as long as it is not online and not just on somebody's hard drive (i.e., they should be on a portable drive that can be handed off to the next keeper).
 - Complaint files are confidential and should be secured by the Board Committee chair, and by event leaders, if copies are maintained. (e.g., files should not be kept in the open at an event in progress).

4.4 Master List & Regular Review

Along with the files of completed forms, the Board Committee shall maintain a comprehensive list of complaints for quick reference. This should include only the names of the people involved, the event (e.g., Thursday contra, Roots, ECD), and the date of the complaint/incident.

4.4.1 When a new incident occurs, leaders may do a quick search of the list to see if the person(s) have been named in a past complaint. If so, they should review the previous complaint as relevant info in resolving a new complaint.

For low-level incidents, review may be after-the-fact. (e.g., something minor happens; the host deals with it in the moment, then sends the report to the Board. The chair files it, and at that time notices that there are 3 past incidents involving that person. This suggests a developing pattern, and the Chair may decide it's time to take additional action).

4.4.2 At least annually, the chair of the Complaint Committee should review the files to develop personal familiarity with the organizational memory, and should provide an updated Master List to the leaders of each OFB event.

4.5 Non-Admit List for Events -- See Section 2.7

4.6 Public Disclosure -- see Section 2.8

APPENDICES

Appendices A-G are separate documents, which may (eventually) be found in the same location as this document (same file folder, web-page, etc.)

APPENDIX H

Glossary - Definitions & Elaborations

Event Leaders - the acknowledged organizers of a particular OFB dance event or group, specifically, the committee chairs of

- the weekly Thursday night dance
- semi-monthly English Country Dance
- monthly Family Dance
- monthly Roots Contra Dance
- annual New Year's Eve Dance
- Community Band
- any other OFB sponsored event or group

Leaders - a catch-all term for anyone who has some authority in this process. Includes Event Leaders, Board Members, members of any relevant committee. May also include event Hosts, and community members who have no title but who have been trained in managing complaints and have been approved by Event Leaders to carry out some role (e.g., "dance buddies"). The appropriate person for managing a given complaint should be identified by Event Leaders for each event or group.

After-the-fact - a complaint submitted about an incident that happened more than a week or two ago, especially several months or years ago.

Disrespecting someone's individuality - this captures a range of isms and their kin: racism, sexism, homophobia, elitism, fashion police, PC-police, language police, etc. An example of respect for individuality which is evolving as we speak is the current shift in language & acknowledgement regarding gender (fluidity vs. binary). Some people would argue that refusing to use someone's preferred pronoun is a form of disrespecting his/her/their individuality. These policies intentionally maintain latitude for Board or Event Leader discretion in evaluating whether or not an actionable offense has occurred under this category. In some instances, those Leaders may have to weigh the balance of conflicting organizational values -- e.g., preservation of tradition vs. respect for new sensibilities.

Anonymity may make the complaint unactionable (elaboration): We want to respect someone's request to be anonymous (*no, don't tell them I was the one who complained about them*), but it's also not fair to go to someone and say, *"someone said you were being offensive. I can't tell you*

exactly what you did, because if I did, you'll know who it was and I promised to keep them anonymous. So, just please stop being generically offensive." Imagine how you would feel receiving that feedback! If it's possible to discuss the behavior without revealing the identity, then we can do so. But if discussing the behavior will reveal the identity, then we can't do both -- we can't discuss the behavior and maintain anonymity. So if they insist on anonymity, then we'll write it down, we'll sympathize with them, we'll advise how they can avoid that person, but we won't actually discuss it with the person named. No action will be taken. That's what is meant by "Anonymity may make the complaint unactionable."