

# Elements of ICF's Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) Process

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## Introduction

Out of its commitment to high ethical standards the International Coaching Federation (ICF) has developed a Code of Ethics (Code). The purpose of the Code is to promote professional and ethical coaching practices, and to raise the awareness of people outside the coaching profession about the integrity, commitment, and ethical conduct of ICF Professionals.

ICF is also committed to providing a forum, the Independent Review Board (IRB), where individuals can bring complaints against ICF Members and ICF Credential-holders where a breach has been alleged. ICF adopted a policy and set of procedures that provide for review, investigation, and response to alleged unethical practices or behavior deviating from the established ICF Code. To affect this policy, ICF has implemented an Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) Process, which is intended to:

- serve as a “model of excellence” for the fair review of complaints concerning the ethical conduct of ICF Professionals; and
- be responsive to complaints concerning alleged unethical behavior and a potential breach of the Code by ICF Professionals.

The first step in the ECR process is the filing of a complaint. The ECR Process applies to complaints submitted to the ICF and directed at coaches who, by virtue of their ICF membership or ICF Credential have pledged to participate in the process. The ECR Process includes provisions for investigation of the allegations in the complaint by ICF, in which both the coach and the person filing the complaint (complainant) may provide information and related documentation to those assigned to investigate the allegations of the complaint.

The second step in the ECR process involves consideration of the complaint and the findings of the investigation by an Independent Review Board leadership team.

If there is a determination that a standard of the Code has been breached, the coach will be instructed to develop and complete a learning plan focused on specific skill development. If warranted by the circumstances of the breach, ICF may impose sanctions that may include removal from or denial of ICF membership and/or ICF Credential.

The ECR Process is a peer review administered by the ICF's IRB. This ethics board does not have the authority of a court of law to award money for damages or to issue an injunction against any one individual.

Prior to and throughout the ECR Process when possible, the complainant and the coach identified in the complaint are encouraged to resolve their differences, work on the issues involved, learn from the situation, and come to an amicable resolution.

The ICF's ECR Process is intended to be confidential in nature. It is the intent of the ICF that specific information about ECR complaints filed and the parties named in the complaints are not disclosed to third parties, except to authorized ICF staff with a legitimate need to access the complaint file information/documents, members of the IRB and the named parties and witnesses identified in the complaint.

Furthermore, some facts and information derived from the complaint, investigation and IRB findings may be disseminated and used by the ICF and/or IRB for educational and training purpose only. Such use will only be made where the ICF has undertaken reasonable and good faith efforts to protect the identities of the parties and to remove references that may identify or be used to identify the parties to the complaint, as well as any confidential information contained in the complaint file records.

The ethical review is a detailed and time-consuming process. To provide a diligent and fair review, completion times vary and could take several months. Every reasonable effort will be made to complete the process as promptly as possible.

If you believe that you have an ethical complaint against an ICF Member or ICF Credential-holder, we invite you to complete the online complaint form available at [Coachingfederation.org](http://Coachingfederation.org). Should you have any questions about your situation or the complaint form, please email ICF at [ethics@coachingfederation.org](mailto:ethics@coachingfederation.org).

## **Elements of the Ethical Conduct Review Process**

### **1. Complete the Decision Tree document.**

- a. To determine if your complaint fits into the Ethical Conduct Review Process, please first complete the [Decision Tree Questionnaire](#) document.

### **2. Filing and Initial Review of Complaint**

- a. The complaint must be filed with ICF within one (1) year of the date of the conduct complained of, or within one (1) year of the date of discovery of the conduct complained of. The one (1) year limitation is in place to stress the importance of timely reporting of complaints and to better ensure the likelihood of accurate recollections of fact and the preservation of relevant documentation by the parties to the complaint.

- b. To initiate a complaint under the International Coaching Federation (ICF) Ethical Conduct Review (ECR) Process, a complainant must use the specified online ICF ECR Complaint form. At a minimum, the complaint must be signed by the complainant, must specify by number, one or more standards of the ICF Code of Ethics that has allegedly been violated by the individual named in the complaint, and must state the facts pertaining to the alleged breach of the ICF Code.
- c. When ICF Headquarters receives the complaint, it will be directed to the ICF staff who will verify the individual named in the complaint is currently an ICF Member and/or an ICF Credential-holder.
- d. If the ICF staff determines that the individual named in the complaint is currently neither an ICF Member nor an ICF Credential-holder, ICF staff will notify the complainant of such and advise that ICF has no authority to act.
- e. If it is determined that the individual named in the complaint is currently an ICF Member and/or an ICF Credential-holder, the ICF staff will forward the complaint to the Initial Review Panel (IRP).
- f. The IRP determines if the complaint's subject matter is one that comes under the IRB jurisdiction and if a breach has been adequately alleged. The IRP and ICF staff may hold conversations with the complainant if additional information or clarification is needed.
- g. If the IRP determines that the complaint is not within the IRB's jurisdiction, or that a breach has not been adequately alleged, ICF staff will so notify the complainant.
- h. If the IRP determines that the complaint is frivolous or vexatious, or of a nature that would not warrant a remedy or sanction if the allegations of the complaint were proven to have occurred, ICF staff will so notify the complainant that the IRB is unable to process the complaint.
- i. If the IRP determines that the complaint warrants further investigation, then the complaint will move to the next stage in the ECR process. ICF staff will notify the coach named in the complaint and provide the coach with a copy of the complaint and any related materials submitted by the complainant, and request that the coach submit a complete written response to the complaint.

### **3. Investigation**

- a. The coach and complainant will be notified by ICF staff that an investigation will be held.
- b. The IRB Vice Chair of Operations will appoint a team of two (2) or more IRB Members for the purposes of investigating the allegations set forth in the complaint.
- c. The investigators are charged with collecting additional information and preparing a factual written report of their findings, which is provided to the IRB Chair. This gathering of facts may include+ interviews with both the complainant and coach as well as possible witnesses.

### **4. Final Review**

- a. A panel of at least three (3) members of the IRB is appointed by the Vice Chair of Operations to review the investigators' report.
- b. If needed, the Final Review Panel may contact investigators for clarification.
- c. The Final Review Panel will determine if a breach has occurred by a two-thirds majority vote.
- d. If it is determined that no breach has occurred, the case is closed, and the complainant and coach named in the complaint are so advised in writing by the IRB Staff Liaison.
- e. If the decision is that a breach has occurred, the Final Review Panel will determine the expected learning outcomes for the coach and support the coach in creating a learning plan to be fulfilled within a designated period.
- f. If the coach accepts responsibility for the breach(s) found, both the coach and the complainant are notified in writing of the final decision and that the case will be closed pending the coach's successful completion of the accepted learning plan within the designated time frame.
- g. If the coach chooses not to accept the determination of breach, nor agree to responsibility for the learning plan, the coach may request in

writing, a formal reconsideration. A reconsideration is granted only when specific criteria is met.

- h. If the coach does not accept the learning plan and does not avail him- or herself of the right to reconsideration, an automatic loss of membership and/or ICF Credential will occur.

## **5. Reconsideration**

- a. If the coach does not accept the final determination, the coach may submit a written request for a formal reconsideration. Reconsideration is granted by the IRB Chair and done so only under specific circumstances, including the discovery of pertinent information or evidence that was previously unavailable or believed to be overlooked, and could now potentially change the outcome of the case.
- b. If reconsideration is granted, the Reconsideration Panel will re-examine the complaint while taking into consideration the new information or evidence. The final determination will be provided in writing to both the coach and the complainant.
- c. The findings of this Reconsideration Panel will be final, subject only to review by ICF legal counsel.
- d. If the determination remains that of breach, and the coach continues not to accept this decision by the Reconsideration Panel, an automatic loss of membership and/or ICF Credential will occur.



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