



Stouffville
Library

PUBLIC COMPLAINT HANDLING

Policy Type: Operational

Policy Number: OP16

Reviewed: November 6, 2025

1.0 Overview

The Stouffville Library (the Library) is committed to a consistent and uniform process to respond to complaints received from members of the public regarding programs, services, facilities, and employees of the Library.

The Library recognizes the importance of public feedback as a valuable means for continual improvement to the quality of services, operations, and facilities.

The policy **does not** apply to:

- Feedback
- Suggestions
- Inquiries
- Compliments
- Anonymous complaints
- Requests for services or programs
- Requests for consideration or reconsideration of Library materials
- Internal staffing complaints (Internal staffing complaints should be referred to the appropriate supervisor or, in the alternative, to the Library CEO)

Requests for reconsideration of library materials shall be submitted and addressed as per the Library's *Collection Development Policy*.

2.0 Policy

2.1 What is a responsible complaint?

A responsible complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction related to a Library program, service, facility, or staff member, where a resident believes that the Library has not provided a service experience to the resident's satisfaction and a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- A failure to do something that staff agreed to do
- A failure of staff or contractors to follow Library policies and/or procedures
- An error made by staff or a person or body acting on behalf of the Library that was not rectified
- Unfair or discourteous actions/statements made by staff or a person or body acting on behalf of the Library
- Issues with access to Library services and Library facilities
- Issues involving accessibility as it may relate to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Service not provided in a manner that meets the quality standard expected.

All complaints filed with the Library necessitate a response.

Complaints shall be made in a timely fashion. Complaints shall be submitted generally within two (2) weeks of the alleged occurrence, but not later than thirty (30) days after the alleged occurrence. These timeframes may be extended when in the opinion of the Library CEO, circumstances reasonably exist to justify the extension.

A complaint is distinct from the following:

- a) **Compliment:** An expression of appreciation for a Library service, program, product, process or to recognize excellent service provided by a Library employee
- b) **Inquiry:** A general or specific request for information regarding a Library product or service that is resolved at the point of service delivery
- c) **Claim:** A request for compensation where the Library may be responsible for a bodily injury such as an injury from a fall in the Library
- d) **Feedback:** An opinion, comment or expression of interest in a Library program or service
- e) **Suggestion:** An idea submitted to the Library by a customer with the aim of improving services, programs, products or processes

The contact page on the Library website www.wsplibrary.ca should be used for the above.

2.2 What information should be contained in a complaint?

- a) The specific details of what occurred
- b) The date of the occurrence including time, day, month, and year
- c) Names of who was involved, if known
- d) What was said or done
- e) What kind of resolution is being sought
- f) Contact information for the complainant

2.3 Who can make a complaint?

Anyone who uses or is affected by Library services can make a complaint. This includes:

- Residents
- Businesses
- People who visit the Library
- Community groups

Some individuals may require assistance to make a complaint, and complaints can be made on their behalf, provided that the person affected has given their written consent. A consent form for this purpose is available from each department (Appendix A).

2.4 Procedure to submit a complaint

Complaints can be submitted:

- a) Online through the Library's website www.wsplibrary.ca/contact/
- b) By telephone at 905-642-7323 or 1-888-603-4292
- c) By e-mail at wsplinfo@wsplibrary.ca
- d) By mail at 2 Park Dr., Stouffville, ON L4A 4K1. (Mark envelope "**Confidential Complaint**")
- e) In person at the LIBRARY's Information Desk and the Circulation Desk.

2.5 What are the Library's Service Standards for Complaint Handling?

The following service standards will be adhered to in the handling of all complaints received.

- a) Complainants shall receive a written acknowledgement of receipt of their complaint. This acknowledgement can be in the form of an e-mail, phone, fax or letter depending upon the complainants preferred contact method indicated when submitting a complaint.
This acknowledgement shall identify who will be following up on the complaint as well as their contact information. The acknowledgment shall also let the complainant know that their complaint is being reviewed and will be responded to within the timelines noted below.
- b) Where a complaint cannot be resolved immediately, a final written response or update shall be sent to the complainant within 20 business days, barring exceptional circumstances.

2.6 Confidentiality

All Complaints will be dealt with in a confidential manner, in accordance with the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and other applicable legislation. The identity of the Complainant will be made known only to authorized individuals who require this information in order to consider the complaint. All participants in the complaints process shall keep the details of the complaint confidential except as may be required by law.

2.7 Responsibility

Employees:

All employees are to have knowledge and awareness of Library's requirement to receive complaints, the process through which a complaint can be made and the service standards that apply to complaints.

CEO:

The CEO shall assign a complaint to the staff member with sufficient authority and capacity to address the nature of the complaint. The CEO is responsible for ensuring that staff provides a prompt response to all complaints in accordance with service standards, to ensure all matters are resolved and closed.

2.9 Monitoring

The CEO is responsible for monitoring corporate compliance with this policy and following up with the appropriate Library section as required.

2.10 Unreasonable Complaints

Unreasonable complaints will be handled in accordance with Appendix B to this Policy.

2.11 Library Board

If, after exhausting all complaint review processes as established by this policy, the complainant believes that the review of the complaint undertaken was inadequate, they may refer the complaint to the Library Board for further investigation.

3.0 References

OP17 – Rules of Conduct – Patrons

FN04 – Intellectual Freedom

OP04 – Collection Development

ADMIN-HR05 – Harassment and Discrimination-Free Workplace

ADMIN-AP53 – Employee Code of Conduct

Municipal Freedom of Information and Privacy Act

Public Libraries Act, R.S.O. 1991, c. P.44

Complaint Representative Consent Form

I, _____,

Please print

Consent to have all communications and information relating to my complaint with the Stouffville Library disclosed to my representative.

Name of Complainant's Representative:
Signature of Complainant:
Date:

Personal information on this form is collected under the authority of Section 227 (c) of the *Municipal Act, 2001*, S.O. 2001, c. 25. This information will be used to confirm your consent under Section 32 (b) of the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. M.56 to disclose information relating to your complaint to the third party you identified. Questions about this collection can be directed to the CEO, 2 Park Drive, Stouffville, ON L4A 4K1, 905 642-7323, extension 5221, or at wsplinfo@wspLibrary.ca.

Appendix B

Staff Guidelines for Addressing Unreasonable Requests/Complaints

In order for the Library to benefit from continuous improvement, feedback, including complaints, is vital. The Library is committed to service excellence and customer satisfaction. The Library recognizes that there may be times when the quality of the services provided does not meet the user's expectations. Receipt of a complaint provides staff with an opportunity to look at the specific service through the eyes of the user.

The Library acknowledges that as a level of government and arbiter of rules, it is held to a high standard by requestors and complainants.

Concurrently, the Library has a duty to provide a safe working environment for its employees which is free from the following:

Cyberbullying means the use of communication technologies to engage in deliberate, repeated or hostile behaviour intended to harm, embarrass, harass or slander someone deliberately, including, but not limited to: social media outlets (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube), personal blogs, web pages, discussion groups or online media/newspaper articles.

Discrimination means an action or a decision that treats a person or a group negatively for reasons such as their race, age or disability. The Ontario Human Rights Code sets out a legal definition of discrimination and establishes the prohibited grounds.

Harassment means engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome.

Intimidation means unwarranted conduct, including, but not limited to: cyberbullying, discrimination, harassment, violence or threats of violence, profanity, personal insults or communication that is deemed threatening.

Vexation means a complaint that is without merit and pursued in a manner that is reasonably perceived by staff to be malicious, intended to embarrass or harass the recipient or intended to be a nuisance.

Violence means:

- (a) The exercise of physical force by a person against an employee, in a workplace, that causes or could cause physical injury to the employee
- (b) An attempt to exercise physical force against an employee, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the employee

- (c) A statement or behaviour that it is reasonable for an employee to interpret as a threat to exercise physical force against the employee, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the employee

As a result, guidelines for addressing unreasonable requests or complaints are necessary in order to balance the Library's desire to encourage public input while at the same time protecting employees in accordance with provincial laws.

What constitutes an Unreasonable Request or Complaint?

An unreasonable request/complaint is one where there is reasonable grounds to believe that the request or complaint:

- a) Is submitted for their nuisance value
- b) Would interfere with the operations of the Library
- c) Is made in bad faith
- d) Has been made more than once and is being used for the purpose of revisiting an issue that has been previously addressed or resolved
- e) Is articulated in such a way that it can be considered harassing or abusive

Addressing an unreasonable request/complaint:

In determining whether a request/complaint is unreasonable, staff shall provide all supporting materials (i.e. E-mails, letters and staff notes documenting a conversation or incident) and advise the CEO of the steps that have been taken to resolve the issue including:

- a) The length of time that staff have been in contact with the requestor/complainant
- b) The amount of correspondence that has been exchanged with the requestor/complainant
- c) The number of requests/complaints that the requestor/complainant has made on the same matter or substantially similar facts and the status of each
- d) A description of the nature of the requestor/complainant's behaviour and/or demeanour

A pattern of conduct must be established through documented evidence. In order to determine that a pattern of conduct exists, the request or complaint should meet one or more of the following requirements:

- a) Is the request/complaint excessively broad, varied in scope or unusually detailed and the requestor/complainant unwilling to clarify or simplify the request or complaint?
- b) Is the request/complaint identical or substantially similar to a previous one?
- c) Is there evidence of dishonesty, underhandedness or "bad faith" from the complainant?
- d) Is there documentation of an inordinate length of staff time spent addressing the request?

There is no fixed number of actions required to establish a pattern of conduct of unreasonable requests or complaints. Instead, the CEO must review each case on its own merits to determine whether there is sufficient evidence of a continuity of purpose or intent to justify claiming there are reasonable grounds to believe that the request or complaint is unreasonable.

The CEO is responsible for reviewing the information provided by staff and determining if the matter should be escalated to the Library Board. Before escalating the matter to the Library Board, the CEO must be satisfied that the matter is an unreasonable request or complaint and ensure that there is adequate evidence to support this position.

The CEO should immediately bring the following to the attention of the Library Board:

- Any implied or explicit threats made against the safety of a staff member or the safety of others
- Any intimidating behaviour which may be established by the content, tone, and language of the person's correspondence, especially if the language used is insulting, offensive or abusive
- Any unsubstantiated, derogatory, or inflammatory allegations made against staff
- Any harassment or discrimination

The CEO is responsible for investigating any unreasonable request brought forward by staff. If the CEO is satisfied that there is adequate evidence to support that the request or complaint being deemed unreasonable, the CEO may:

- a) Request a face-to-face meeting with the requestor or complainant and relevant staff (if applicable) in order to identify any misunderstandings and attempt to resolve the issue
- b) Require the requestor/complainant clarify and/or simplify any overly broad requests/complaints
- c) Issue the requestor/complainant a warning letter advising the requestor/complainant that further correspondence with staff is to be in a particular format (i.e. e-mail only), or at a specific time (i.e. at specific times and days of the week), or for a specific duration (i.e. conversations may not be longer than 10 minutes)
- d) Restrict the requestor/complainant to a particular point of contact and advise staff to refer the requestor/complainant to that point of contact
- e) Advise the requestor/complainant that any face-to-face interactions between the requestor/complainant and staff are to take place in the presence of an appropriate witness
- f) Require the requestor/complainant produce full disclosure of documentation or information before staff will further investigate a request or complaint and advise the requestor/complainant to wait for that documentation or information to be reviewed and an investigation to be concluded before contacting staff

In extreme circumstances, where the CEO recommends that the requestor or complainant be advised that staff will not respond any further to the request or complaint, or a substantially similar request or complaint, the CEO will first seek concurrence with the Library Board. If the Library Board is in agreement with the CEO's recommendations, then the CEO will advise requestor or complainant that their request or complaint has been closed.