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## **SAMPLE WHISTLEBLOWER POLICY**

### **AS OF DECEMBER 1, 2009**

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#### **NOTE ON THE SCOPE OF THIS MATERIAL**

This material is designed to provide general guidance about an aspect of nonprofit corporate governance in the specific and limited context of the governance questions contained in the new IRS Form 990 (published by the IRS in 2008 and applicable to 990 filers based on a 2009-2011 filing year phase-in period depending on the size of the nonprofit). It is intended to provide some general guidance on the establishment of processes and/or policies to address a specific governance question in the Form. The subject matter of that question implicates a broad array of legal and practical issues ranging far beyond the immediate subject matter of the question itself. This material may address some of those issues but does NOT attempt to review them comprehensively and is NOT intended to be relied on for guidance on how they should be addressed in any specific situation.

Whether or not a nonprofit organization adopts a specific governance process or policy (or modifies an existing one), either in response to the disclosure requirements of the new IRS Form 990 or to change its governance practices for other reasons is a matter to be carefully considered by that organization, with input from its board and advisors and evaluation of its specific circumstances. The IRS has explicitly stated that adoption of the policies and practices about which the new Form 990 asks is not mandatory, although the IRS has also indicated that it attaches significance to the manner in which all tax-exempt nonprofit organizations govern themselves. These sample policies are not intended to suggest that the policy is appropriate for every nonprofit organization nor that, if a policy on that topic is determined to be appropriate, the formulations in the samples necessarily fit the needs of an individual nonprofit organization. A customized approach, with outside professional advice, is recommended. Accordingly, this material is intended as general information for legal practitioners advising nonprofit organizations as to their governance and does not constitute legal advice for any particular nonprofit organization. For more information, see the related Form 990 Policy Series Memorandum at:

<http://www.publiccounsel.org/tools/assets/files/WBMemo.pdf>.

Although the subject matter of this material may have relevance to nonprofit organizations that are not required to file informational tax returns with the IRS or are permitted to file on an IRS form other than Form 990, the focus of this material is 990 filers. While this material is meant to apply to Form 990 filers who are exempt under Section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code, certain portions of this material may be applicable only to Section 501(c)(3) organizations. In addition, although this material may be of assistance with respect to nonprofit organizations that are not subject to oversight under California law, there may be portions of this material that are relevant only to nonprofits organized under, or (by reason of their California-related activities) otherwise subject to, California law.

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#### **WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION POLICY**

**A. Application.** This Whistleblower Protection Policy applies to all of the Organization's staff, whether full-time, part-time, or temporary employees, to all volunteers, to all who provide contract services, and to all officers and directors, each of whom shall be entitled to protection.

**B. Reporting Credible Information.** A protected person shall be encouraged to report information relating to illegal practices or violations of policies of the Organization (a "Violation") that such person in good faith has reasonable cause to believe is credible. Information shall be reported to the [Insert title of person designated for this position]

(the “Compliance Officer”), unless the report relates to the Compliance Officer, in which case the report shall be made to [Insert another person’s title, or the Board of Directors, or the Audit Committee or another appropriate committee of the Board of Directors] which shall be responsible to provide an alternative procedure.

Anyone reporting a Violation must act in good faith, and have reasonable grounds for believing that the information shared in the report indicates that a Violation has occurred.

C. Investigating Information. The Compliance Officer shall promptly investigate each such report and prepare a written report to the Board of Directors. In connection with such investigation all persons entitled to protection shall provide the Compliance Officer with credible information. All actions of the Compliance Officer in receiving and investigating the report and additional information shall endeavor to protect the confidentiality of all persons entitled to protection.

D. Confidentiality

The Organization encourages anyone reporting a Violation to identify himself or herself when making a report in order to facilitate the investigation of the Violation. However, reports may be submitted anonymously by *[select one or more of the following (or insert other procedure):* [filling out a “Whistleblower Reporting Form” and depositing the form in a designated box] / [filling out a “Whistleblower Reporting Form” and mailing it to [insert appropriate recipient, such as the chair of the appropriate committee]] / [calling the anonymous hotline established by the Organization for this purpose]*]. Reports of Violations or suspected Violations will be kept confidential to the extent possible, with the understanding that confidentiality may not be maintained where identification is required by law or in order to enable the Organization or law enforcement to conduct an adequate investigation.*

E. Protection from Retaliation. No person entitled to protection shall be subjected to retaliation, intimidation, harassment, or other adverse action for reporting information in accordance with this Policy. Any person entitled to protection who believes that he or she is the subject of any form of retaliation for such participation should immediately report the same as a violation of and in accordance with this Policy.

Any individual within the Organization who retaliates against another individual who has reported a Violation in good faith or who, in good faith, has cooperated in the investigation of a Violation is subject to discipline, including termination of employment or volunteer status.

F. Dissemination and Implementation of Policy. This Policy shall be disseminated in writing to all affected constituencies. The Organization shall adopt procedures for implementation of this Policy, which may include:

- (1) documenting reported Violations;

- (2) working with legal counsel to decide whether the reported Violation requires review by the Compliance Officer or should be directed to another person or department;
- (3) keeping the board of directors [and the audit committee or other applicable committee] informed of the progress of the investigation;
- (4) interviewing employees;
- (5) requesting and reviewing relevant documents, and/or requesting that an auditor or counsel investigate the complaint; and
- (6) preparing a written record of the reported violation and its disposition, to be retained for a specified period of time.

The procedures for implementation of this Policy shall include a process for communicating with a complainant about the status of the complaint, to the extent that the complainant's identity is disclosed, and to the extent consistent with any privacy or confidentiality limitations.