



Valley Board of REALTORS®
Professional Standards



Ethics Complaint Packet

Thank you for your inquiry. We ask that you review the following pages before you file an ethics complaint.

Please direct questions to the **Valley Board of REALTORS®**, and/or submit an ethics complaint by email or mail:

- Phone: 907-376-5080
- Email: valleybd@vbrealtors.org
- Mail: **Valley Board of REALTORS®**
Professional Standards Administrator
741 East Susitna Avenue
Wasilla, Alaska 99654

Due to the confidentiality and seriousness of ethics complaints, local board staff and board members must limit their discussion with someone who may file a complaint. You are encouraged to make inquiries only with the VBR Professional Standards Administrator. *Thank you.*

Attachments: National Association of REALTORS® Code of Ethics
Valley Board of REALTORS® Ethics Complaint Form E-1 (page 6 of this packet)

Before You File an Ethics Complaint -- Please Read

Background

Local boards and state associations of REALTORS® are responsible for enforcing the REALTORS® Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics imposes duties above, and in addition to those imposed by law or regulation which apply *only* to real estate professionals who choose to become REALTORS®.

Many difficulties between real estate professionals (whether REALTORS® or not) result from misunderstanding, miscommunication, or lack of adequate communication. If you have a problem with a real estate professional, you may want to speak with them or with a principal broker in the firm. Open, constructive discussion often resolves questions or differences, eliminating the need for further action.

If, after discussing matters with your real estate professional or a principal broker in that firm, you are still not satisfied, you may want to contact the local board or state association; both offer informal dispute resolving processes available to consumers including ombudsmen and mediation.

If, after taking these steps, you still feel you have a grievance, you may want to consider filing an ethics complaint. You will want to keep in mind that:

- Only REALTORS® and REALTOR-ASSOCIATES® are subject to the Code of Ethics of the National Association of REALTORS®.
- If the real estate professional (or their broker) you are dealing with is not a REALTOR®, your only recourse may be the state real estate licensing authority or the courts.
- Boards of REALTORS® determine whether the Code of Ethics has been violated.
- Boards of REALTORS® do not determine whether the law or real estate regulations have been broken. Those decisions can only be made by the licensing authorities or the courts.
- Boards of REALTORS® can discipline REALTORS® for violating the Code of Ethics. Typical forms of discipline include attendance at courses and seminars designed to increase REALTORS®' understanding of the ethical duties or other responsibilities of real estate professionals. REALTORS® may also be reprimanded, fined, or their membership can be suspended or terminated for serious or repeated violations. Boards of REALTORS® cannot require REALTORS® to pay money to parties filing ethics complaints; cannot award "punitive damages" for violations of the Code of Ethics; and cannot suspend or revoke a real estate professional's license.
- The primary emphasis of discipline for ethical lapses is educational, to create a heightened awareness of and appreciation for the duties the Code imposes. At the same time, more severe forms of discipline, including fines and suspension and termination of membership may be imposed for serious or repeated violations.

Filing an Ethics Complaint

A local board or state association of REALTORS® can provide you with information on the procedures for filing an ethics complaint. Here are some general principles to keep in mind:

- Ethics complaints must be filed with the local board or state association of REALTORS® within 180 days from the time a complainant knew, or reasonably should have known, that potentially unethical conduct took place. If the Board's informal dispute resolution processes, such as ombudsman or mediation, are invoked in which case the filing deadline will momentarily be suspended.
- The REALTORS® Code of Ethics consists of 17 Articles. The duties imposed by many of the Articles are explained and illustrated through accompanying Standards of Practice or case interpretations. View the National Association of REALTORS® Code of Ethics at:
<https://www.nar.realtor/sites/default/files/documents/2020-Code-of-Ethics-and-Standards-of-Practice.pdf>
- Your complaint should include a narrative description of the circumstances that lead you to believe the Code of Ethics may have been violated.
- Complete an *Ethics Complaint Form E-1* (page 6 of this packet) and cite one or more of the Articles of the Code of Ethics which may have been violated. Hearing panels decide whether the Articles expressly cited in complaints were violated; not whether Standards of Practice or case interpretations were violated.
- The local board or state association of REALTORS® Grievance Committee may provide technical assistance in preparing a complaint in proper form and with proper content.

Prior to the Hearing

Your complaint will be reviewed by the local board or state association of REALTORS® Grievance Committee. Their job is to review complaints to determine if the allegations made, if taken as true, might support a violation of the Article(s) cited in the complaint.

- If the Grievance Committee dismisses your complaint, it does not mean they don't believe you. Rather, it means that they do not feel that your allegations would support a hearing panel's conclusion that the Article(s) cited in your complaint had been violated. You may want to review your complaint to see if you cited an Article appropriate to your allegations.
- If the Grievance Committee forwards your complaint for hearing, that does not mean they have decided the Code of Ethics has been violated. Rather, it means they feel that if what you allege in your complaint is found to have occurred by the hearing panel, that panel may have reason to find that a violation of the Code of Ethics occurred.
- If your complaint is dismissed as not requiring a hearing, you can appeal that dismissal to the board of directors of the local board or state association of REALTORS®.

Preparing for the Hearing

The Professional Standards Administrator will walk with you through the process.

Familiarize yourself with the hearing procedures that will be followed. You will want to know about challenging potential panel members, your right to counsel, calling witnesses, and the burdens and standards of proof that apply.

- Complainants have the ultimate responsibility ("burden") of proving that the Code of Ethics has been violated. The standard of proof that must be met is "*clear, strong and convincing*," defined as, ". . . *that measure or degree of proof which will produce a firm belief or conviction as to the allegations sought to be established.*" Consistent with American jurisprudence, respondents are considered innocent unless proven to have violated the Code of Ethics.
- Be sure that your witnesses and counsel will be available on the day of the hearing. Continuances are a privilege not a right.
- Be sure you have all the documents and other evidence you need to present your case.
- Organize your presentation in advance. Know what you are going to say and be prepared to demonstrate what happened **and how you believe the Code of Ethics was violated.**

During the Hearing

Appreciate that panel members are unpaid volunteers giving their time as an act of public service. Their objective is to be fair, unbiased, and impartial; to determine, based on the evidence and testimony presented to them, what occurred; and then to determine whether the facts as they find them support a finding that the Article(s) charged have been violated.

- Hearing panels cannot conclude that an Article of the Code has been violated unless that Article(s) is specifically cited in the complaint.
- Keep your presentation concise, factual, and to the point. Your task is to demonstrate what happened (or what should have happened but didn't), and how the facts support a violation of the Article(s) charged in the complaint.
- Hearing panels base their decisions on the evidence and testimony presented during the hearing. If you have information relevant to the issue(s) under consideration, be sure to bring it up during your presentation.
- Recognize that different people can witness the same event and have differing recollections about what they saw. The fact that a respondent or their witness recalls things differently doesn't mean they aren't telling the truth as they recall events. It is up to the hearing panel, in their Findings of Fact that will be part of their decision, to determine what happened.

- The hearing panel will pay careful attention to what you say and how you say it. An implausible account doesn't become more believable through repetition or through volume.
- You are involved in an adversarial process that is, to some degree, unavoidably confrontational. Many violations of the Code of Ethics result from misunderstanding or lack of awareness of ethical duties by otherwise well-meaning, responsible real estate professionals. An ethics complaint has potential to be viewed as an attack on a respondent's integrity and professionalism. For the enforcement process to function properly, it is imperative for all parties, witnesses, and panel members to maintain appropriate decorum.

After the Hearing

When you receive the hearing panel's decision, review it carefully.

- Findings of fact are the conclusions of impartial panel members based on their reasoned assessment of all the evidence and testimony presented during the hearing. Findings of Fact are not appealable.
- If you believe the hearing process was seriously flawed to the extent you were denied a full and fair hearing, there are appellate procedures that can be invoked. The fact that a hearing panel found no violation is not appealable.
- Refer to the procedures used by the local board or state association of REALTORS® for detailed information on the bases and time limits for appealing decisions or requesting a rehearing. Rehearing's are generally granted only when newly discovered evidence comes to light (a) which could not reasonably have been discovered and produced at the original hearing and (b) which might have had a bearing on the hearing panel's decision. Appeals brought by ethics respondents must be based on (a) a perceived misapplication or misinterpretation of one or more Articles of the Code of Ethics, (b) a procedural deficiency or failure of due process, or (c) the nature or gravity of the discipline proposed by the hearing panel. Appeals brought by ethics complainants are limited to procedural deficiencies or failures of due process that may have prevented a full and fair hearing.

Conclusion

Many ethics complaints result from misunderstanding or a failure in communication. Before filing an ethics complaint, make reasonable efforts to communicate with your real estate professional or a principal broker in the firm. If these efforts are not fruitful, the local board or state association of REALTORS® can give you the procedures and forms necessary to file an ethics complaint.



Valley Board of REALTORS®

Ethics Complaint Form # E-1

Complete and email to:
valleybd@vbrealtors.org

To the Grievance Committee of the Valley Board of REALTORS®
 Date filed: _____, 20 _____

Complainant(s) information:

Address
Phone Number
Email

Respondent(s) information:

Address
Phone Number
Email

Complainant(s) charge(s):

An alleged violation of **Article(s)** _____ of the Code of Ethics and/or other membership duty as set forth in the bylaws of the Board in Article VII, Section 1, 2, and 3 and alleges that the above charge(s) is/are supported by the attached statement, which is signed and dated by the complainant(s) and which explains when alleged violation(s) occurred and, if a different date, when the complaint(s) first knew about the alleged violations.

This complaint is true and correct to the best knowledge and belief of the undersigned and is filed within 180 days after the facts constituting the matter complained of could have been known in the exercise of reasonable diligence or within 180 days after the conclusion of the transaction, whichever is later.

Date(s) alleged violation(s) took place _____

Date of the closing or conclusion of the transaction, if applicable _____

Date(s) you became aware of the facts on which the alleged violation(s) (is/are) based _____

Are the circumstances giving rise to this ethics complaint involved in civil or criminal litigation or in any proceeding before the state real estate licensing authority or any other state or federal regulatory or administrative agency? **Yes** **No**

You may file an ethics complaint in any jurisdiction where a REALTOR® is a member or MLS participant. Note that the REALTOR® Code of Ethics, Standard of Practice 14-1 provides, in relevant part, "REALTORS® shall not be subject to disciplinary proceeding in more than one Board of REALTORS® . . . with respect to alleged violations of the Code of Ethics relating to the same transaction or event."

Have you filed, or do you intend to file, a similar or related complaint with another entity or association(s) of REALTORS®? **Yes** **No**

If so, name of other entity: _____ Date(s) filed: _____

I (we) declare that to the best of my (our) knowledge and belief, my (our) allegations in this complaint are true. I (we) understand that should the Grievance Committee dismiss this ethics complaint in part or in total, that I have 20 days from transmittal of the dismissal notice to appeal the dismissal to the Board of Directors.

Complainant(s) Signature(s)

_____	_____	_____
Print Name	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Print Name	Date	Signature