



# Whistleblower Policy

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Drafted by	Andria Pugh	Approved by Board on	January 2020
Responsible person	Rita Lang	Scheduled review date	January 2021

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Bridges is committed to fostering a culture of legal, ethical and moral behaviour and exemplary corporate governance.
- 1.2 Bridges recognises the value of transparency and accountability in its administrative and management practices, and supports the reporting of improper conduct.
- 1.3 This Whistleblower Policy and Procedure has been developed so that people can raise concerns regarding situations where they believe that Bridges or anybody connected with Bridges has acted in a way that constitutes serious wrongdoing, including unethical, illegal, corrupt or other inappropriate conduct, as set out below.

## 2. Purpose

- 2.1 This Policy aims to:
  - a) encourage a person to report improper conduct in good faith if they know or have reasonable grounds to suspect such conduct
  - b) provide a mechanism to report misconduct or dishonest or illegal activity that has occurred or is suspected within the organisation
  - c) enable Bridges to deal with reports from whistleblowers in a way that will protect the identity of the whistleblower and provide for secure storage of the information
  - d) ensure that any Reportable Conduct (see item 5) is identified and dealt with appropriately
  - e) ensure that individuals who disclose wrongdoing can do so safely, securely and with confidence that they will be protected and supported, and
  - f) help to ensure that Bridges maintains the highest standards of ethical behaviour and integrity.

## 3. Scope

3.1 This policy applies to both current or former:

Employees	Directors	Contractors (including employees of contractors)	Volunteers	Suppliers & Funders	Consultants	Customers
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Within this policy all of these people are represented by the term “**Workers**”.

- 3.2 Although they are under no obligation to do so, any associate, family member or dependant of any person in the above groups of people may also speak up. If they do choose to speak up in line with this Policy, we will extend to them the relevant rights and protections under this Policy.

## 4. Principles

- 4.1 **Higher standard** – This Policy is designed to comply with Bridges legal obligations. If anything in this Policy is inconsistent with any law imposed on Bridges, that legal obligation or the “higher standard” will prevail over this Policy.
- 4.2 **Speak up and report it!** – We encourage Workers at Bridges to report any concerns in line with our policies and procedures.
- 4.3 **Our expectations of Workers** – Bridges expects Workers to act honestly and ethically, and to make any report on reasonable grounds.
- 4.4 **Our responsibility to Whistleblowers** – Our obligations to Workers are spelled out in this policy, but in particular in section 6 ‘Protection’.
- 4.5 **Confidentiality and consent** - Bridges will maintain confidentiality of all reports and protect the identity of whistleblowers to the fullest extent possible. While Bridges encourages Whistleblowers to identify themselves, you may opt to report your concerns anonymously.

## 5. Reportable Conduct

### 5.1 Who can make a report?

- 5.1.1 A Whistleblower is a person who, whether anonymously or not, attempts to report misconduct or dishonest or illegal activity that has occurred in connection with Bridges, and wishes to avail themselves of protection against reprisal for having made the report.
- 5.1.2 A Whistleblower may be a current or former Worker with Bridges.

### 5.2 What is Reportable Conduct?

- 5.2.1 A whistleblower may disclose any information that the person has reasonable grounds to suspect concerns misconduct, or an improper state of affairs or circumstances in relation to:
- Bridges
- 5.2.2 Reportable Conduct is any past, present or likely future activity, behaviour or state of affairs considered to be:
- dishonest;
  - corrupt (including soliciting, accepting or offering a bribe, or facilitating payments or other such benefits);
  - fraudulent;
  - illegal (including theft, drug sale or use, violence or threatened violence, or property damage);
  - in breach of regulation, internal policy or code (such as our Code of Conduct);
  - improper conduct relating to accounting, internal controls, compliance, actuarial, audit or other matters of concern to the whistleblower;
  - a serious impropriety or an improper state of affairs or circumstances;
  - endangering health or safety;
  - damaging or substantially risking damage to the environment;
  - a serious mismanagement of Bridges resources;

- k) detrimental to Bridges financial position or reputation;
- l) maladministration (an act or omission of a serious nature that is negligent, unjust, oppressive, discriminatory or is based on improper motives);
- m) concealing reportable conduct.

5.2.3 Reportable Conduct usually relates to the conduct of employees or directors, but it can also relate to the actions of a third party, such as a funder, customer/client, supplier or service provider.

### **5.3 What is *not* Reportable Conduct?**

5.3.1 While everybody is encouraged to speak up and report any concerns to Bridges, not all types of conduct are intended to be covered by this Policy or by the protections under the *Corporations Act 2001*. This Policy does not apply to complaints by our customers about the service or personal work-related grievances (see 5.3.2, 5.3.3 and 5.3.4), unless the grievance includes victimisation due to whistleblowing.

5.3.2 Personal work-related grievances are those that relate to the discloser's current or former employment with Bridges that might have implications for the discloser personally but do not:

- a) Have any other significant implications for Bridges (or another entity); or
- b) Relate to any conduct or alleged conduct about a disclosable matter (as set out in 5.2.2).

5.3.3 Personal work-related grievances include grievances such as interpersonal conflicts, decisions about promotions, decisions that do not involve a breach of workplace laws, or terms and conditions of employment.

5.3.4 However, personal work-related grievances may be covered by this policy where they include information about misconduct, an allegation that the entity has breached employment or other laws punishable by imprisonment by a period of 12 months or more, or the grievance includes victimisation due to whistleblowing.

### **5.4 What information do I need to make a report?**

5.4.1 To make a protected report you must know of or have reasonable grounds to suspect the Reportable Conduct.

5.4.2 For a report to be investigated, it must contain enough information to form a reasonable basis for investigation. It is important therefore that you provide as much information as possible. This includes any known details about the events underlying the report such as the:

- a) incident type;
- b) date;
- c) time;
- d) location;
- e) name of person(s) involved;
- f) possible witnesses to the events;
- g) evidence of the events (e.g. documents, emails)

5.4.3 In your report, include any steps you may have already taken to report the matter elsewhere or to resolve the concern.

## **5.5 How can I make a report?**

5.5.1 A report can be made to:

- a) The whistleblower protection officer (Bridges CEO)
- b) Alternatively if the disclosure contains allegations against any Bridges executive or where the Whistleblower has a reasonable belief that the whistleblower protection officer or investigator is not sufficiently independent, a report may be made to:

The Active Ageing & Disability Services Manager  
c/o Knox City Council  
511 Burwood Highway  
Wantirna 3152  
Tel: 03 9298 8000

5.5.2 Bridges will also protect individuals who have made a report in connection with Bridges:

- a) To the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (**ASIC**) or the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (**APRA**) or another Commonwealth regulatory body prescribed in legislation;
- b) To a legal practitioner for the purposes of obtaining legal advice or legal representation about whistleblower protections; or
- c) That qualifies as an emergency or public interest disclosure under the Corporations Act 2001(Cth). It is important that you understand the criteria for making a public interest or emergency disclosure and you may wish to consult an independent legal adviser before making a public interest or emergency disclosure.

5.5.3 While Bridges encourages you to identify yourself to the Whistleblower Protection Officer (Bridges CEO), you may opt to report your concerns anonymously such as by adopting a pseudonym.

## **6. Protection**

### **6.1 How will I be protected if I speak up about Reportable Conduct?**

6.1.1 If you have reasonable grounds to suspect Reportable Conduct, even if it turns out your concerns are mistaken, Bridges will support and protect you and anyone else assisting in the investigation.

6.1.2 Bridges will not tolerate any detriment inflicted on you because you or somebody else has made, or might make, a report of Reportable Conduct. Examples of a detriment include:

- a) retaliation, dismissal, suspension, demotion, or termination of your role;
- b) bullying, harassment, threats or intimidation;
- c) discrimination, subject to current or future bias, or derogatory treatment;
- d) harm or injury;
- e) damage or threats to your property, business, financial position or reputation; or
- f) revealing your identity as a Whistleblower without your consent or contrary to law;
- g) threatening to carry out any of the above actions.

6.1.3 This protection applies regardless of whether any concerns raised in a report are found to be true, provided that you are acting honestly and ethically and made the report on reasonable grounds.

6.1.4 This protection also applies to individuals conducting, assisting or participating in an investigation. You will also be entitled to the protection if you make a report of Reportable Conduct to an external body under this Policy.

6.1.5 Anyone found to be victimising or disadvantaging another individual for making a disclosure under this Policy will be disciplined and may be dismissed or subject to criminal or civil penalties.

6.1.6 If you believe you have suffered a detriment in violation of this Policy, we encourage you to report this immediately to:

The Active Ageing & Disability Services Manager  
c/o Knox City Council  
511 Burwood Highway  
Wantirna 3152

Your concerns of being disadvantaged will be treated as a report of Reportable Conduct in line with this Policy.

6.1.7 Anyone engaging in detrimental conduct may be subject to serious consequences, including disciplinary action and/or termination of engagements or contracts, as applicable. They may also be subject to civil and criminal penalties.

## **6.2 How will Bridges ensure confidentiality?**

6.2.1 A whistleblower can choose to remain anonymous while making a disclosure, over the course of the investigation and after the investigation is finalised. Bridges will do all it can to protect confidentiality.

6.2.2 However, we encourage all individuals to disclose their identity when raising a concern. This will assist us to gather further information on your report. If you choose to disclose your identity, your details will be treated confidentially to the fullest extent possible. Bridges will take measures to protect your identity such as by redacting your personal information, storing your information and disclosure securely, referring to you in a gender-neutral context and only allowing qualified staff to investigate your disclosures.

6.2.3 You may choose to report your concerns anonymously. However, if you choose to disclose your identity, your details will be treated confidentially to the fullest extent possible in connection with the investigation, and your identity will not be disclosed unless:

- a) you consent in writing to the disclosure;
- b) the disclosure is made to ASIC, APRA or the Australian Federal Police (AFP);
- c) the disclosure is made to a Legal Practitioner for the purpose of obtaining advice;
- d) the disclosure is authorised under the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth); and/or
- e) disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a threat to a person's health, safety or welfare.

6.2.4 We encourage all individuals to disclose their identity when raising a concern. This will assist us to gather further information on your report. All information relating to a report of Reportable Conduct will be stored securely and access will be limited to authorised staff.

6.2.5 It is illegal for a person to identify a whistleblower, or disclose information that is likely to lead to the identification of the whistleblower unless an exception above applies. If you feel that your confidentiality has been breached, you can lodge a complaint with:

The Active Ageing & Disability Services Manager, c/o Knox City Council  
A regulator, such as ASIC, APRA or the ATO, for investigation.  
Bridges may also take disciplinary action against individuals that breach the confidentiality of a discloser, including summary dismissal.

### **6.3 False reports or disclosures**

- 6.3.1 Protected Disclosures must be made on reasonable grounds. Anyone who knowingly makes a false report/disclosure of Reportable Conduct may be subject to disciplinary action, including dismissal.
- 6.3.2 The disciplinary action will depend on the severity, nature and circumstance of the false disclosure.

## **7. Handling and investigating a disclosure**

- 7.1.1 Within 7 days of receiving a Protected Disclosure, Bridges Whistleblower protection officer will endeavour to assess the disclosure to determine whether:
  - a) It qualifies for protection; and
  - b) A formal, in-depth investigation is required.
- 7.1.2 Bridges will endeavour to provide the whistleblower with regular updates, however Bridges may not be able to investigate a disclosure if it is unable to contact the whistleblower.
- 7.1.3 Bridges will handle and investigate Protected Disclosures in accordance with the Whistleblowing Procedure (See Whistleblower procedure WB1)

## **8. Monitoring and Review**

- 8.1 This Policy will be distributed and available to all Workers via the Bridges website. A hard copy will be made available upon request.
- 8.2 To ensure effective protection under the Whistleblower Policy, Bridges board of directors will monitor and review this Policy on an annual basis.

## **9. Related Documents**

- 9.1 Whistleblowing Procedure
- 9.2 Bridges Code of Conduct Policy
- 9.3 Bridges Customer Complaints Policy
- 9.4 Bridges Grievance Policy
- 9.5 Corporations Act 2001
- 9.6 Bridges Board Governance Policy
- 9.7 Bridges Definitions Document