ENVIRONMENTAL & SUSTAINABILITY SECTOR

HUMAN RESOURCE POLICY MANUAL

A General HR Policy Framework for Environmental & Sustainability-Sector Non-Profit Organisations

THE MANGROVE FOUNDATION OF INDIA

VERSION 1.0

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Pulicat · Tamil Nadu · India

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1. Introduction & Purpose

The Mangrove Foundation of India ("the Foundation", "the Organisation") is a mission-driven, non-profit trust working on mangrove and forest restoration, blue-carbon and agroforestry project development, wetland conservation, climate education, and community livelihoods. Our people — permanent staff, project staff, consultants, field coordinators, volunteers, and interns — are the foundation's most valuable resource in delivering this mission.

This Human Resource Policy Manual ("the Manual") sets out the principles, entitlements, and procedures that govern the employment relationship between the Foundation and everyone who works for it. It is written to apply broadly across environmental and sustainability-sector non-profits — organisations that combine office-based programme and finance functions with extensive field operations in remote, ecologically sensitive, and often climate-vulnerable locations.

The purpose of this Manual is to: (a) ensure fair, transparent, and consistent treatment of all personnel; (b) protect the safety and wellbeing of staff working in field conditions; (c) safeguard the communities, children, and ecosystems we work with; (d) meet statutory and donor compliance obligations; and (e) reinforce a culture consistent with the values we ask the world to practise — integrity, sustainability, and respect.

2. Applicability & Scope

This Manual applies to all categories of personnel engaged by the Foundation, including regular/permanent employees, fixed-term or project-based staff, consultants and retainers, field coordinators and community mobilisers, volunteers, interns, and fellows, across all offices, project sites, and field stations, in every state in which the Organisation operates.

Where a specific clause applies only to a particular category of personnel (for example, statutory benefits that apply only to employees on payroll, and not to volunteers or consultants engaged on a service-fee basis), this is stated explicitly within the relevant section.

This Manual supersedes any earlier HR policy, handbook, or informal practice on the same subject matter. Where any clause conflicts with applicable law, the law will prevail, and the Organisation will amend the clause accordingly.

3. Guiding Principles

All HR policies and decisions at the Foundation are guided by the following principles:

- Mission alignment — our people practices should strengthen, not compete with, our ecological and community goals.
- Integrity and transparency — in recruitment, compensation, and decision-making.
- Community respect — staff represent the Organisation in the communities we serve, and are expected to conduct themselves accordingly.
- Safety first — particularly for field-based, tidal, forest, and wetland work, where risks differ materially from office-based work.
- Equity and inclusion — fair treatment regardless of background, and deliberate inclusion of local and indigenous community members in our workforce.
- Continuous learning — investment in the technical and scientific skills (ecological monitoring, MRV, GIS, carbon methodologies, community facilitation) our sector demands.

4. Equal Opportunity, Diversity & Non-Discrimination

the Foundation is an equal opportunity employer. Recruitment, promotion, compensation, training, and all other terms of employment are based on merit, qualifications, and organisational need, without regard to caste, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, ethnicity, place of origin, or political affiliation.

Given that our project locations often lie within or near indigenous and local coastal, forest, and farming communities, the Foundation is committed to actively encouraging applications from qualified candidates within these communities, and to providing reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities wherever the role and field conditions permit.

Any employee who believes they have experienced discrimination should raise the matter through the Grievance Redressal Mechanism described in Section 19.

5. Recruitment, Selection & Onboarding

5.1 Recruitment

All vacancies are filled through a documented, merit-based process: a written role description, an approved requisition, advertisement (internally and/or externally, including within relevant project communities where appropriate), shortlisting against defined criteria, and a structured interview.

- At least two members of staff, or one staff member and one Trustee/senior advisor for leadership roles, should be involved in final selection decisions.
- Reference checks are mandatory for all confirmed hires.
- Roles that involve direct, unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable community members require an additional background/character verification, consistent with the Child & Community Safeguarding Policy (Section 15).

5.2 Onboarding

New joiners receive a documented induction covering: organisational mission and programmes, this Manual, the Code of Conduct, the POSH policy, the Child & Community Safeguarding Policy, health and safety procedures for field visits, and role-specific training. Field-facing staff additionally receive orientation on site-specific hazards (tidal timing, terrain, wildlife, remoteness) before their first independent field visit.

6. Categories of Personnel

Given the mixed funding and delivery model typical of environmental NGOs (core trust funding, project/CSR grants, and field operations), personnel are engaged under one of the following categories, each with distinct terms:

- Regular/Permanent Staff — engaged on an open-ended basis against core or diversified funding, eligible for the full benefits described in this Manual.
- Fixed-Term / Project Staff — engaged for the duration of a specific grant or project (e.g. a Verra/Gold Standard project cycle); eligible for statutory benefits pro-rata and most policy provisions, subject to the term of the underlying grant.
- Consultants & Retainers — engaged for defined deliverables under a service agreement; governed by that agreement and the Code of Conduct, but not by the compensation, leave, or benefits sections of this Manual.
- Field Coordinators & Community Mobilisers — often recruited from local/project communities; covered under Regular or Fixed-Term terms as applicable, with additional field allowances described in Section 11.
- Volunteers, Interns & Fellows — engaged under a separate Volunteer/Internship Agreement; see Section 22.

7. Terms of Employment & Probation

Every employee receives a written offer/appointment letter specifying role, reporting line, compensation, place of posting (including expected field travel), and applicable notice period.

New employees serve a probation period of three (3) to six (6) months, as specified in their appointment letter, during which either party may end the engagement with fourteen (14) days' written notice. Confirmation in writing follows successful completion of probation; the probation period may be extended once, by up to three months, where performance needs further assessment.

Fixed-term/project staff are engaged for a term tied to the funding period of the relevant project and are informed in writing if their contract will or will not be renewed, with as much notice as the funding cycle reasonably allows.

8. Working Hours, Attendance & Field Duty

Standard office working hours are 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday to Saturday (or as locally notified), with a lunch break, totalling approximately 40–45 hours per week, consistent with applicable state Shops & Establishments rules.

Field-based work (plantation drives, monitoring visits, community meetings) is often dictated by tide timing, weather, daylight, and community availability rather than fixed office hours. Field schedules are approved in advance by the reporting manager, and staff undertaking early-morning, late-evening, or multi-day field visits are entitled to compensatory time off, taken within 30 days of the field assignment.

Attendance is recorded through the Organisation's designated system (biometric, digital, or manual register as locally applicable). Persistent unexplained absence is addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure (Section 20).

9. Compensation, Benefits & Statutory Compliance

Compensation is set with reference to role, experience, sector benchmarks, and the funding available for the position, and is reviewed at least annually, subject to organisational and project budgets.

the Foundation complies with all applicable statutory requirements, including (where thresholds under the relevant Act are met) contributions to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), Employees' State Insurance (ESI), Professional Tax, Gratuity under the Payment of Gratuity Act, and timely deduction/deposit of income tax at source. Salaries are disbursed by the 7th working day of the following month, by bank transfer, with a payslip issued each month.

Where organisational resources permit, the Organisation additionally provides group personal accident and/or health insurance cover, particularly for field-facing staff, given the elevated-risk nature of fieldwork in coastal, wetland, and forest environments.

10. Leave Policy

Leave entitlement for regular and fixed-term staff is kept simple and uniform across categories:

- Leave accrues at 2 (two) days per month, for a total of 24 (twenty-four) days per year, credited monthly and calculated pro-rata for staff joining or leaving mid-year/mid-month.
- All leave is paid only where it has been requested and approved in advance by the reporting manager; leave taken without prior approval, or in excess of the accrued/approved balance, is treated as unpaid (Leave Without Pay) unless the manager determines it was unavoidable (e.g. a genuine medical emergency).
- Leave requests should be submitted with as much notice as possible, and approval is confirmed in writing (email or the Organisation's leave-tracking system) before the leave is treated as sanctioned.
- Unused leave may be carried forward up to a cap of 30 days, beyond which it lapses at year-end, unless otherwise specified in the employee's appointment letter.
- Maternity Leave is provided separately, in accordance with the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (as amended), and does not draw against the standard 24-day annual entitlement.
- Bereavement Leave of up to 5 days, for the death of an immediate family member, is granted on request and does not require the standard advance-approval notice period.
- Compensatory Off (day-for-day) for approved weekend or public-holiday field duty, as described in Section 8, is tracked separately from the standard 24-day entitlement.

Field-season and project deadlines should be taken into account when planning leave, and managers may ask staff to reschedule a requested leave date (though not decline it outright) where a critical field or reporting commitment would otherwise be left uncovered.

11. Travel, Fieldwork & Reimbursement

Staff undertaking approved field travel are entitled to reimbursement of actual, reasonable travel, accommodation, and meal costs against submitted bills, or a pre-approved per-diem where receipts are impractical (e.g. remote village stays).

A Field/Hardship Allowance may be paid to staff regularly posted to, or travelling to, remote, difficult-terrain, or otherwise hardship locations, at a rate set by management and reviewed periodically.

Travel advances may be issued for planned field trips and must be settled with supporting documentation within 15 days of return. Staff must inform their manager and, where relevant, a designated safety contact, of their travel itinerary and expected return before departing for remote field locations.

12. Health, Safety & Field Security

Environmental fieldwork — mangrove and wetland restoration, forest and agroforestry monitoring, boat travel, tidal-zone work — carries risks distinct from office-based work, including tidal currents, uneven or waterlogged terrain, extreme heat, wildlife (including venomous or dangerous species), and remoteness from medical facilities. This section applies in addition to any location-specific safety protocol issued for a given project site.

- Personal protective equipment appropriate to the task (boots, gloves, sun protection, life jackets for boat travel) is provided and its use is mandatory.
- A stocked first-aid kit and emergency contact list must accompany every field team; at least one team member should hold basic first-aid training.
- Solo fieldwork in remote or high-risk locations is discouraged; field teams should operate in pairs or groups wherever feasible, with a check-in protocol to a designated office contact.
- All accidents, near-misses, and injuries during fieldwork must be reported to the reporting manager within 24 hours and logged in an incident register, which is reviewed periodically to improve safety practice.

Staff have the right to decline or postpone a field assignment they reasonably believe to be unsafe (e.g. due to severe weather, flooding, or civil unrest), without adverse consequence, and should report the concern to their manager immediately.

13. Code of Conduct & Ethics

All personnel are expected to act with honesty, professionalism, and respect toward colleagues, communities, donors, government counterparts, and the environment, both on duty and in a manner that does not bring the Foundation into disrepute.

- Conflict of interest — staff must declare any personal, financial, or family interest that could conflict with their duties (e.g. a relative supplying goods/services to the Organisation, or a personal stake in land under a carbon project) and recuse themselves from related decisions.
- Gifts and hospitality — staff may not solicit or accept gifts, cash, or favours from community members, contractors, vendors, or project beneficiaries beyond token/customary courtesies; any offer of value must be reported to the manager.
- Use of position — staff must not use their role, or the Organisation's name, for personal gain, or to pressure community members, farmers, or field partners.
- Political and religious neutrality — staff must not use organisational time, resources, or community access to promote personal political or religious activities.
- Environmental conduct — consistent with our mission, staff are expected to act responsibly toward the environment and the ecosystems we work to protect, including during field operations.

Breach of this Code is addressed under the Disciplinary Procedure (Section 20).

14. Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH)

the Foundation maintains a zero-tolerance policy toward sexual harassment in the workplace, in compliance with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. "Workplace" is interpreted broadly to include field sites, project vehicles, community meetings, training venues, and any location where staff are present in connection with their work.

The Organisation constitutes an Internal Committee (IC), chaired by a senior woman employee, including an external member with relevant expertise, to receive and inquire into complaints. Where staff strength is below the statutory threshold requiring a full IC, a Local Committee constituted under the Act, or a joint arrangement with a partner organisation, is used instead.

- Complaints may be filed in writing with the IC within 3 months of the incident (extendable by the IC for sufficient reason).
- Complaints are handled confidentially, and the Organisation prohibits retaliation against a complainant, respondent (pending inquiry), or witness.
- The IC completes its inquiry within 90 days and recommends action, up to and including termination, consistent with the Act.

All staff receive POSH orientation at induction and refresher awareness at least annually, including staff based primarily at field stations.

15. Child & Community Safeguarding

Because environmental and sustainability NGOs frequently engage with schools, youth groups, and vulnerable coastal, forest, and farming communities — including through climate education and community mobilisation activities — the Foundation maintains a dedicated safeguarding policy.

- Roles involving regular contact with children or vulnerable community members require background/character verification prior to confirmation.
- Staff must never be alone with a child without another adult present; photography or filming of children requires parental/guardian consent and is used only for legitimate organisational purposes.
- Staff must never use their position to exploit, financially or otherwise, any community member, and must treat all community interactions — including land, resource, and benefit-sharing discussions — with full transparency.
- Any suspicion or disclosure of abuse or exploitation, by a staff member, volunteer, contractor, or third party, must be reported immediately to the designated Safeguarding Focal Point and, where required by law, to the appropriate authorities.

Breach of this policy is treated as gross misconduct under Section 20 and may be reported to law enforcement, independent of any internal process.

16. Anti-Corruption, Fraud & Whistleblower Protection

Given that environmental NGOs typically operate on public donor, CSR, and carbon-finance funding, financial integrity is treated with particular seriousness. Staff must not misappropriate, misreport, or divert organisational funds or assets, falsify project data (including plantation, survival, or carbon-sequestration figures), or facilitate bribery in any form.

the Foundation maintains a confidential channel (a designated email address and/or a Trustee contact) through which any staff member, volunteer, or third party may report suspected fraud, corruption, or data falsification without fear of retaliation. Reports are investigated promptly, and any staff member found to have retaliated against a good-faith whistleblower is subject to disciplinary action.

17. Performance Management & Capacity Building

Performance is reviewed at least annually against role objectives agreed with the reporting manager, linked where relevant to programme-level indicators (area restored, survival rates, farmers/community members supported, training delivered).

the Foundation invests in the technical and soft skills the sector demands — ecological monitoring and MRV, GIS and remote sensing, carbon project methodologies (e.g. VM0033, VM0047), community facilitation, and safeguarding — through a training budget reviewed annually, and encourages staff to pursue relevant external certifications.

18. IT, Data Protection & Use of Organisational Assets

Vehicles, GPS units, field equipment, laptops, and other organisational assets issued to staff must be used primarily for official purposes and returned in good condition on request or on separation. Loss or damage due to negligence may be recovered from the employee.

Personal data collected in the course of project work — including farmer, landholder, and community beneficiary data used for eligibility, KML mapping, and carbon-registry submissions — must be stored securely, accessed only on a need-to-know basis, and never shared externally without authorisation.

Official communications (with donors, government bodies, registries such as Verra or Gold Standard, or the media) should be made only by authorised staff; other staff should route such enquiries to their manager or the communications focal point.

19. Grievance Redressal Mechanism

Employees are encouraged to raise concerns informally with their reporting manager in the first instance. Where this is not appropriate or does not resolve the matter, a written grievance may be submitted to HR or a designated senior staff member/Trustee.

- Grievances are acknowledged within 5 working days and a response provided within 21 working days.
- Staff may escalate to the Board of Trustees where a grievance involves the Head of the Organisation or is not satisfactorily resolved.
- No employee will face retaliation for raising a grievance in good faith.

20. Disciplinary Procedure

Minor misconduct (e.g. repeated lateness, minor policy breaches) is addressed through verbal counselling, followed by a written warning if it recurs. Major misconduct (e.g. fraud, harassment, safeguarding breaches, serious safety violations, misuse of funds) may result in suspension pending inquiry and, if substantiated, termination.

In all cases, the employee is informed of the allegation in writing, given a reasonable opportunity to respond, and the matter is decided by someone not directly involved in the incident, consistent with principles of natural justice.

21. Separation & Exit

Employees wishing to resign must provide written notice as specified in their appointment letter (typically 30–60 days for regular staff; shorter for project staff nearing contract end). The Organisation may waive part of the notice period at its discretion.

On separation, staff complete an exit interview, return all organisational assets and data, and receive full and final settlement (including any earned leave encashment) within 30–45 days, along with a relieving/experience letter on request.

22. Volunteer & Intern Management

Volunteers, interns, and fellows are engaged under a separate written agreement setting out their role, duration, any stipend, and supervision arrangements, and receive the same safety, POSH, and safeguarding orientation as staff before participating in field activities.

Volunteers participating in plantation drives or other field activities are covered by appropriate accident insurance for the duration of the activity, briefed on relevant hazards, and supervised by a designated staff member at all times.

23. Environmental Commitment — Internal Practice

Consistent with our mission, the Organisation seeks to minimise its own environmental footprint: preferring digital documentation over print, segregating and responsibly disposing of waste at office and field stations, favouring shared/public transport or fuel-efficient vehicles where field logistics allow, and using native, locally sourced planting material in restoration work.

All staff are encouraged to identify and suggest ways to reduce the Organisation's own operational footprint.

24. Policy Review & Amendment

This Manual is reviewed at least once every two years, or sooner where changes in law or organisational practice require it, and any amendment is approved by the Board of Trustees and communicated to all staff.

Acknowledgement

I confirm that I have received, read, and understood the The Mangrove Foundation of India Human Resource Policy Manual, and agree to abide by its provisions, including the Code of Conduct, POSH Policy, and Child & Community Safeguarding Policy.

Name: Mr. Meerasa Designation: Founder & Director

Signature: Date: 10/08/2024