



Partner Housing Australasia (Building) Incorporated
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Pro-bono professional services and funding for South Pacific
village infrastructure, housing, water, sanitation and training.

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As a member of Australian Council for International Development and signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct, we are committed to achieving high standards of financial reporting, management and ethical practice.

Complaints Handling

Policy

- (1) The Organisation recognises the importance and value of listening and responding to concerns and complaints. Receiving concerns and complaints is one of the most important ways of learning what we need to do to improve our work. Partner Housing and its Partner Organisations shall act together to adhere to the Complaints Handling Policy and the Procedures.
- (2) This policy applies to all our people – volunteers and partner organisations – and they are familiarised with it. Those with particular relevant responsibilities are trained in its application.
- (3) Access to the complaint handling process is free of charge to complainants.
- (4) The Organisation shall address all complaints in an equitable, fair and unbiased manner using evidence submitted by both the complainant and our personnel through the complaint handling process.
- (5) The implementation, reporting and monitoring compliance with this policy shall be as set below and the “Code of Conduct”.

Responsible Personnel

All personnel have a responsibility to ensure that the Policy and Procedures are observed. The personnel with specific tasks designated in the position descriptions, and/or most likely to be involved in implementation are Chief Executive Officer, Resource Development Manager, Administration Manager, Regional Managers and Project Managers.

Context

Continual improvement of the complaint handling process and the quality of services is one of our permanent objectives. To this end Partner Housing will:

- maintain data collection on complaints for the purpose of identifying trends for the
- purpose of enhancing information management and service provided;
- keep abreast of best practices (both locally and overseas) regarding complaint handling;
- foster a consumer/client-focused approach;
- undertake specific training and retraining of staff to foster better complaint handling practices;
- encourage innovation in complaint handling development; and
- recognise and reward exemplary complaint handling behaviour.

The Organisation will accept complaints relating to our volunteers, our partners, our contracted service providers or anyone else acting on our behalf.

A complaint may be made by a person to whom we deliver services or goods or who is affected by our services or goods, a partner, a local organisation we work, volunteers, donors or a member of the public.

Anonymous complaints can be made, but obviously our ability to investigate them may be limited because of this.

Procedures to ensure the complaint handling policies are understood

- A Memorandum of Understanding, including the relevant policy, shall be signed by each Partner Organisation.
- The Complaints Policy shall be distributed to all Directors and Regional Managers and reviewed in the context of this and other projects at each February Board Meeting.
- A report on any complaints in the context of the Partner Organisation shall be presented to the February Board Meeting and dealt with as per the Procedures.

How the Organisation will handle complaints

When oral complaints are made, Partner Housing personnel shall:

- Identify ourselves, listen, record details, and determine what the client wants;
- Confirm that we have understood and received the details;
- Show empathy for the client, but not attempt to take sides, lay blame, or become defensive;

For all complaints Partner Housing personnel shall:

- Seek from the client the outcome/s they are expecting;
- Make an initial assessment of the severity of the complaint and the urgency of action
- Clearly explain to the client the course of action that will follow:
 - if the complaint is out of our jurisdiction;
 - if we may exercise a discretion not to investigate;
 - if preliminary enquiries need to be made, or further consideration needs to be given: or
 - if the complaint is to be investigated.
- The Organisation shall not create false expectations, but assure the client that the complaint will receive full attention;
- Give an estimated timeframe or, if that is not possible, a date by which the Organisation will contact them again;
- Check whether the client is satisfied with the proposed action and, if not, advise them of alternatives.
- Ensure that the complaint is appropriately acknowledged;
- Follow up where necessary, and monitor whether the client is satisfied.
- The Organisation will register all complaints (see section 16)

Where appropriate, the Organisation shall ensure that personnel working in communities we serve have all necessary training to encourage and handle inquiries, expressions of concern and making of complaints so as to take account of cultural and gender sensitivities and to ensure that cases involving children are appropriately handled.

The Organisation will ensure that a complainant is not required to express their complaint to a person implicated in their complaint.

The Organisation shall also ensure that a person implicated in a complaint is not involved in any way with the handling of that complaint.

Initial Assessment of Complaint

The Organisation shall first assess whether there is more than one issue raised in the complaint and whether each needs to be separately addressed.

To determine how a complaint should be managed, the Organisation shall assess it in terms of the following criteria:

- a) severity;
- b) health (including mental health) and safety implications;
- c) financial implications for the complainant or others
- c) complexity;
- d) impact on the individual, public and organisation;
- e) potential to escalate; and
- f) the need for, and possibility of immediate action.

If the complaint is assessed as significant in terms of one or more of these criteria, it shall be classified accordingly.

Inquiries, Minor Complaints and Jurisdiction

The Organisation shall endeavour to deal immediately with inquiries and minor complaints which are made orally by telephone or in person i.e. during the initial phone call or meeting.

However, as far as possible, the Organisation shall ensure that the inquirer or complainant is completely satisfied with the information and or resolution provided.

On receipt of a complaint, the Organisation shall also attempt to determine expeditiously whether investigation is required or not depending on jurisdictional questions and whether the complaint is ill conceived.

If the complainant disputes an assessment that a complaint should not be investigated, the member of staff handling the complaint will refer it to a more senior colleague for review. If such a dispute is unresolvable the Organisation shall refer the complainant to Code Committee of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)

How the Organisation will investigate complaints

The Organisation shall make every reasonable effort to investigate all the relevant circumstances and information surrounding a complaint. The level of investigation will be commensurate with the seriousness and frequency of the complaint.

Timeframes

The Organisation shall acknowledge written complaints within 5 days.

The Organisation shall acknowledge oral complaints immediately.

The Organisation shall aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and within 30 days unless there are exceptional circumstances. If a complaint is not resolved within 30 days we will inform the complainant of progress and keep them informed of progress every two weeks.

How the Organisation will respond to and close a complaint

The President or a Board Member delegated by him/her will normally make the decision on a complaint that has required investigation (i.e. not a minor complaint). Decisions on serious complaints may be referred to the Board.

The Organisation shall communicate our decision on a complaint as soon as is practical. Our communication will be in writing in the appropriate language by email and/or post. However, where appropriate such as in the case of a complaint being made by a local community member (in the field) we will also communicate our decision orally and again in the appropriate language.

The Organisation shall encourage the complainant to respond and advise whether or not they are satisfied with our decision. In our decision we will advise that if a complainant is not satisfied we will be prepared to consider any additional information they may provide and to review our decision.

In all cases, the Organisation shall advise that the complaint may be referred to the Code Committee of ACFID. We will provide all necessary information for referral to the Code Committee and offer to assist in referral.

How the Organisation will learn from complaints

The Organisation shall ensure that all relevant personnel are informed of the outcomes of complaints and the implications for our services, goods, procedures and processes.

The Organisation shall take all required remedial action. We will be prepared to change the way in which we operate and improve or undertake further training of our people. Where needed we will counsel or discipline our people.

Where appropriate the Organisation shall consult and take advice from ACFID and/or other relevant regulatory/enforcement authorities.

Confidentiality

The Organisation shall not reveal a complainant's name or personal details to anyone in or outside our organisation other than the persons involved in handling the complaint without obtaining the complainant's permission. See also the Privacy Procedures

Complaint Data

The Organisation shall register all inquiries and complaints. The Organisation shall ensure that the following information is contained in written complaints and if not, and in the case of oral complaints, record this information ourselves:

- date of receipt
- a description of the complaint and relevant supporting data;
- the requested remedy;
- the service(s) and/or good(s) and/or practice or procedure complained about;
- the due date for a response;
- immediate action taken (if any) to resolve the complaint.

Reporting About Complaints

The Organisation shall immediately escalate complex and/or major complaints to the President or his/her delegate.

All complaints shall be reported at the next Board Meeting.

Minor complaints shall be reported in summary form. Major complaints shall be reported in detail.

Training

Members, Directors, Volunteers and Partner organisations shall be made aware of this policy and these procedures, by:

- Tabling and discussing them at the AGM;
- Tabling and discussing them at the February Board Meeting (as part of the training package);
- Including them with any brief provided to volunteers, contractors or other personnel working on behalf of the organisation. (Partner Housing is a voluntary organisation and does not employ staff); and
- Including them with any Memorandum of Understanding with Partner Organisations.

