

Managing Complaints

The purpose of this quick guide is to provide an overview of managing complaints for leaders of volunteers. Your organisation may also have policies and procedures you need to follow. In this document both complaint and feedback are used to describe the situation where a person shares they are unhappy or dissatisfied with a service, the way they were treated or an incident that occurred.

Complaints management

A complaint happens when someone is dissatisfied with a service offered or treatment received, and they let you know. Volunteers, clients, community members and staff should be provided with the opportunity to let you, or your organisation know.

A complaint management process can resolve problems before they escalate and provide appropriate outcomes for the person making the complaint. Your process should support a culture that is non-defensive and open to feedback.

Where possible allow complaints and feedback to be raised via multiple formats such as: phone, email, online form, post, and face to face.



Complaints management (continued)

The process should be accessible to everyone. This means taking active steps to understand and reduce any barriers to accessing the system. Pay particular attention to the needs of people who may be vulnerable due to age, disability, language, geographical, financial, or cultural reasons.

Having a process demonstrates your commitment to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about services, systems, practices, procedures, products, and complaint handling.

A process should ensure people making complaints are supported and provided with:

- information about the complaint handling process and how to access it
- assistance to lodge a complaint or access the process
- accessible options when a written complaint is not an option, such as staff to assist with documentation
- respect from staff and are actively involved in the complaint process where possible and appropriate
- reasons for decision/s and any options for redress or review
- outcomes within a reasonable time frame
- when there is an immediate risk to health a safety, control measures shall be put in place

Robust complaints management process

A robust process will include acknowledging the complaint, actions and responses, follow up and record keeping.

Acknowledgement

This step assures people that their concerns have been heard and understood and the impact on them is recognised. Some tips for doing this effectively include:

- actively listening without interrupting was the communication appropriate and timely?
- acknowledging how the situation has affected the person
- letting them know what steps you will take in response to their complaint

Actions / response

Your answers should provide clear explanations relevant to the concern while sticking to the known facts.

Some people want action to address their concerns. You may not always be able to fix the situation, but you can implement solutions to prevent it from occurring again. An effective way to do this is to develop an action plan. This should include:

- what will be done
- who will do it
- when it will be done by
- how you will communicate the progress and the outcomes

Provide a sincere response which includes:

- timelines
- accepting responsibility for what happened and the effect it had
- explaining any causes, without offering excuses
- summarising the actions you've agreed to take in response whilst still maintaining confidentiality

Follow up

Create the opportunity to reflect on the complaints process and any outcomes. This can be done by following up with the person that made the complaint. Feedback may be sought on the following:

- were their concerns resolved?
- was the communication appropriate and timely?
- how can the process be improved?

Keeping records

Information captured should support a record keeping system that enables easy monitoring to identify opportunities for improvement.

Key information to capture should include the following:

- information about the person making the complaint, only record information that is needed for the process
- when and how the complaint was made
- preferred method of communication (face to face, email, phone)
- what the complaint was about
- causes (rudeness, inaction, discrimination, accessibility)
- how the complaint was resolved
- outcomes (such as complaint upheld, not upheld, inconclusive)
- solutions
- further steps and timelines
- follow up and feedback

Process / Facilitate Feedback and Complaints

Identify a complaint management process in the Volunteer Handbook or the organisational induction process.

Provide clear information to assist with accessing and submitting the appropriate documents.

Receive and Acknowledge

Acknowledge the receipt of a complaint – formally in writing to establish a time frame to respond.

Communication

Communicate with the person making the complaint and /or their representative in a reasonable timeframe. Provide an overview of the expected process and timeframes to establish engagement in obtaining a well-considered outcome.

Consultation

Investigate the incident if required with statements documented. Maintain confidentiality throughout this process. Only disclose personal information that identifies individuals with considerations to relevant privacy obligations/policy.

Assessment / Consideration

Involve the person making the complaint and /or their representative in the assessment process as far as possible. Address each complaint with integrity and in an equitable, objective, and unbiased manner.

Outcome

Provide a clear, formal written outcome including reasons for the decision/s and any options for review. This may simply state the matter has been resolved and outline relevant changes that have been implemented because of complaint.

Additional information

Providing the appropriate resolution may be difficult. There are many things to consider, and you may not always have all the information you need. It may also be out of your control to resolve, however providing a person with further information on where to go may also be helpful. You can direct people to the following websites for more information.

- Australian Human Rights Commission - www.humanrights.gov.au
- Australian Competition and consumer commission – <https://www.accc.gov.au>
- The Australian Consumer Law - www.consumer.gov.au/australian-consumer-law
- Fair Work Commission - www.fwc.gov.au
- AFCA – Australia Financial Complaints Authority - www.afca.org.au



The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.

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