



Policy: Handling Complaints

1. Preamble

Pacific Aid Australia will deal constructively with complaints from its supporters, partners, the general public, donors and official bodies.

Pacific Aid Australia will keep this policy under review. As a small organisation, all complaints will be dealt with by the Board.

2. Overview

Transparent and independent handling of complaints will improve *Pacific Aid Australia's* accountability and the quality of its work. It will build the trust and confidence of stakeholders; identify areas of work that can be improved, and help *Pacific Aid Australia* to apply the lessons of the feedback provided through this process.

This policy is intended to apply to any complaint, regardless of who makes it. A complaint can be made by any supporter, partner, community or individual with whom *Pacific Aid Australia* works or any member of the public.

Pacific Aid Australia is committed to ensure the accessibility of its Complaints-Handling Policy, procedures and systems for making a complaint. This policy will be included in staff and volunteer induction packages. Staff and volunteers will be briefed on the nature and purpose of the policy, and their responsibility for dealing with complaints in the proscribed manner.

3. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, a complaint is regarded as any expression of dissatisfaction about *Pacific Aid Australia*, its personnel, its partners, its contracted service providers, or anyone acting on *Pacific Aid Australia's* behalf.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service, actions or lack of action by **Pacific Aid Australia** or its personnel or anyone directly involved in the delivery of **Pacific Aid Australia** work. A complaint may be related to **Pacific Aid Australia's** activities, use of resources, mission and values, staff conduct/behavior, or a legal requirement.

4. Principles

Pacific Aid Australia will seek to handle complaints fairly, guided by the Code of Conduct of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and the guideline set out by other reputable organisations.

Pacific Aid Australia will receive and respond to complaints irrespective of who makes them or the nature or subject of the complaint.

Everyone who makes a complaint to **Pacific Aid Australia** will be treated with courtesy and respect. Complaints are to be addressed in a fair, equitable, objective and unbiased manner. Issues of conflict of interest will be identified to ensure objectivity. In return, **Pacific Aid Australia** expects people who make a complaint to communicate their concerns fairly and appropriately.

Complainants may lodge a complaint verbally face to face or by email or other written correspondence, via a third party, or by other means.

Some complaints may be both made and resolved verbally, for example by telephone or face to face. Where they are unable to be resolved verbally, complaints must be made in writing.

Some complaints however need to be kept confidential in order to safeguard those making or involved in the complaint. In some instances **Pacific Aid Australia** may judge that the complainant will be better served if others are involved in the resolution process. Third parties will only be included in the resolution of confidential complaints on a case-by-case basis, with agreement of the complainant.

5. Standards

The following minimum standards apply:

- Complainants will be treated respectfully, whether it is felt the complaint is justified or not.
- Complaints will be acknowledged as soon as possible and ideally within five(5)working days by the recipient. All complainants will receive a copy of this policy.

- Complainants will receive a response giving the outcome of their complaint as soon as possible, ideally within 30 working days of receipt.
- When a complaint cannot be resolved within this timeframe, the complainant will be informed about the progress to date and when they can expect to receive a response.
- If the matter is more complex, a further acknowledgement will be sent explaining what further investigation is required to resolve the complaint and the likely time frame.
- All serious complaints are to be recorded in a file managed by the Chief Executive Officer.

6. Reporting about Complaints

The person who receives a complaint must consider the nature and seriousness of the issues raised. They should never dismiss a complaint, but rather consult a supervisor or Board members to assess the seriousness of the complaint and the steps to be taken to resolve it in accordance with the procedures (Annex1).

Some complaints are of a more minor nature and can be more easily and promptly resolved. More minor complaints might include a telephone complaint that can be responded to immediately, or a written complaint that proceeds on the basis of a misconception that readily can be corrected.

6.1 Minor Complaints

Minor complaints and disputes should be resolved promptly and without need to use formal procedures. Whenever possible, informal resolution should be attempted first in all matters assessed as less serious.

Other complaints may be more complex and require acknowledgement, initial assessment and investigation. They may require remedial action. For example, a change in the way **Pacific Aid Australia** operates counsel or discipline personnel, or, even, consider the involvement of regulatory/legal authorities

6.2 Major Complaints are those that are deemed to pose significant operational, safety, financial or reputational risk to *Pacific Aid Australia*. Serious complaints include allegations of criminal or corrupt conduct, maladministration or serious and substantial waste.

Complaints deemed serious are to be reported immediately to the Executive Director. In very serious cases a complaint may require the Board of Directors to investigate and respond.

If it is established that a complaint has been made maliciously, in bad faith or without serious intent a response will be made to the complainant explaining why the complaint is not being taken further.

Complainants who have made a well-founded complaint and who are unsatisfied with *Pacific Aid Australia's* response may appeal to the Board of Directors.

Pacific Aid Australia will log and monitor serious complaints and results of such complaints. This information will be brought to the attention of senior managers, and the records will be managed by the Chief Executive Officer. The information will not necessarily be available to the public.

Annual and other reports to the Board of Directors will include information about serious complaints, how they were resolved and any resulting changes to organizational processes.

7. Staff Awareness and Training

For PAA's complaints handling process to be effective PAA's executive, staff, volunteers and partners should be made aware of our process and be trained to effectively implement it.

- PAA will make the points of access to the complaints process prominent on the PAA website and publicise it prominently in materials for public information (e.g. Annual Report, brochures).
- PAA will make every reasonable effort to ensure that translation services are available for those of non-English speaking backgrounds who wish to lodge complaints.
- PAA will ensure that the complaints process is conducted with a minimum of formality and technicality.
- Our complaints policy and procedure will be integrated into project materials and integrated into a welcome pack for all new staff, volunteers and partners.
- Staff and volunteers will receive explicit training in managing complaints.

Informal guidance on handling complaints will be provided to personnel through peer to peer support. Guidance will cover:

- Receiving complaints: listening and empathising.
- Responding to complaints: using tact, understanding the complainant's viewpoint and responding using constructive language.
- Investigating the complaint: gathering factual information, interviewing skills.
- Handling difficult complainants: how-to respond when under pressure.

Information about the benefits and purpose of this policy will be part of the induction for all new Board and staff members. The policy will be available for all staff and placed on ***Pacific Aid Australia's*** website.

As part of ***Pacific Aid Australia's*** regular review sessions, staff will reflect on the lessons from complaints received and how they were resolved. This information will be included in ***Pacific Aid Australia's*** Annual Report.

8. Resources

- ACFID Code of Conduct D.6 Complaint-handling within signatory organisations
- Australian Standard: Customer satisfaction—Guidelines for complaints handling in organizations (ISO10002:2004)