

How to set up a complaints and response mechanism

Feedback can be positive or negative: complaints mean that things may have gone wrong. Receiving complaints and responding to them is central to accountability, impact, and learning.

I. Information

Tell people how to complain and that it is their right to do so.

- Use staff and notice boards to give information about complaints processes.
- Be clear about the types of complaint you can and can't deal with.
- Know your agency's procedures on abuse or exploitation of beneficiaries.
- Explain details of the appeals process.

II. Accessibility

Make access to the complaints process as easy and safe as possible. Consider:

- How will IDPs in remote locations be able to make complaints?
- Can complaints be received verbally or only in writing?
- Is it possible to file a complaint on behalf of somebody else (owing to their illiteracy, fears for their personal safety, inability to travel, etc.)?

III. Procedures

Describe how complaints will be handled.

- Develop a standard complaints form.
- Give the complainant a receipt, preferably a copy of their signed form.
- Enable an investigation to be tracked and keep statistics on complaints and responses.
- Keep complaint files confidential. Ensure discussion about the complaint cannot be traced back to the individual complainant.
- Know your agency's procedures for dealing with complaints against staff.

IV. Response

Give beneficiaries a response to their complaint.

- Make sure each complainant receives a response and appropriate action.
- Be consistent: ensure similar complaints receive a similar response.
- Maintain oversight of complaints processes and have an appeals process.

V. Learning

Learning from complaints and mistakes.

- Collect statistics and track any trends.
- Feed learning into decision-making and project activities.