



COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline Beyond Charity's rationale for and approach to handling complaints and to ensure that we listen to and respond to complaints in a manner that is fair, efficient and effective. We strive to ensure that the complaints handling process is respectful of all parties and in line with our guiding principles of transparency and equity.

Beyond Charity recognises the importance of receiving feedback about our operations and being open to and having an effective response to complaints. We are committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about our programs, people, systems, practices, procedures, products and complaint handling.

This policy provides guidance to our staff and volunteers on our approach to and management of concerns or complaints. It sets out who can make a complaint, the broad spectrum of concerns and complaints and what can be expected in the way complaints will be received, handled and responded to.

This complaints policy is part of Beyond Charity's commitment to living out our guiding principles, to achieving high standards of practice, to being accountable to our stakeholders and to continuous improvement and learning as an organisation.

SCOPE

Complaints will be considered, regardless of who makes them. Feedback and complaints may originate from the public, our supporters, our funders, our community partner organisations or people in the communities in which our partners operate.

We will accept and investigate complaints relating to our staff, our Coordinators, other volunteers, interns, board members and consultants/contractors hired by us. Complaints about Beyond Charity's processes, decisions, systems and activities will also be accepted and investigated, if a response or resolution is expected to the concern raised.

We will also accept complaints about our community partners if raised directly with us. Depending on the circumstances, we will ask our partner organisation to investigate the concern, or we may investigate it directly if the concern or complaint is of a serious nature or in any way involves Beyond Charity representatives.

The policy applies to all staff, volunteers and board members of Beyond Charity receiving or managing feedback and complaints made to or about us.

DEFINITIONS

Feedback means opinions, comments and suggestions about our processes and activities. It may relate to the activities of Beyond Charity or our community partners. Feedback is gathered in a range of ways – verbally, via emails, through meetings and structured conversations during field visits by Beyond Charity representatives. Information gathered via feedback is used in an ongoing way to adapt, change and improve the way Beyond Charity and our community partners are working. We will encourage our partners to be receptive to ongoing feedback from participants in their activities and other community members for use in planning and managing their community development activities.

An inquiry is a request for information or explanation about an activity or processes Beyond Charity or our community partners are engaged in.

A complaint means an expression of dissatisfaction or concern, where a response and some resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected. Complaints may include, but are not limited to, concerns about our development program and the activities and processes of our partner organisations, concerns about the way our organisation is managed and our interaction with the public in Australia and concerns about the conduct and behaviour of our representatives in Australia and abroad.

Beyond Charity encourages and is open to both feedback and complaints and we recognise that what starts as feedback or an inquiry may transition to a complaint. Further, a complaint may turn out to be an inquiry or feedback, once more information is received.

We pursue the highest degree of care and protection within our organisation and our overseas programs and we take complaints about child protection and safety, sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption, other criminal matters and misconduct by our representatives very seriously. Expectations of Beyond Charity's representatives are included in all of our policies and procedures.

Note that this policy does not apply to workplace grievances (involving a written statement by a staff member about another staff member or a work-related problem) or to internal disputes between members (which is dealt with under the Beyond Charity Constitution).

PRINCIPLES FOR COMPLAINTS HANDLING

We are committed to promoting a culture that values feedback and complaints and gives importance to fair and effective resolution of complaints and concerns raised.

We are committed to ensuring that making a complaint is as easy as possible.

We are committed to maintaining complaints procedures that:

- are managed in accordance with the principles of respect, fairness, responsiveness, transparency and efficiency
- are documented in a clear and accessible manner and easy to use (complaints can be made orally in person or over the phone, and in writing via any means).
- provide accessible, safe and confidential points of contact for internal and external stakeholders:
- For complaints about Beyond Charity personnel and processes this will be the Directors and/or Chairperson
- For complaints from community members about the community partner in the countries where we operate this will be a respected person in the community or partner organisation and/or the Directors.
- take into consideration the needs of the most vulnerable community members and provide access for children and young people
- provide time-bound processes for investigation, escalation (including the possibility of escalation to the Board) and response
- ensure the person handling the complaint is different from any person engaged by Beyond Charity whose conduct or service is being complained about
- ensure that due process and natural justice is provided for the complainant and the subject of the complaint, and
- provide for prompt, firm, and fair corrective action where wrongdoing is identified.
- provide for referral of criminal matters to police or other relevant judicial bodies in-country or in Australia.

Beyond Charity will work with our partners to develop context specific and responsive complaints processes at the local level, in line with the above principles and with the following basic elements in mind:

- work may be needed in some country and cultural contexts to encourage our community partners to embrace the value and importance of having a complaints process in place
- community members will be consulted on the way complaints are best made and responded to in a given partnership context. This should include identification of a respected person to whom complaints can be made safely and confidentially.
- our community partners will ensure visibility of any complaints processes to program participants and community members, with specific attention to enabling children and young people and other vulnerable community members to raise concerns or make a complaint
- there will be clarity in what complaints the partner organisation is responsible for investigating and what complaints should be referred to Beyond Charity.

Beyond Charity will ensure that the Directors are sufficiently trained to receive and manage complaints in accordance with this policy and our Directors will train and support all Coordinators to integrate this policy into practice with our community partners.

PUBLICISING AND INFORMING KEY STAKEHOLDERS ABOUT OUR COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Our complaints policy and a simple guide to making complaints will be posted to our website. A commitment to feedback and complaints will be included in discussions with community partners.

Feedback and complaints processes will be covered in induction of staff, board members and Coordinators appointed to support community partners overseas.

Coordinators will work with community partners to understand the value and importance of feedback and complaints in managing their community development activities and ways to inform and consult community members on complaints processes in their context.

RECEIVING, INVESTIGATING AND RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS

Any concerns raised in feedback or complaints will be dealt with within a reasonable time frame. We aim to promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints within three days.

Each complaint will be responded to with integrity and in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner.

People making complaints will be:

- provided with information about our complaint handling process and what to expect
- listened to, treated with respect and actively involved in the complaint process where possible and appropriate
- provided with reasons for any decisions, and
- provided with options for redress or review.

We will take all reasonable steps to ensure that people making complaints are not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf. In the case of serious complaints, we will take all possible steps to safeguard the health and wellbeing of any victim/s of abuse, misconduct or exploitation.

All complaints involving child abuse or sexual exploitation and abuse will be notified to our Directors, or if they are the subject of the complaint, to the Chair of the Board.

If a person prefers or needs another person or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/ or resolution of their complaint, we will communicate with them through their representative if this is their wish.

Where possible, complaints will be resolved at first contact with us. In these cases, if appropriate, we may offer an explanation or apology to the person who has raised a concern. We will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and seriousness of the issues raised. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security, the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

We are committed to managing people's expectations, and will inform them as soon as possible, of the following:

- the complaints process
- the expected time frames for our actions
- the progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay
- their likely involvement in the process, and
- the possible or likely outcome of their complaint.

We will advise people as soon as possible when we are unable to deal with any part of their complaint and, if possible and appropriate, provide advice about where such issues or complaints may be directed.

We will ensure that the person handling a complaint is different from any staff member whose conduct or service is being complained about.

Conflicts of interest, whether actual or perceived, will be managed responsibly. In particular, internal reviews of how a complaint was managed will be conducted by a person other than the original decision-maker.

We will assess each complaint on its merits and involve people making complaints and/or their representative in the process as far as possible.

We will protect the identity of people making complaints where this is practical and appropriate. Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by us as permitted under the relevant privacy laws and confidentiality obligations.

We will inform people who make complaints to or about us about any internal or external review options available to them, including notifying the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission.

THREE LEVELS OF COMPLAINT HANDLING

We aim to resolve complaints at the first point of contact.

Where this is not possible or where the complaint is serious, we may escalate the complaint to the Directors or Chair of the Board. This second level of complaint handling will provide for the following internal mechanisms:

- assessment and possible investigation of the complaint and decision/s already made, and/or
- facilitated resolution (where a person not connected with the complaint reviews the matter and attempts to find an outcome acceptable to the relevant parties).

Where a person making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of our review of their complaint, they may seek an external review of our decision.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING

All complaints will be recorded in a register of complaints which will be tabled at the next board meeting after a complaint is received. The register will be accessible to the Board so that information can be easily retrieved for reporting and analysis.

We are committed to improving the way our organisation operates, including our management of the effectiveness and efficiency of our complaint management system. To this end, we will:

- support the making and appropriate resolution of complaints
- implement best practices in complaint handling
- work with our community partners to introduce accessible and culturally appropriate feedback and complaints processes
- regularly review the complaint management system and complaint data, and
- implement appropriate system changes arising out of our analysis of complaints data and continual monitoring of the system.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This Complaints Policy has drawn from the model policy and procedures released in 2018 by a coalition of 11 peak NGO bodies in Australia.

COMPLAINTS

If you have a question or complaint you contact us at complaints@beyondcharity.org, via our website at www.beyondcharity.org or alternatively write to Beyond Charity's Complaints Officer:

The Complaints Officer
Suite 455, 585 Little Collins Street
Melbourne, Victoria 3000