

COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY¹

1. Purpose

This policy is designed to guide VolunteeringACT staff on how to handle complaints fairly, efficiently, and effectively. This policy establishes the key principles and concepts of VolunteeringACT's complaints management system, including requirements for child-focused complaints handling. The Standard Operating Procedures provide guidance on how to treat all complaints.

VolunteeringACT is committed to being a Child Safe Organisation and ensuring processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused, in line with Principle Six of the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#). This principle is underpinned by article 42 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and stipulates that adults should also know about the rights of children and proactively help them learn about these rights.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all staff, contractors, and the Board of Directors, who receive or manage complaints from the public or stakeholders made to or about VolunteeringACT, regarding our products, services, staff, or our complaints handling process.

The Whistleblower Policy is to be followed for disclosures of wrongdoing.

3. Definitions

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about VolunteeringACT, our services, staff including volunteers, or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required (AS/NZ 10002:2018) Guidelines for complaints handling in organisations.

A dispute is an unresolved complaint escalated within or outside of VolunteeringACT.

Feedback encapsulates opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern, made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to or about VolunteeringACT, about our services or complaint handling system where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

Child-focused complaint handling is a requirement under Principle Six of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. It means there must be an accessible and responsive process for managing concerns and complaints of child harm or abuse. It is important for ensuring children and young people and their families understand that they have the right to make a complaint, that they will be listened to and protected, and that their complaints will be taken seriously. In the context of child safety, the definition of a 'child' is a person under 18 years of age.

4. Policy Statement

VolunteeringACT will administer an effective complaints handling system modelled on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency, and integration into organisational culture.

The child-focused complaints handling process is modelled on the essential components outlined in Principle Six of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and the National Office for Child Safe and NSW Ombudsman Complaint Handling Guide: Upholding the Rights of Children and Young People and is summarised below.

¹ Revised document last endorsed by Board 6 August 2024

5. Responsibilities

VolunteeringACT expects staff at all levels to be committed to fair, effective, and efficient complaint handling, and has a responsibility under the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations to ensure that children know their rights around safety and for making a complaint. The following outlines the nature of the commitment expected from staff and the way that commitment should be implemented.

The Chair, Board, CEO, and Leadership Team are responsible for promoting a culture that values complaints and their effective resolution and includes a child-focused approach that considers the different cultural and communication needs of children through:

- Reporting to the Board on our complaints handling including number of complaints received in each reporting period and summary of outcomes.
- Providing adequate support and direction to key staff responsible for handling complaints.
- Regularly reviewing reports about complaints trends and issues arising from complaints.
- Encouraging all staff to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them promptly.
- Encouraging staff to make recommendations for system improvements and training opportunities.
- Supporting recommendations for service, staff and complaints handling improvements arising from the analysis of complaints data.

The Board, CEO and staff are responsible for demonstrating exemplary complaint handling practices through:

- Treating all people with respect, including people who make complaints.
- Assisting people to make a complaint, if needed.
- Complying with policies and associated procedures.
- Providing regular feedback on issues arising from complaints.
- Implementing changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis of complaints data.
- Offering several named contacts for children to approach with their complaints and different methods to make a complaint.
- Ensuring that conversations with children about complaints and how they are recorded and explained are child-friendly and consider their different cultural and communication needs.
- Setting out actions to be taken when the complaint is about an employee, volunteer, parent (if/where relevant), or another adult associated with VolunteeringACT.
- Setting out approaches for responding to complaints and/or harm caused to children by other children, including children displaying potentially harmful sexual behaviours.
- Ensuring that an adult's opinion on a complaint is not given greater weighting over a child's in the event that they differ.

6. Procedure Overview

When responding to complaints, staff must act in accordance with the complaints handling procedures as well as any other internal or external documents providing guidance on the management of complaints.

Staff should also consider any relevant legislation and/or regulations when responding to complaints and feedback and ensure confidentiality is protected and that the complainant is treated respectfully. VolunteeringACT will refer – via the CEO – to appropriate law enforcement agencies or statutory

bodies should we become aware of abuse or neglect of a minor. We may also be required to report to a funder on broad parameters.

Staff dealing with child safety complaints must only be those with additional training on child wellbeing and safety.

7. Evaluation

VolunteeringACT will seek feedback on the effectiveness of the complaints handling policy within one month of the complaint resolution date *where appropriate*. Stakeholders will be asked to provide feedback on the following:

- Clarity and explanation of complaints process
- Satisfaction level on how the complaint was handled
- Satisfaction with timeframe for response
- Effectiveness of communication.

Complaint themes, outcomes, and any issues of concern that need to be flagged will be reported to the Board on a regular basis via the existing meeting schedule. Complaint outcomes and findings will be used to inform changes/improvements to the complaints handling policy and associated procedures when reviewed.

VolunteeringACT will incorporate key learning from complaints outcomes and findings into ongoing continuous improvement processes to redevelop policies and procedures where appropriate, enhance staff training, and improve capability where needed.