



Complaints Handling Policy

Managed on behalf of ED and Board by: Head of Resource Mobilisation

Approved by Board: 29 May 2021

1. Purpose

ActionAid Australia believes that having a well-managed mechanism for handling external complaints can improve the quality of its work, enhance the trust and confidence of stakeholders, identify areas of work that need to be improved, and ensure that ActionAid Australia learns from the feedback provided through this process. ActionAid Australia therefore welcomes feedback and will react constructively to complaints from the people it works with: its supporters, donors, the general public, official bodies and its partners.

The Complaints Handling Policy **links to the principles of ActionAid International's Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS)** and will ensure feedback, transparency and learning which will strengthen ActionAid Australia's accountability as an organisation.

This Complaints Handling Policy **complies with ActionAid International's Complaints and Response Mechanism Framework Policy and Procedure and has been heavily informed by that policy**, with appropriate tailoring to meet local Australian needs.

This Policy solely deals with external grievances. Internal issues and grievances made by staff are dealt with in discussion with line managers and in accordance with the Grievance Resolution Procedure contained in the ActionAid Australia Human Resources Manual.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the following people:

- ActionAid Australia staff members, contractors, and consultants;
- ActionAid Australia office-based volunteers, interns and Grassroots Network activists;
- ActionAid Australia Board of Directors; and
- partner organisations.

This policy also outlines a process for complaints that fall outside the scope of the policy such as those pertaining to other organisations or individuals.

3. Definitions

For the purpose of this Policy, ActionAid Australia defines a complaint as:

“an external grievance made against ActionAid Australia or against one or more of its employees, consultants, suppliers, partners or anyone else acting on its behalf, where the organisation has allegedly failed to meet a requirement. That commitment might be related to ActionAid Australia’s activities, use of resources, mission and values, staff conduct/behaviour, or a legal requirement.”

Examples of complaints that are covered by this policy include (but are not limited to):

- a government, NGO, partner or other actor brings criminal allegations of fraud, unlawful harassment, discrimination or child abuse against ActionAid Australia in relation to Australian laws and regulations, local laws and regulations applying to communities supported by ActionAid Australia, any breach of the ACFID Code of Conduct, and/or to ActionAid Australia’s own policies and procedures. In such cases the most stringent standard will apply whether it be the local regulations or ActionAid Australia’s policies; or
- a member of the public contacts ActionAid Australia to express their concern about the way in which we have conducted a fundraising campaign, activist campaign or advocacy work; or
- a local person or partner raising concerns with us about one of our programs and/or the behaviour of one of more of our Country Program or Country Office staff.

A complaint may be made by a person to whom ActionAid Australia delivers programs or support including a partner, a local organisation with which we work, a national government or other NGOs, as well as members of the Australian public, supporters, donors, the Australian government, and trusts and foundations.

4. What Complaints Are Considered?

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

Some complaints are of a more minor nature, can be more easily and promptly resolved and pose minimal risk to ActionAid Australia. Minor complaints that are readily resolved will not follow all the procedures outlined in the Complaints Handling Procedures in Section 6 of this Policy as to do so would be unnecessarily cumbersome, bureaucratic and compromise their timely resolution. More minor complaints might include a telephone complaint that can be responded to in an initial call, a written complaint that proceeds on the basis of a misconception that can readily be corrected.

Complaints of a more complex and significant nature that require acknowledgement, initial assessment and investigation and may require remedial action (e.g. a change to the way in which we operate, train, counsel or discipline staff or volunteers or even the involvement of regulatory/enforcement authorities) **will be undertaken in line with the Complaints Handling Procedures in Section 6 of this Policy.**

Serious complaints – those that pose significant operational, safety, financial or reputational risk to ActionAid Australia – **will be immediately escalated to the Complaints Handling Focal Point** (the Head of Resource Mobilisation) **and by the**

Focal Point, depending on the seriousness of the complaint, to the Executive Director and potentially the Board Chair.

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

5. Principles

The following principles will guide ActionAid Australia in the handling of complaints and ensure that as a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct we comply with the standards relating to complaints handling as follows:

- We recognise the importance and value of listening and responding to concerns and complaints;
- The feedback and complaints handling process is as effective, safe, confidential and accessible to all stakeholders as possible, irrespective of their gender, status or background and without prejudice to their future participation
- **Visibility:** Information about the process for making a complaint will be clear and well publicised to supporters, rights holders participating in programs, and other stakeholders.
- **Accessibility:** The complaints handling process is easily accessible to all stakeholders. There is readily accessible information about the process of making and resolving complaints in a range of formats so that no complainants are disadvantaged. ActionAid Australia will ensure that flexibility is provided to complainants to ring, write and e-mail complaints and/or to raise concerns in person.
- **Objectivity:** All complaints are addressed in a fair and equitable, objective and unbiased manner throughout the complaints handling process. Issues of conflict of interest will be identified to ensure objectivity.
- **Confidentiality:** Confidentiality relating to the complaint will be safeguarded so far as reasonably practicable including the person(s) to whom the complaint is addressed. Anonymous complaints will also be investigated by the organisation.
- **People-centred approach:** ActionAid Australia has a people-centred approach and actively welcomes feedback including complaints and has a commitment to acting to resolve all complaints
- **Responsiveness:** All complaints and constructive feedback will be taken seriously and handled as swiftly as practicable. All complainants will be treated courteously and kept updated on the progress of their complaint through the complaints-handling process.
- **Accountability:** Accountability for handling complaints and reporting on the actions and decisions of ActionAid Australia with respect to complaints handling will be clearly established. All complaints will be recorded through one central point before action is taken. Complaints will be addressed as locally as possible using the agreed complaints procedure and only escalated to management if they are of a serious nature.
- **Continuous improvement:** ActionAid Australia is committed to the continual improvement of the complaints handling process and the quality of ActionAid

Australia's work. This commitment is practically supported by: the collection and classification of complaints trends; analysis and reporting of complaints trends; monitoring of complaints handling processes; and auditing/management reviews of the complaints handling process and refining of complaints handling in light of those reviews.

- **Organisational commitment to this policy:** ActionAid Australia will ensure that sufficient resources and expertise are provided to handle complaints. Staff will be briefed on the nature and purpose of the policy and senior managers dealing with the complaints will be given coaching in handling complaints. Complaints will be handled in accordance with ActionAid Australia's policies and procedures and in accordance with Australian laws and regulations. The Executive Director and Chair of the Board, depending upon the nature and level of complaints, will be the key people to receive and respond external complaints.

6. Standards

ActionAid Australia's handling of complaints will meet the following minimum standards:

1. All complaints will be acknowledged as soon as possible, and ideally within five working days by the recipient. All complainants will have access to the policy on the ActionAid Australia website.
2. All complainants will receive a response giving the outcome of their complaint as soon as possible and ideally within thirty working days of receipt. 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 timeframe.
3. All complaints should be recorded on a Complaints Record Form ([Appendix 1](#)).
4. All complainants will be treated respectfully, whether it is felt the complaint is justified or not.
5. Anonymous complaints will be investigated by the organisation.

7. Complaints Handling Procedures

This Policy will be implemented using the following procedures:

1. Raising Complaints with ActionAid

All ActionAid Australia's stakeholders must be clear that ActionAid Australia welcomes complaints and constructive feedback and need to know how to raise a complaint with the organisation.

ActionAid Australia's Complaints Handling Policy, specifically highlighting the following central points for all complaints, is publicised on ActionAid Australia's website.

- General complaints about any aspect of ActionAid Australia and its work should be sent to the e-mail address: complaints.au@actionaid.org;
- Complaints about the Executive Director should be sent to: Boardchair.au@actionaid.org;
- Postal complaints can also be sent to the Executive Director or the Chair of the Board at ActionAid Australia's official address:

ActionAid Australia

Locked Bag 5515
Camperdown, NSW 1450

- Complaints regarding any breach of the ACFID Code of Conduct should be made to the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee. For information on the Code of Conduct and how to make a complaint, see the ACFID website www.acfid.asn.au.

ActionAid Australia's Executive Director has delegated responsibility to initiate and coordinate the complaint response to the Head of Resource Mobilisation. This person in their capacity as the Focal Point for all complaints made against ActionAid Australia will maintain appropriate confidentiality and ensure that only the parties relevant to solving the complaint are involved. The Head of Resource Mobilisation will decide whether they will investigate the complaint themselves, delegate to another person more appropriate, or form a committee of investigation. For example, any sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment or child abuse complaints will be referred to ActionAid Australia's Safeguarding Focal Point.

The process for handling complaints received outside the scope of the policy and received in respect to other organisations or individuals will be to help refer the complainant to the most appropriate/relevant complaints mechanism available to them. Should any such complaint be serious in nature, then any such referral would be made under the direction of the Executive Director. The person handling the complaint will ensure that the central contact for all complaints is informed and that the Complaint Record Form (**Appendix 1**) is completed.

2. Receiving Verbal and Written Complaints

The complainant must be treated with respect at all times. It is important that the person receiving a complaint face to-face clarifies the issues underlying the complaint, listens to what the complainant has to say and makes a brief and accurate written summary of the complaint. The person receiving the complaint should document their name and contact details, details about the complaint (eg: date, location, people involved). Where necessary, language interpreters may be required to help establish the nature of the complaint. If the complaint is in writing it might be appropriate to write or speak to the complainant to clarify the facts of the case.

3. Acknowledging Complaints

Complainants, who are not anonymous, will receive an acknowledgement of their complaint to confirm that it has been received and an outline of the next steps.

Appropriate assistance and referrals will be provided to survivors of any forms of violence, exploitation and abuse.

Complainants raising issues outside the scope of the policy will receive an acknowledgement and where appropriate, advice as to where to pursue the complaint.

4. Registering Complaints

All complaints, whether verbal or written, are recorded on the Complaints Record Form at **Appendix 1**.

Each complaint will also be recorded on the log form at **Appendix 2** which will form the basis for review at the end of each year. All complaints will be recorded and logged. These records will be used to ensure complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively

and to monitor any trends. It will provide information on the number and types of complaints ActionAid is receiving.

ActionAid will de-identify complainants or survivors in the Complaints Record Form, should this be requested.

5. Resolving Complaints (Investigation and Action)

The person handling the complaint will determine what resources are needed for the investigation and secure access to those resources including the assistance of other employees or external professional help (including lawyers, accountants, forensic analysts or operational experts). Where the complaint involves fraudulent acts, the person handling the complaint should refer to the procedures outlined in ActionAid Australia's Fraud Policy.

Each complaint within the scope of the policy will be investigated. The person handling the complaint will:

- establish the facts and gather the relevant information; and
- if necessary and/or practicable, interview those involved.

If, as a result of the investigation it is felt that there is a case to answer by the staff member then the matter would be referred to the Executive Director for the appropriate disciplinary and other organisational policies and procedures will be followed (e.g. ActionAid Australia's EEO and Workplace Behaviour, Financial Management Framework's policy on fraud and other irregularities, and the Child Protection Policy). Any relevant employment law should also be followed and taken into account.

If the person handling the complaint decides it is not possible to resolve a complaint within ActionAid Australia, they may refer the complaint to external processes such as mediation, or statutory complaints handling bodies. Where possible, the person who has made the complaint will be advised in writing of the reasons for this decision, and of the proposed strategy for dealing with the complaint.

The person handling the complaint will prepare an Investigation Report and forward to the Executive Director (or the Chairperson of the Board if the Executive Director is party to the Complaint) and a designated member of the Board. The Executive Director in consultation with the designated member of the Board has final responsibility for the resolution of the complaint.

6. Responding to the Complainant

Complainants, who are not anonymous, will receive a response outlining the outcome of the complaint or, if it is a complex matter, when it will be investigated further and how long it is likely to take. ActionAid Australia will let the complainant know the outcome which may include:

- corrective action which has been taken;
- timeline for implementation; and/or
- the person/role addressing the issue.

Wherever possible ActionAid Australia will invite the complainant to outline suggestions for actions the organisation can take to ensure similar complaints do not arise in future.

ActionAid will maintain an organisational record on all misconduct complaints.

7. Appeals Process

If a complainant is unhappy about the response received from ActionAid Australia or if they believe the corrective action has not been adequately implemented they may appeal to the next level. For example:

- if the complaint is about a matter at management level then the complainant may appeal to the Chair of the ActionAid Australia Board;
- if the complaint is about ActionAid Australia's governance, then the complainant may appeal to the ActionAid International Chief Executive;
- if the complaint is about the ActionAid International Chief Executive, then the complainant may appeal to the Chair of the International Board; and
- if the complaint relates to a possible breach of the ACFID Code and the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcome or process managed by ActionAid Australia, then the complainant may appeal to the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee: <https://acfid.asn.au/content/complaints>; and
- if the complainant continues to be dissatisfied with the outcome, after all avenues have been explored to resolve the complaint, a letter will be sent to the complainant explaining the steps/actions that have been taken, outlining any changes that have been put in place as a result of the complaint and bringing the matter to a close.

The Role of the Board

ActionAid Australia's complaints and response mechanism needs to be transparent and independent. In very serious cases a complaint may require ActionAid Australia's Board to investigate and make a response.

The ActionAid Australia Board has an important role to play in overseeing the number and nature of complaints received by ActionAid Australia and ensuring that they have been handled satisfactorily, that appropriate corrective action has been implemented and that trends are identified and addressed. The Head of Resource Mobilisation, in consultation with the Leadership Team, will complete the Complaints Handling Log and any supporting analysis for submission to the Board as part of the Management Report.

Briefing and Induction for Staff

As part of implementing the policy and procedure, all staff will receive a briefing on the benefits and purpose of the policy. This will take place via a staff meeting and follow up team meetings.

The policy will be available for all staff on a nominated share drive and placed on ActionAid Australia's website. Information about the policy will be part of the induction process for all new board and staff members.

Refresher briefings will be provided when the policy is updated, and as required.

8. Monitoring and Review of Policy and Procedure

The Head of Resource Mobilisation is accountable to the Executive Director and Board for managing and maintaining this policy. All members of the Leadership Team are accountable for ensuring that their functional teams understand and adhere to this policy in their day-to-day work. Where compliance issues are surfaced, Leadership Team members will work with staff to address these issues promptly. Any updates/revisions to the policy must be endorsed by the Executive Director and Leadership Team before being submitted to the Board for its approval.

As part of the annual participatory review and reflection process ActionAid Australia staff will reflect on the learnings from the complaints process. This will feed into ActionAid Australia's Annual Report and then into the ActionAid International Annual Report. A key input into this annual review process will be the completed Complaints Log.

Appendix 1**COMPLAINTS HANDLING LOG**

*All complaints about ActionAid Australia or any of its people from an external individual or organisation, whether verbal or written, are to be recorded **in the complaints register**. ActionAid Australia's Executive Director has delegated responsibility to initiate and coordinate the complaint response to the Head of Resource Mobilisation. Please ensure that you discuss this matter with the Head of Resource Mobilisation ASAP after receiving a complaint and seek advice from them in order to complete this form and identify next steps required.*

This Log will be provided to the Leadership Team and then to the Board as part of the Management Report. This completed log will be accompanied by any analysis that may highlight a need to review/improve/change organisational processes or practices.

The log should indicate, at a minimum:

- Date the complaint was received
- Nature and detail of complaint
- Who responded to complaint
- How the complaint was resolved/dealt with
- Outcome
- Any follow-up required, such as escalation or change to program or policy

CHANGES TO POLICY

Nature of Changes	Date of Board approval
Policy first developed.	25 August 2011
Policy updated	22 November 2012
<p>Key changes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Change of roles to reflect new structure; (b) Inclusion of a section outlining the scope of this policy; (c) Updated Board processes to reflect fact that complaints information is now included in Management Report to the Board rather than reported via a Board Committee, as previously; (d) Inclusion of a 'changes to policy' section so that revisions can be tracked systematically over time. 	12 May 2017
<p>Key changes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Modified to include complaints regarding our campaigning work. (b) Change of title for Head of Resource Mobilisation following restructure. (c) Change of references to previous ACFID Code of Conduct sections. (d) Change to centralised location of complaints register so no longer part of fundraising team CRM and complaints logged in 1 step instead of 2. 	8 December 2018
Changes made to add ACFID Code of Conduct complaints mechanism and investigation of complaints strengthened to provide more clarity on our process	29 May 2021