

POLICY

Complaints Handling

Established:	July 2018	Review frequency:	Every three years
Prepared by:	P Simmons	Approved by:	Board

Purpose

To empower transparent, responsive, efficient and effective complaints handling in line with organisational values and a commitment to respectful engagement

Introduction

GraceWorks Myanmar (GWM) recognises the importance and value of listening and responding to concerns, complaints and grievances. We are committed to achieving the highest standards and continual improvement in every area of our work – acting in accordance with the Australian Council for International Development’s (ACFID) Code of Conduct. This applies especially to the delivery of programs/projects, seeking donations and being generally accountable to stakeholders.

Definitions

Feedback

Feedback spans opinions, comments, suggestions and expressions of interest in organisational activities, policies and procedures, and personnel.

Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation related to its services or the complaint handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

Grievance

A grievance is a formal complaint raised by an employee toward an employer in the workplace.

Complainant

A complainant is the person, organisation or its representative making a complaint.

Stakeholder or interested party

A stakeholder or interested party is a person or group having an interest in the performance or success of an organisation.

Implementing the complaints mechanism

We prioritise informing our people, and the individuals, communities, partners and other stakeholders we work with, of their right to complain and the confidentiality we will maintain during that complaints process:

- ◆ For staff and volunteers – details will be explained during their induction.
- ◆ For contractors – details will be included in their contract.
- ◆ For partners – details will be in their memorandum of understanding/partnership agreement, be discussed at regular review meetings, and be part of any discussion around continuing or setting up an extended/new partnership.
- ◆ For primary stakeholders – details will be explained verbally at the start of our work with them. If required, we will use pictures to communicate. This verbal-first approach recognises literacy is a constraint for many individuals and communities with whom we work and, culturally, people in



Myanmar may require additional encouragement to make a complaint. We will take special care to facilitate complaints from vulnerable people, including children and marginalised groups.

- ◆ For project visitors – details will be covered in pre-departure briefings/documentation.
- ◆ For other stakeholders and interested parties – this policy is available on GWM's website.

Receiving complaints

Concerns, complaints and staff grievances will be treated with respect. GWM will be proactive about hearing feedback and complaints – actively listening, accepting the feedback/complaint, being courteous and committing to resolving it. Where possible, all complainants are encouraged to address the matter directly with the person concerned or raise it with their manager/primary contact first. We acknowledge the vast majority of those with whom we work in Myanmar find themselves in unequal power relationships with non-government organisation (NGO) workers. As such, we encourage face-to-face discussions to reduce the likelihood of the misunderstanding and misinformation that can create complex issues, given cultural differences – especially those related to a society built on a hierarchical structure of authoritarianism. Appropriate assistance and referrals will be provided to survivors.

Avenues for raising complaints

We observe strict confidentiality in complaints handling via management by skilled and authorised personnel in line with our chain of command, and via the protection of personal information. Complaints may be made by a friend or advocate of the complainant on their behalf. Anonymous complaints will not be accepted. Formal complaints will be acknowledged within 10 working days. All formal complaints will be documented on our Incident Register.

Complaints can be provided:

- ◆ Orally by phone – via the GWM Chief Executive Officer (CEO) based in Australia on +61 418 108 056, or our Country Director (Myanmar) based in Myanmar on +95 09 4303 2252.
- ◆ Written by email – via info@gwm.org.au.
- ◆ Written by post – via Boom Gallery, Hub 21, 21 Rutland Road, Newtown, 3220, Victoria, Australia, or 142A, 5th floor, Lower Kyimyindine Road, Ahlone Township, Yangon, Myanmar.
- ◆ Written by GWM's website – via the contacts page at www.graceworksmyanmar.com.

Formal complaints received orally will be written up to capture all information the complainant wishes to provide. If an interpreter is required, GWM will engage an interpreter.

We will ensure a person implicated in a complaint is not involved in the handling of that complaint. All complaints will be directed to the CEO, who is responsible for managing formal complaints. If the complaint is about the CEO, the Chairperson of the Board is the responsible first contact. If the complaint is about the Chairperson of the Board, another member of the Board is the responsible first contact. Complex and/or major complaints will be immediately escalated to the relevant contact.

Where complaints fall outside the scope of this policy (eg complaints against an employee of a separate organisation), we will immediately refer them to the relevant organisation or governing body.

ACFID Code of Conduct

ACFID's Code of Conduct offers an independent mechanism to address concerns relating to the conduct of ACFID members. If a complainant wishes to make a complaint regarding an alleged breach of the Code to the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee, they can do so at:

- ◆ Chair, ACFID Code of Conduct Committee via code@acfid.asn.au, refer to <https://acfid.asn.au/content/complaints>.

Resolving complaints

GWM will address all complaints in an equitable, fair and unbiased manner using evidence submitted by the complainant and our people.



Analyse

We acknowledge the majority of complaints GWM receives have the potential to be resolved immediately using common sense, diplomacy and fair knowledge of GWM and its activities. In general, we will:

- ◆ Seek from the complainant the outcome/s they are expecting
- ◆ Make an initial assessment of the severity of the complaint and urgency of action
- ◆ Assure the complainant the complaint will receive attention, without creating false expectations.

Investigate

We will make every reasonable effort to investigate all relevant circumstances and information surrounding a complaint. The level of investigation will be commensurate with the seriousness and frequency of the complaint. Complaints about programs/projects/services delivered by our partners in Myanmar may take time to investigate and resolve. Other complaints may require detailed investigation. We will aim to resolve all complaints within 30 days.

Responding to and closing a complaint

We will not reveal a complainant's name or personal details to anyone in or outside our organisation without obtaining the complainant's permission, other than the staff involved in handling the complaint. Relevant GWM personnel may be informed of complaints received, investigated and acted on – often a vital step in maintaining/restoring staff morale.

GWM will inform the complainant about the outcome of the investigation. In most instances, this will be done in writing. If literacy is an issue, the update will be provided orally, and the discussion documented by GWM. If a decision has not been reached, the complainant will be given a progress report and an indication of the likely date of the final outcome. If a complaint is upheld, the complainant will be advised that action has been taken to address the issue. The details of that action may not be disclosed in all instances due to confidentiality. If a complaint is not upheld, and the complainant remains unsatisfied, they have a right to appeal and will be informed of that right. Appeals go to, and are the responsibility of, the Board.

Learning and improving

GWM will take all required remedial action. This includes being prepared to change how we operate, improve and undertake further training of staff. Where needed, we will counsel or discipline staff or volunteers and provide constructive feedback to partners. Complaint data will be recorded on GWM's Incident Register and reviewed annually by the Board to analyse and reflect on issues that have arisen from complaints, support our continual improvement and avoid similar issues arising in the future. Survivors and complainants can request that the complaint be deidentified.

References and related documents

References

- ◆ ACFID Code of Conduct

Related documents

- ◆ Code of Conduct
- ◆ Incident Register
- ◆ Whistleblowing Policy
- ◆ Privacy Policy

Review

Previous reviews: June 2021, November 2021 (minor)
Next review: June 2024