

Feedback and Complaints Policy



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Document History

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Record of Review

Review Date	Lead by	People consulted
15/07/2015	CEO	Chairperson
11/12/2017	CEO	People, Policies and Safety Portfolio

Legislation

- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
- Ombudsman Act 1974

Reference Documents

- Complaints register
- Complaint form

Policy Statement

ConnectGroups believes in the importance of positive relationships between members, employees, volunteers and the organisation.

Feedback and complaints provide valuable information and give us an opportunity to learn and improve. Feedback may be of a sensitive nature and the service user's right to privacy and confidentiality will be respected. Any information relating to the complaint will be distributed on a need to know basis.

All complaints will be resolved at the service level where possible and in the shortest time practicable.

Service users can expect complaints to be dealt with fairly and promptly and for staff to take steps to ensure that service users feel comfortable to continue accessing the service after making a complaint.

The complaints management process will be simple and easy to use and effectively communicated and promoted to all service users and stakeholders.

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Definitions

Complaint - any written or verbal statement outlining a problem or concern involving the organisation including its staff, the service they provide, or the terms of engagement or contract with the organisation.

Feedback - information given by a service user, stakeholder or community member in relation to the organisation and may be in the form of a compliment, suggestion or complaint.

Compliment - an explicit expression of satisfaction or praise in relation to the organisation or a staff member working on behalf of the organisation.

Suggestion - a comment that indicates how the organisation could improve its service delivery. It may be part of a compliment or complaint but may also be offered as standalone information.

Complaint resolution - a complaint is resolved when both parties reach an agreement. The parties will be informed, in writing, of the complaint agreement.

Vexatious grievances - where complainants use the complaint/grievance resolution process without reasonable cause, the processes as outlined above will still be adhered to. If complaints are malicious or vexatious and therefore not made in good faith, the complainant may be referred to undertake counselling and/or other actions if appropriate.

Corrective action - addressing an ongoing systemic issue to eliminate the root cause of the problem to prevent recurrence.

Confidentiality - only people directly involved in the complaint as part of the nature of the complaint or the resolution of it will have access to the information about the complaint.

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Delegations

Roles	Responsibilities
Board of Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversee organisational reputation and mitigate any risk Respond to complaints relating to the CEO and/or Board members and escalated complaints from service users, staff or stakeholders, as required
CEO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and monitor reports on all complaints to ensure issues impacting service user satisfaction and service outcomes are being managed effectively Ensure complaints where relevant are tabled at the Board Receive feedback and complaints and ensure the appropriate person resolves the complaint in a timely manner and feedback is monitored and reviewed Ensure all staff are equipped to handle complaints in a professional manner and adhere to the complaint management process

Receiving Complaints and other Feedback

The CEO will receive feedback or a complaint in writing or verbally from service users or stakeholders. If verbal feedback or complaint is received the CEO completes the Complaint form detailing the information.

Disputes

In the case of a dispute the parties to the dispute must meet and discuss the matter and try and resolve the dispute within fourteen (14) days after the dispute comes to the attention of all parties. If the parties are unable to resolve the dispute at the meeting, or if a party fails to attend the meeting, then the parties must, within ten (10) days, hold a meeting in the presence of a mediator.

The mediator must be:

- a person chosen by agreement between the parties; or
- in the absence of agreement:
- in the case of a dispute between a member and another member, a person appointed by the Board of Management; or
- in the case of a dispute between a member and a non-member and the Association, a person who is a mediator appointed to, or employed with, a not-for-profit organisation.

A member of ConnectGroups can be a mediator, provided they are not a party to the dispute.

The parties to the dispute must attempt to settle the dispute by mediation.

The mediator must:

- give the parties to the mediation process every opportunity to be heard;

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- allow due consideration be given to all parties of any written statement submitted by any party; and
- ensure that natural justice is accorded to the parties to the dispute throughout the mediation process.

The mediator must not determine the dispute.

The mediation must be confidential and without prejudice.

If the dispute is not resolved by mediation, the parties may seek to resolve the dispute in accordance with the Act or otherwise at Law.

Complaints Involving Staff Members

Complaints involving staff members, excluding the Chief Executive Officer should be forwarded to the Chief Executive Officer who will coordinate a response to the complaint.

Staff are to be kept informed at all times about any service user complaint involving them.

Complaints by service users about staff will not be seen as negative comments about the staff, but as comments on the service provided by the organisation. Staff play a vital role in supporting service users to complain and will not be penalised for doing so. Staff will be positively recognised for advocating on behalf of a service user, including when the service user makes a complaint. Staff will not be penalised as a result of a service user complaint unless malpractice has occurred.

Responding to the complaint may involve:

- Investigating the complaint and providing the staff member with an opportunity to respond to issues raised
- Attempting to mediate the dispute (if appropriate) and/or attempt to resolve the matter
- Taking further action necessary to resolve the issue (e.g. external mediation and dispute resolution services)
- Any disciplinary action against a staff member arising from a complaint will be taken in accordance with the Performance Management Policy

Complaints involving the Chief Executive Officer should be referred to the Chairperson. The process for complaints involving the Chief Executive Officer is the same as for complaints involving other staff, except the Chairperson facilitates the resolution.

Complaints Involving Board Members

Complaints concerning a Board member should be referred to the Chairperson. The Chairperson, or an approved delegate, will attempt to resolve the issue to the satisfaction of the complainant. Where the Chairperson is the subject of a complaint, the complaint should be referred to another member of the Board.

A response to the complaint may involve:

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- Investigating the complaint and providing the Board Director with an opportunity to respond to issues raised.
- Attempting to mediate the dispute (if appropriate) and/or attempt to resolve the matter to the satisfaction of the outside party.
- Take further action necessary to resolve the issue (e.g. external mediation and dispute resolution services).
- Raising the complaint at a Board meeting to determine a suitable course of action to resolve the issue, if appropriate.
- Action taken arising from a complaint about a Board member will be taken in accordance with the Constitution, the Board policy and procedures and the code of conduct.

Complaints Resolution and Follow Up

Within two (2) months of the complaint being resolved, ConnectGroups will follow up with the complainant to review their satisfaction with the actions taken.

Feedback information (both positive and negative) is to be considered in operational planning as well as implementation and review activities in the areas of governance, risk management, client services, project management and workplace health and safety.

Confidentiality of Complaints and Disputes

As far as possible, the fact that a service user has lodged a complaint and the details of that complaint are kept confidential amongst staff directly concerned with its resolution. The service user's permission is obtained prior to any information being given to other parties that it may be desirable to involve in order to satisfactorily resolve the complaint or dispute.

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Feedback and Complaints Procedure

Communicating the Feedback and Complaint Policy

Information is available to service users and stakeholders about mechanisms to communicate feedback, comments and complaints. This information is available in the ConnectGroups website.

Information includes:

- How to make a complaint or provide feedback to ConnectGroups.
- Right to make a complaint without fear of retribution.
- The complaints process, confidentiality, timelines and management of feedback.

Feedback

Depending on the nature of the feedback, one or more of the following actions may be appropriate:

- Record the information (if communicated verbally) and pass the information on to the specific individual concerned and the Chief Executive Officer
- Raise the information at regular staff meeting, and meeting, and inform the Board at the regular meeting unless urgent to do so.
- Record the information in the relevant staff, service user or project file. The Chief Executive Officer where required will include the feedback in reports to the Board of Directors and funder.

Complaints

Complaint information should be forwarded to the Chief Executive Officer who will review the information and coordinate a response. Complaints involving the Chief Executive Officer should be referred to the Chairperson. Anonymous complaints will not be acknowledged however will be reviewed for varsity.

Timeframe

Any complaint made by a member or member of the public against ConnectGroups or a member of ConnectGroups must be submitted in writing to the CEO within three (3) months of the incident or cause of complaint.

Complaints Register

Once the Client Feedback Form is received by the Chief Executive Officer, details are recorded in the Complaints Register, including the date the complaint was made, name and contact details of complainant, nature of complaint, staff involved (if any), action taken and results.

Responding to Feedback

Depending on the type of feedback received, particularly if it is a comment or suggestion for improvement, it will be appropriate to contact the individual who gave the feedback to communicate

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any changes made as a result of their suggestion. This will contribute to a positive relationship between the organisation and its service users and stakeholders.

Responding to a Complaint

The CEO will send a letter or email to the complainant (or the complainant's nominee) within five to seven (5-7) working days of the complaint being received. The response details what is being done to investigate and resolve the complaint.

In responding to complaints, CEO and Board members:

- Acknowledge the complaint - acknowledge the concerns and experiences of someone making a complaint, particularly if the issue has caused distress or considerable inconvenience.
- Attempt to resolve the complaint directly with the complainant - clarify the specific issue that the individual is complaining about and their desired outcomes. It may be necessary to contact the complainant to ask for more information.
- Detail how the complaint will be investigated - provide clear timeframes and the contact details for an appropriate person that can be contacted by the complainant if necessary.
- Consider the sensitive and/or confidential nature of a complaint and the privacy of the individual making the complaint - staff will carefully consider what information is recorded and to whom within the organisation the information is communicated to. When completing a Complaints Form, only record factual information that can be supported by evidence or note that the information is not yet substantiated.
- Consider whether the complaint needs to be managed in a way either because the person making a complaint has specific rights of review or because the complaint includes allegations that must be reported to an external body. For example, criminal allegations should be reported to the Police.
- Reassure the complainant that making a complaint will have no negative consequences or repercussions on their service provision.
- Inform the complainant they can select which staff member is their primary contact regarding the complaint and ask if they wish to nominate a person.

ConnectGroups aims to investigate and resolve all complaints within one (1) month of receiving the complaint. If this timeframe cannot be met, the complainant will be informed of the reasons why and of the alternative timeframe for resolution.

ConnectGroups aims to keep the complainant informed at all stages of the decision-making process concerning their complaint and the reasons for those decisions.

A register of complaints and files containing details of all complaints, actions and resolutions are filed securely in the Chief Executive Officer Office.

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Monitoring and Reporting Information about Complaints

Information regarding complaints is collated and provided to the Board of Directors at each regular Board meeting unless the Chief Executive Officer considers that it is to be communicated to the Board urgently.

The Chief Executive Officer analyses complaints for trends and provides recommendations for action to be taken. Recommendations are discussed at Board and/or staff meetings when required.

Provision of Staff Training in Complaints Handling

ConnectGroups will provide and ensure all staff, management and volunteers receive information and training as part of their induction on complaints handling. Refresher training will be provided every three years.