

Program and Service Complaints Policy and Procedure

Purpose

The ADF’s Program and Service Complaints Policy & Procedures are designed to provide partners, stakeholders and customers with a clear process that enables people to register concerns and complaints about the ADF.

This includes programs, projects, products, and individual behaviour. The document provides for prompt, effective, respectful, and timely responses to complaints raised.

Your comments and feedback are very important to us as they can help us improve our programs and services. We appreciate any type of feedback, whether positive or negative to help us review and improve the way we work with our communities and partners.

Scope

This policy applies to partners, stakeholders and consumers who are involved in ADF projects, programs and/or utilise ADF products. It is to be applied wherever people wish to register a complaint.

Our policy covers complaints about:

- The standard and quality of service.
- The behaviour of our staff or providers in delivering that service.
- Any action, or lack of action, by our staff or others engaged on ADF business.

What is a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, whether justified or not. A complaint may be about any act, omission, situation, or decision that you think is unfair, discriminatory, or unjustified. This includes interpersonal behaviour, conflicts of interest and respect for intellectual property.

Complaints can also be about unsatisfactory products and services.

Examples of Complaints

- Dissatisfaction with the way a service or program has been provided.
- Disagreement with procedures or decisions made by ADF about grant requests or participation in a service or program.
- Failure of ADF to provide a service or program, or lack of responsiveness to a request.
- Dissatisfaction with the actions of ADF employees.
- Disagreement between members of a committee, team or group representing the ADF.

What's not included in this Policy

- Matters concerning ADF staff members related to employment or workplace issues (refer to the Staff Grievance Resolution Policy).
- Organisational HR policies and procedures relating to staff performance and management.
- Issues regarding sharing of organizational intellectual property or confidential information.

How do Complaints get resolved?

- **Confidentiality:** Only those directly involved in making or investigating a complaint will have access to information about the complaint.
- **Impartiality:** Both sides of the complaint will have an opportunity to provide detail and respond. No action will be taken until all relevant information has been collected and assessed.
- **Free From Repercussions:** No service, program, or product will be impacted by the complaints process unless requested by the complainant.
- **Timeliness:** All complaints will be dealt with as quickly as possible, aiming to resolve within four weeks. In exceptional cases, additional time may be required, but all parties will be informed of developments.

Record keeping

- Accurate documentation of complaints will be maintained by the ADF.
- The ADF will review feedback and examples of good practice quarterly to celebrate success and improve program quality and effectiveness.

Rights & obligations

The aim is to achieve resolution, not to escalate interpersonal conflict or create difficulties for a worker or business unit. Everyone involved should act to ensure the best outcome.

Complaints Procedure:

Stage 1: Advice and Local Resolution

- Empower stakeholders and partners to resolve issues locally and efficiently. Direct resolution with the person involved is encouraged.

When discussing it with the person, the complainant should clearly state the unacceptable behaviour experienced, or product deficiency. Explain why it is a problem and ask that it does not continue or specify an acceptable solution.

Stage 2: Conciliation/negotiation

With a neutral third party, identify concerns and reach an agreed solution. The relevant State Manager should be advised and approve of the nominated third party.

The conciliation process will encourage the parties to reach an agreement but will not decide on the concerns.

Information and support provided by the third party may include:

- Explaining ADF's policy on complaints and feedback.
- Exploring possible strategies to resolve the concern.
- Providing information about other options, including the right to complain to a relevant external body.
- Providing support to the person until the matter is concluded under these procedures.

Stage 3: Investigation and Determination

If discussion, negotiation or conciliation fails to produce a resolution, then the matter may proceed to a formal review or investigation.

This means:

- The complainant will need to provide a signed, written statement describing the complaint and listing any evidence to support the grievance. The complainant should also specify the resolution they are seeking.
- The complainant's name and the substance of the grievance will be made available to the person(s) they have made the complaint against.
- Once a statement of complaint has been received, the appropriate ADF employee (or their nominee) will investigate and then make a determination. This determination will be communicated to the complainant and to the person(s) complained about within ten working days of receiving the complaint, aiming to complete the process within four weeks.

Appeals

Appeals must be made within seven working days of receiving the initial determination, to the State Manager or their delegate, who will conduct a review and make a final determination.

Outcomes

The outcomes depend on the complaint's nature and severity. Criminal behaviour will be reported to the appropriate authorities.