



## **SELF-REGULATORY COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY**

**Reviewed: November 2014**

**Reviewed: April 2016**

**Board Approval: July 2016**

**Next Review: 2018**

## **1. COMMITMENT**

In operating according to the standards required by the Code of Conduct of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the Australian Himalayan Foundation (AHF) is committed to achieving the highest standard in every area of its work and to continuous improvement.

AHF encourages the public to continually engage in dialogue to help improve the delivery of its services as well as accountability and transparency to its stakeholders. Through a range of mechanisms (such as information and membership events, Annual General Meetings and social media), the public and stakeholders can directly engage with AHF to raise issues and to ask for and receive information about the organisation

AHF recognises the importance and value of listening and responding to inquiries, concerns and complaints. This is one of the most important ways of learning how to improve its work. The *Complaints Policy* provides an effective, accessible and safe process for stakeholders to raise feedback, a concern or a complaint and receive a response.

## **2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The *Complaints Policy* is based on the principles of:

- Providing a formal, public and accessible mechanism for receiving and responding to complaints.
- Ensuring that feedback, concerns and complaints are handled effectively, efficiently, objectively and in utmost confidentiality.
- Providing clear, well publicised and easily accessible information about the process for making a complaint to all stakeholders, irrespective of their gender, status or background, and without prejudice to their future participation.
- Fostering, where applicable, an innovative community-orientated complaints handling process that includes training of staff based on continuous improvement.
- Taking special care to train in-country program partners to encourage, receive and respond to feedback, concerns and complaints.

## **3. DEFINITIONS**

A *complaint* is defined as an expression of dissatisfaction made to AHF related to its activities where a response or resolution is requested. A *complainant* means a person, organisation or its representative making a complaint. A *stakeholder* refers to a person or group having an interest in, or benefiting from, AHF activities.

#### **4. SCOPE OF POLICY**

This *Complaints Policy* refers to complaints related to the AHF Board, staff, volunteers, program partners, consultants or anyone else acting on behalf of AHF. A concern or complaint may be made by any stakeholder be it an: AHF supporter; a staff member; a volunteer; a consultant; a program partner; an employee of a government authority with whom AHF's program partners work; or a person affected by AHF services.

#### **5. PUBLICITY**

This *Complaints Policy* is distributed to all Directors, staff, volunteers, and program partners. The Policy is also communicated to primary stakeholders as a part of in-country project activities. When working in communities AHF will endeavour to translate the Policy into the local language.

A link to this Policy can be found on the homepage of the AHF website - <http://www.australianhimalayanfoundation.org.au>. This provides information about who the complaint can be made about, the required information, the handling process, time frames and feedback processes.

#### **6. PROCESS FOR RECEIVING COMPLAINTS**

AHF's preference is to receive feedback, concerns and complaints in writing or by email. If the complaint is made orally AHF commits to recording the complaint in writing. In all cases the confidentiality and anonymity of the complainant will be respected.

#### **7. HANDLING PROCESS**

The AHF CEO has prime responsibility for the management of this Policy and its mechanisms. When a complaint has been made AHF will not take sides, lay blame or become defensive. It will ensure that the complainant is satisfied with the intended process. To determine how the complaint is to be managed AHF will assess it in terms of: severity; health (including mental health) and safety; financial implications; the complexity; the impact on the complainant; systematic implications; and potential timeframes, including the need for and possibility of immediate action.

#### **8. MINOR COMPLAINTS**

AHF may receive minor concerns or complaints that may be based on a misconception or insufficient information that can be readily provided or corrected by a member of staff. If the complainant is satisfied with the response the complaint may be considered an enquiry.

#### **9. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION**

AHF will make every reasonable effort to investigate all relevant circumstances and information relevant to the complaint. The level of investigation will match the seriousness and frequency of the complaint.

## **10. TIMEFRAMES**

AHF commits to acknowledging written complaints within five working days, and oral complaints immediately. It further aims to resolve complaints within thirty working days. If the complaint is not resolved by then it will inform the complainant of the progress and keep them regularly updated regarding the progress of their complaint.

## **11. RESPONDING TO A COMPLAINT**

Either the CEO, or the AHF staff member delegated by the CEO to investigate the complaint, will normally make the decision in relation to resolving the complaint. Serious complaints may be referred by the CEO to the AHF Board for consideration and decision. The complaint will be addressed in writing or orally in exceptional circumstances in remote rural locations. The complainant will also be asked whether they are satisfied with the decision. If they are not satisfied, a review of the process and decision will be undertaken.

In some cases AHF will advise that the complaint be referred to the Code Committee of ACFID. The Foundation will provide all necessary information for referral to the Code Committee and offer to assist in referral.

## **12. OUTCOMES OF COMPLAINTS**

In order to learn from complaints AHF will ensure that all relevant personnel are informed of the outcomes of complaints and the implications for the delivery of programs.

AHF will take all required remedial action, be prepared to change the way in which it operates, and commit to further training of staff if necessary. Where needed staff or volunteers will be counselled or disciplined. Where appropriate AHF will consult and take advice from ACFID and/or relevant regulatory/enforcement authorities.

## **13. CONFIDENTIALITY**

AHF will at all times respect the confidentiality of the complainant.

## **14. RECORD KEEPING**

All complaints will be registered. A record of the complaint will include the date of receipt, a description of the complaint, supporting and related documentation, and details of the response.

## **15. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN COMPLAINT HANDLING**

AHF will monitor the effectiveness of its complaints handling on a regular basis and make amendments as appropriate.

## **16. AHF CONTACT PERSON**

A complaint should be addressed to:

AHF CEO  
PO Box 553, Crows Nest  
NSW 1585, Australia  
O2 94381822  
carolyn@ahf.org.au

If the complaint refers to the conduct of the CEO then the complaint should be made to the:

AHF Chairman  
PO Box 553, Crows Nest  
NSW 1585, Australia

## **17. PUBLIC COMPLAINTS POLICY**

AHF is a member of ACFID and adheres to the ACFID Code of Conduct. As such, AHF draws to the attention of its donors, supporters and members of the public that complaints can be made directly to ACFID if it is believed that AHF has breached any aspect of the ACFID Code of Conduct.

### **Related documents**

AHF Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy  
AHF Volunteers Policy  
AHF Staff Safety and Security Policy  
AHF Counter-Terrorism Guidelines  
AHF Communications Policy  
AHF HR Policy and Procedures Manual