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## Complaints Policy

May 2020

<b>Board Ratification Dates</b>	Sept 2018	
<b>Revision Date</b>	May 2020 Sept 2018 Oct 2012	May 2020 full revision, only minor changes Sept 2018 full revision (clarified grounds for complaints in table, aligned with ACFID CoC and recent best practice)
	August 2020 Updates by CEO	Contact details updated. Complaint form updated to include a question identifying concerns around safety. Complaint form updated to add 'prefer not to say' to report form question on gender. 'Type of Complaint Table' and complaint form amended to improve explanation of our response to anonymous complaints.
<b>Reaffirmation Date</b>	May 2020	
<b>Next Review Date and Cycle</b>	May 2022	Every three years from date of ratification or last full review or earlier if required.

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### 1. Introduction:

Act for Peace is committed to providing high-quality humanitarian, development and advocacy programmes and to working in a transparent and accountable manner. In an effort to achieve high quality, we strive to meet and even surpass the expectations of our stakeholders, including our partners, crisis-affected communities, donors, supporters and the public. We realise, however, that there may be occasions when we do not meet the reasonable expectations of all stakeholders at all times. Managing these times is an essential part of being an effective agency. The development of the complaints policy is the first step in Act for Peace managing this process. A second step is encouraging partners to use the *ACT Complaints Handling and Investigations Guidelines 2010* to assist them to establish a complaints mechanism for their organisation and their programmes.

## 2. Rationale

Our stakeholders have a right to raise any reasonable concern and provide feedback without any risks of reprisal or unfair treatment, including harassment or victimisation, or of losing their employment, entitlements or funding. All complaints are taken seriously, and we appreciate when people take the time to help us do our job better.

We also recognise that as a member of ACT Alliance we have a responsibility to ensure the safety, dignity and rights of crisis-affected populations and communities in all of our humanitarian and development programs. We therefore encourage all partners to explore and develop safe and effective complaints mechanisms that are accessible to all women, men, boys and girls with whom we work. Communities should be informed of their rights and entitlements and about how to make a complaint.

## 3. Scope and Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to recognize, promote and protect stakeholder rights, including the right to raise a concern, give feedback and/or complain; whilst providing clear policy guidance for responding to and resolving complaints. This is to ensure that Act for Peace is accountable to external stakeholders, and continues to strive for high quality and continuous improvement in its humanitarian, development and advocacy work, as well as in our communications and in the way we manage information; and ultimately increase the level of stakeholder satisfaction with the work of the ACT Alliance.

This Policy solely deals with external complaints. Internal issues and grievances made by staff are dealt with according to our Staff Grievance Handling Policy.

**This policy covers complaints, concerns and/or feedback in relation to the following:**

1. **Breaches of the Act for Peace Code of Conduct:** all staff, contractors representatives, volunteers or anyone else representing Act for Peace must sign and abide by the Code of Conduct and can be held to account for breaches of the Code, which outlines Act for Peace's zero tolerance approach to sexual exploitation and abuse, corruption, fraud, or other abuses of power.<sup>1</sup>
2. **Breaches of the Act for Peace Child-Safe Code of Conduct:** all Act for Peace staff, volunteers, contractors, representatives, volunteers or anyone else representing Act for Peace including through visiting an Act for Peace partner or project must sign and abide by the Code of Conduct and can be held to account for breaches of the Code. Act for Peace also insists that all of our overseas programs partners maintain an equivalent zero tolerance approach to child abuse, and that their staff are similarly accountable.
3. **Breaches of Act for Peace's Code of Good Practice,** which outlines clear standards for programs, partnerships and good organisational practice. Act for Peace also has a range of other policies which create clear standards for our humanitarian and development work in Australia and overseas, and we can also be held to account for failing to uphold these standards in our programs, advocacy and other work.

Complaints may also be made if there is concern Act for Peace or one of its staff have failed to deliver according to its quality and accountability standards as outlined in its various policies (see: [www.actforpeace.com.au](http://www.actforpeace.com.au))

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<sup>1</sup> 'Abuse of power' includes any abusive behaviour (physical, psychological, sexual or emotional) by a person in a position of authority and trust against someone in a position of vulnerability and/or dependency.

Types of Complaints Accepted/Not Accepted under this complaints policy/mechanism:		Relevant Complaints Mechanism
✓	Complaints from any Act for Peace stakeholder about an Act for Peace staff member, Commission member, volunteer or representative for breaching one of our two Codes of Conduct, which are mandatory Act for Peace standards for individual behaviour.	Please use the complaints form in Annex 2, and refer to Section 8 of this Policy. Act for Peace's general <i>Code of Conduct</i> and Act for Peace's <i>Child Safeguarding Code of Conduct</i> are available on our website: <a href="http://www.actforpeace.org.au">www.actforpeace.org.au</a>
✓	Complaints that Act for Peace, as an organisation, has not lived up to the standards it has adopted under its <i>Code of Good Practice</i> or its other humanitarian and development policies.	Please use the complaints form in Annex 2, and refer to Section 8 of this Policy. To access Act for Peace's humanitarian and development policies, see our website: <a href="http://www.actforpeace.org.au">www.actforpeace.org.au</a>
✓	Anonymous complaints. We generally do not respond to anonymous complaints, however if you have genuine concern about revealing your identity please confirm this when you contact us.	Use the relevant complaints mechanism as above.
✗	Complaints from Act for Peace 'supporters' in Australia of any nature (except the areas above).	Please see the description of how supporters can lodge a complaint on the website: <a href="http://www.actforpeace.org.au">www.actforpeace.org.au</a>
✗	Act for Peace staff complaints against other staff	These complaints should use Act for Peace's internal complaints procedures.
✗	Act for Peace staff complaints about another organisation or one or more of its employees.	Such complaints should be raised with Act for Peace management and the staff member should be supported through the process of raising and addressing the complaint.
✗	Complaints against one or more employees of a third party organisation (e.g. not Act for Peace or one of its partners)	Such complaints must be addressed to the management or governing board of the organisation.
✗	Offensive, malicious or abusive complaints, including complaints sent to as part of a bulk email to multiple organisations.	Act for Peace will not respond to these complaints
✗	Complaints relating to ongoing legal proceedings	Act for Peace will not hear these complaints until the case is resolved.

If an agency, group, or individual submits a complaint – hereinafter referred to as “the complainant” – that is not within the scope of this policy, s/he will be informed accordingly.

#### 4. Definition

Act for Peace defines a complaint as a formal expression of dissatisfaction or discontent, and/or misconduct about someone or something. We distinguish the term 'complaint' from 'feedback'. Feedback is any positive or negative informal statement of opinion about someone or something – an opinion shared for information but without the intention of lodging a formal complaint. A complaint requires a response, but feedback may not.

#### 5. Policy Objectives

Act for Peace 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 Act for Peace learns from the feedback provided through this process. Therefore the core objective of this policy is to ensure that Act for Peace reacts constructively to complaints from the people it works with; its supporters, donors, the general public, official bodies and its partners.

## 6. Principles guiding complaints policy.

Act for Peace recognises the importance and value of listening and responding to concerns and complaints as set out in the ACFID Code of Conduct<sup>2</sup> in ensuring that feedback and the 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.<sup>2</sup> It will do this by following these guiding principles:

1. **Confidentiality:** Act for Peace will maintain the highest level of confidentiality regarding details shared in receiving and investigating a complaint, including the complainants name and personal details. Information will only be shared as necessary to investigating and reporting the complaint. Information will be stored in a locked file.
2. **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. We make clear the value we place on receiving concerns and complaints in all relevant communications. Our website 'contact us' page has a prominent tab with the word complaint linking to this policy and information on how to make a complaint.<sup>3</sup> Our Partnership Agreements include a standard complaints report which is discussed with partners and a contextually appropriate mechanism agreed.
3. **Accessibility:** The complaints handling process is easily accessible to all stakeholders. Act for Peace will ensure that flexibility is provided to complainants to ring, write and e-mail complaints and/or to raise concerns in person. Where literacy is a constraint we will orally invite expressions of concern and complaint on a regular basis. We will take care to give this invitation in a way that is culturally appropriate recognising that in some cultures people require greater encouragement to make a complaint. We will take special care to facilitate complaints from vulnerable populations including children and marginalised groups. If appropriate we will make use of pictorial means of communication. We will do our very best to assist a complainant to put their complaint in writing or to write it down ourselves as faithfully as we can. All relevant communication (including our website, annual report, partnership agreements, and staff policies) explain how to make a complaint including:
  - Where or to whom complaints can be made
  - Information to be provided by the complainant
  - The process for handling complaints, including confidentiality and protection for the complainant
  - Time periods associated with various stages in the process
  - The complainants options for remedy, including external means
  - How the complainant can obtain feedback on the status of the complaint.
4. **Objectivity:** All complaints will be 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.
5. **Responsiveness:** All complaints and constructive feedback will be taken seriously and handled as swiftly as practicable. All complaints will be responded to immediately on receipt, and an investigation plan established. Whilst we aim to confirm all investigations within one month of notification, timeframes must remain flexible according to the investigation process. All complainants will be treated courteously and kept updated on the progress of their complaint through the complaints-handling process. Further, in line with the Core Humanitarian Standards<sup>4</sup> only trained staff should investigate allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.
6. **Accountability:** Accountability for handling complaints and reporting on the actions and decisions of Act for Peace with respect to complaints handling will be clearly established. All complaints will be handled using the agreed complaints procedure. All staff will receive training on complaints handling

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<sup>2</sup> ACFID Code of Conduct, Section D.6.2.

<sup>3</sup> [Section D.6.1 –ACFID Code of Conduct](#)

<sup>4</sup> Core Humanitarian Standards, point 5, page 19

and investigations. We will encourage partners to use the ACT Guidelines on Complaints Handling and Investigations to encourage them to establish a complaints mechanism for their organisation and their programs.

7. **Continuous improvement:** Act for Peace is committed to the continual improvement of the complaints handling process and the quality of its work. This commitment is practically supported by the analysis and reporting of complaints trends, monitoring of complaints handling processes, auditing/management reviews of the complaints handling process, and refining of complaints handling in light of those reviews.
8. **Organisational commitment to this policy:** Act for Peace will ensure that sufficient resources and expertise are provided to handle complaints. Our Complaints Policy will be distributed to all our Commissioners, paid staff, office-based volunteers, partners, consultants, contracted service providers and all others acting on our behalf. Commissioners, staff, volunteers, consultants and partners will be required to formally signify their commitment to this policy. Act for Peace will run induction programs for all relevant personnel. Personnel directly involved in complaint handling are to be fully trained in all aspects of this policy and its implementation. We take special care to train our field facing personnel to encourage, receive and handle complaints taking account of language issues and cultural sensitivities.
9. **Creating a safe environment:** Act for Peace seeks to provide a safe environment through which to voice a concern, without fear of reprisal or unfair treatment. We are committed to ensuring that all stakeholders should be able to raise reasonable concerns:
  - Without any risk of losing their employment or entitlements or suffering any form of retribution in the workplace or outside;
  - Knowing that harassment or victimisation will not arise from raising a genuine concern - and if it does, to know that we will deal with it as a disciplinary action under the appropriate procedure;
  - Knowing that their safety is our highest priority; and
  - Knowing that sensitive complaints will be addressed in a confidential manner.

## **7. Types of complaints**

### ***Operational and sensitive complaints***

This policy is designed to handle both operational complaints and sensitive complaints.

**Operational Complaints:** this may include Act for Peace partners disagreeing over areas of operation, funding sources, priorities, differences of interest between the public relations interests of the funding partners, conflict over advocacy approaches, the capacities of implementing partners, or non-compliance with Act for Peace programmatic principles, among others. Complaints may also relate to Act for Peace, e.g. regarding decisions on funding appeals, strategy implementation, management issues, etc. Complaints may also relate to marketing, fundraising or campaigns activities.

**Sensitive Complaints:** Allegations of harassment or bullying, of sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption or other gross misconduct are considered by Act for Peace as “sensitive” complaints. The policy supports the confidential handling of information related to sensitive complaints. It also ensures that sensitive complaints are addressed by senior management.

### ***Anonymous complaints***

As a principle, Act for Peace does not accept anonymous complaints. We recognise, however, that at times people who have genuine concerns may not be able to speak out because of special circumstances and may wish to lodge a complaint with a staff person without revealing their identity to a wider audience. In this instance, we will accept the complaint and will endeavor through best efforts to protect the complainants identity through the course of the investigation and required reporting.

### **Malicious complaints**

We operate under the assumption that all complaints are made in good faith and are not motivated by intent for personal gain, personal interest or a grudge. However, should a subsequent investigation reveal a complaint to be malicious – an accusation that the complainant knows to be false - any investigation underway must be stopped immediately and the Subject of Complaint (SoC) cleared. Complaints lodged for genuine reasons that are subsequently considered to be unfounded shall not be treated as malicious. If a malicious complaint is made by an Act for Peace employee, disciplinary measures must be taken.

## **8. Notifying Act for Peace of a Complaint**

### **When to complain**

If you wish to make a complaint, lodge your complaint as soon as possible after you become aware of the concern. Act for Peace will not accept a complaint more than six months after the alleged incident, except in exceptional circumstances and then only in cases of allegations of abuse, exploitation, fraud, gross misconduct or malpractice.

### **How to complain**

Act for Peace invites its stakeholders – partners, supporters, beneficiaries or others - to contact Act for Peace through one of the following means (noting that information will not be shared with multiple contact points unless necessary to dissolve the concern):

- **In Person:** by speaking to an Act for Peace staff member
- **By Email:** [complaints@actforpeace.org.au](mailto:complaints@actforpeace.org.au), our Chief Operating Officer at smar@actforpeace, or our CEO at jcousens@actforpeace.org.au, or by emailing your Act for Peace focal point
- **By Skype, Whatsapp** or other digital communications mechanisms that you regularly use to contact your Act for Peace focal point
- **By Letter:** please use the Complaints Form (see Annex 1.)
- **By phone:** contact your Act for Peace contact, or the Chief Operating Officer on: (+61)(02)82590808

Complaints relating to a breach of our Code of Conduct may also be lodged with the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee via the ACFID website <https://acfid.asn.au/content/complaints>

### **Minimum information required**

When lodging your complaint, please include your name, address and contact telephone number in your email or letter so that we can contact you if we require further information. Where possible, let us know how you would like your complaint to be resolved.

### **Obligation to disclose**

All Act for Peace staff, volunteers, partners, consultants and contractors are required to report allegations, concerns or suspicions of breaches related to abuse (including but not limited to child abuse), exploitation and fraud and corruption to relevant donors and authorities. Proven deliberate non-disclosure will lead to disciplinary action.

Please see the Act for Peace Code of Conduct for Act for Peace employee commitments.

### **Review cycle**

On a continuing basis we will monitor the effectiveness of our complaints handling and make improvements as appropriate. We will:

- Maintain registers and further data collection on complaints for the purpose of identifying trends for the purpose of enhancing information management and service provided;
- Keep abreast of best practices (both locally and overseas) regarding complaint handling;
- Foster a partnership/consumer/client-focused approach;
- Undertake specific training and retraining of staff to foster better complaint handling practices;
- Encourage innovation in complaint handling development; and
- Recognise and reward exemplary complaint handling behaviour.

We will conduct an internal review of the effectiveness of our complaint handling every year and will commission an independent review of the effectiveness of our complaint handling after three years and then every five years. In addition to the general reviews of our complaint handling, we will monitor how effectively we are publicising our complaints policy on a continuing basis and make necessary improvements in its communication.



## Annex 1: Policy Objectives and Indicators to measure Progress towards Objectives.

OBJECTIVES	INDICATORS
To ensure that Act for Peace is accountable to its standards and constructively manages complaints from its stakeholders.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Act for Peace’s organisational standards and the standards of behaviour expected of its staff and others are clearly communicated to Act for Peace’s stakeholders.</li><li>2. Act for Peace’s maintains a safe and accessible complaints mechanism.</li><li>3. Relevant staff and stakeholders are aware of the complaints policy.</li><li>4. All complaints are managed according to best practice principles.</li></ol>

## Annex 2: Complaints Form

*This form could be completed (or adapted) by or for the person wishing to lodge a complaint. If the person making a complaint would rather use a different format, that is fine too. Please ensure that enough information is provided to enable Act for Peace to contact you to discuss your concerns. We generally do not respond to anonymous complaints, however if you have genuine concern about revealing your identity please confirm this. Act for Peace aims to ensure that all complaints are handled fairly, timely and appropriately. Information shared will be kept confidential unless we need to share it to resolve a complaint, in which case we will discuss this with the complainant first. We will also do our best to support the complainant through the process of resolving the complaint.*

### A: General Information

1. Name of complainant: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Their Organisation (if any): \_\_\_\_\_
3. Their Location (city, country): \_\_\_\_\_
4. Male/Female/prefer not to say: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Address: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Name of the person and/or organisation you wish to lodge a complaint against (if known):  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Date of incident or concern: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of incident or concern: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Place of incident: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Date of reporting: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of reporting: \_\_\_\_\_

**B: Please list any concerns you have for the safety of children or others, including yourself, in making this report. Please confirm if these concerns require immediate action.**

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### C: Brief description of the incident or concern

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**D: Name of witnesses** (if any/ and if relevant). Include the names of witnesses and where they can be contacted, if known;

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**E: State what kind of response you expect from Act for Peace and how you wish to see the matter resolved:**

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(Name) \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Please send by email, addressed to: The Act for Peace Complaints Officer: [complaints@actforpeace.org.au](mailto:complaints@actforpeace.org.au)