

Principle 5: Timeliness



What timeliness means

Our organisation will:

- do our best to manage and respond to your complaint as quickly as possible
- inform you if there are delays in managing your complaint, and explain the reasons, and
- publish our timeframes for finalising complaints which recognises the seriousness, urgency and complexity of the complaints we receive.

Timeliness is being clear about how long it is likely to take for individual complaints to be finalised. From the beginning, set realistic timeframes to manage complainant expectations and update them of progress, including if there are delays.

Why timeliness matters

A person is more likely to be satisfied with your complaint management process, if their matter is managed and finalised quickly. They will be more likely to view your organisation positively, as being responsive and respectful of their time.

Dissatisfaction increases with time, especially if progress or reasons for delays are not communicated. This can also lead to issues being escalated, which will require additional resources. If people's expectations about timeliness are not managed effectively, they may be less likely to engage with or access your organisation's advice or services in the future.



How to ensure timeliness

It may not be possible to set definitive timeframes for finalising complaints as there are many variables that can impact on response timeframes. However, there are ways your organisation can manage complainant expectations.



Establish and publicise realistic timeframes for finalising complaints which recognise the seriousness, urgency and complexity of the complaints received by your organisation.

Include these timeframes in your:

- complaint management policy
- publicly available information on the complaint process
- acknowledgement sent to the complainant.



Promptly acknowledge complaints and aim to resolve them quickly and accurately. When you receive a complaint, let the complainant know that you have received it as soon as you can, or within 3 business days.¹



Manage a complainant's expectations by providing realistic timeframes, from the beginning of the complaints process. If there are delays, promptly contact the complainant with an explanation, apologise if appropriate and provide a new timeframe.

1. Standards Australia, *Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations* (AS 10002:2022), 2022, p 4.



Track the progress of each complaint until it has been finalised. Updates of the complaint should be made available to complainants on request and at regular intervals.



Monitor workloads of complaint handling staff to ensure resourcing levels support effective complaint management. This involves balancing timeliness with quality, which is dependent on thorough evidence gathering and fact checking.



Make improvements to your complaint management system by collecting and analysing complaints data, including if complaints were:

- responded to at the first point of contact
- appropriately prioritised
- acknowledged within a set time, and
- finalised within a set time.



Case example

Complaint

Kevin made a written complaint to a regulatory organisation that an inspector failed to show up for an appointment. He contacted the call centre 3 times for an explanation for why the inspector did not attend, but the calls were never answered.

Judy, the complaints officer, read the complaint and immediately contacted Kevin. She apologised for the no show and lack of response from the contact centre, and then advised Kevin she would reschedule a new appointment within 2 days.

Judy explained the call centre escalation process and what should have occurred. She promised to investigate why Kevin's calls to the contact centre were left unanswered. She explained she needed time to look at records and speak to other staff and that she would get back to Kevin within 2 weeks about this aspect of his complaint.

She also provided her contact details and promised to contact Kevin if there was a delay. Within 2 weeks, Judy contacted Kevin again and told him the organisation had uncovered an issue with the voicemail system. Judy told Kevin that his complaint had led to a system change, which would help the organisation improve the service provided to others.

Analysis

Judy displayed a commitment to timeliness in dealing with the complaint. She recognised the urgency of booking a new appointment for Kevin and prioritised this task ahead of investigating the rest of the complaint.

She then explained what the contact centre process and acknowledged that her organisation did not meet expectations about when and how the complaint should have been dealt with and apologised.

Judy gave Kevin specific, realistic timeframes for booking a new appointment, completing inquiries into his complaint and promised to contact him if there were any delays. She showed that she had read Kevin's complaint, and resolved to determine why the process failed in this instance and the steps required to ensure others did not experience the same dissatisfaction with the service.

Additional resources

- NSW Ombudsman, [Effective Complaint Management Guidelines](#), 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, [6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 1. Respectful treatment](#), 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, [6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 2. Information and accessibility](#), 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, [6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 3. Communication](#), 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, [6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 4. Taking ownership](#), 2024
- NSW Ombudsman, [6 Principles for Effective Complaint Management Information Sheet 6. Transparency](#), 2024
- Standards Australia, [Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations \(AS 10002:2022\)](#), 2022

Contact details

Level 24
580 George Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Toll free (outside Sydney metro)
1800 451 524
Email info@ombo.nsw.gov.au
Web www.ombo.nsw.gov.au
National Relay Service 133 677

Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS)
131 450
We can arrange an interpreter through TIS or you can contact TIS yourself before speaking to us.