Principle 6: Transparency

What transparency means

Our organisation will:

- record and analyse information on our complaint management processes, including the:
  - number of complaints received
  - number of complaints finalised
  - percentage of complaints finalised within stated timeframes
  - issues raised in complaints
  - actions taken in response to complaints
  - systemic issues identified, and
  - number of requests received for internal or external review.

Why transparency matters

Transparency is about being open and accountable. A transparent complaint management system and processes will increase trust in your organisation. Recording and analysing data will enhance your organisation's ability to manage complaints in a consistent, systematic and responsive manner. It will also assist to identify recurring issues and trends and what is needed to improve your operations and service delivery.

How to be transparent

In designing and implementing your complaint management system, you should consider your organisation's size, volume of complaints, functions and customer base. When managing complaints, let people know how you capture this information and that you will treat their personal information confidentially. In circumstances where you may need to share a complainant's information with another agency, such as through a warm referral, seek their consent.

Continuous improvement

By accurately and systematically recording and analysing complaints information, your organisation will gain important insights into what processes, services and systems improvements are needed. This data should be both quantitative and qualitive and include, but not be limited to:

- date of complaint
- number of complaints received, finalised and sent for internal and/or external review
- referral source
- demographic information
- nature and severity of complaints
- underlying cause
- staff member managing complaint
- timeframes for acknowledging, responding to and finalising complaints
- number of contacts made to address issues
- requested vs actual complaint outcome, and
- actions taken, including remedies, determinations and results.

Reporting

Communicate data trends and analysis to all frontline staff and senior management for review and action, where appropriate. It is also good practice to notify members of the public about the changes and improvements made from analysing complaint data. This can be done by publishing the information on your website.

Ombudsman
New South Wales

Case example

Complaint

Micha, a council complaint officer, received a complaint from Sahir regarding a lack of response regarding his development application.

Micha, along with other complaint officers at council, is required to record all the relevant information about the complaints she manages, including the date received, the staff member allocated to the complaint, time to acknowledge, respond and finalise, the actions taken and remedies, determinations and results.

Tarun, the system administrator, analysed the relevant data from council's complaint management system. He identified that council had received 10 complaints in the last 3 months about the same issue.

When council investigated the matter further, it discovered that 1 of council's officers had been allocated too many development applications to process, causing delays. Sahir's application was one of these. From the data, Tarun also found that the complaints officers who had received complaints about the issue were not always acknowledging the complainants within the required 3 day time frame.

Micha got back to Sahir and explained the issue, apologised and gave him an update about his application. Council also communicated findings about the over-allocation of development applications, and delays in acknowledging complaints, to staff.

Analysis

Council has an appropriate complaint management system for its size and function. Micha and her colleagues commitment to recording both qualitative and quantitative information about the complaints they receive allowed council to analyse the data to identify complaint trends and areas for improvement.

Council used this data to address Sahir's concerns with his application, uncover a systemic issue with resourcing for development applications and identify an issue with acknowledgement of complaints. Council was also open and accountable by communicating the outcomes to Sahir and its staff.

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 5. Timeliness, 2024
- Standards Australia, *Guidelines for Complaint Management in Organizations* (AS 10002:2022), 2022

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We can arrange an interpreter through TIS or you can contact TIS yourself before speaking to us.