

Complaints Handling Policy

This policy sets out how we approach complaints or negative feedback about us. It is open for use by members of the public, employees or volunteers and involves five key elements:

- (a) *Culture*. Our aim is to serve our stakeholders to the best of our ability. We accept that we are not perfect. We value complaints and feedback as a means of identifying and understanding how we can do things better.
- (b) *Principles*. Our complaints and feedback system is modelled on the principles of humility, fairness, accessibility, responsiveness and efficiency.
- (c) *People*. Our complaints handling employees and volunteers will be skilled and professional.
- (d) *Process*. Our complaints handling process involves seven stages - acknowledgment, assessment, planning, investigation, response, review, and consideration of systemic issues.
- (e) *Analysis*. We review information about complaints as part of a continuous process of review and improvement.

We discuss these elements in more detail below:

Element 1 - Culture

We are committed to the implementation of our Strategy (<https://localleaders.org.au/strategy-focus/the-local-leaders-strategy/>). We are equally committed to doing so in the best way possible, and without causing concern or hurt for any of the people we deal with. We know that despite our best efforts, we are not perfect and that we can always do better. Accordingly, we value feedback and recognise that effective complaint handling will benefit our stakeholders, our reputation and our administration. We acknowledge that complaints can highlight weaknesses in our programs, policies and service delivery, and stimulate us to improve our operations. We also recognise that good complaint handling will reassure stakeholders that we are committed to resolving problems, improving relations and building loyalty, and to improving our accountability and transparency.

Element 2 - Principles

Our complaint and feedback handling system is modelled on principles of humility, fairness, accessibility, responsiveness and efficiency. Complaint handling has the same priority as our core business. All complaints will be investigated with complete impartiality by a staff member or Board member who is not personally involved in the issues, or by an external consultant or adviser. Each complaint will be assessed on its own merits. As far as possible confidentiality and privacy will be maintained and we will be transparent in reporting back results to you as quickly as reasonably possible. It is our aim to resolve all complaints as quickly and efficiently as possible. For example, if they can be resolved over the phone at the time they are made, we will do so.

We will not victimise or treat any person adversely because they have made a complaint. There is no financial charge for making a complaint. If you have special needs (eg non English speaking background or a physical impairment), please let us know and we will do our best to assist you.

You may initiate a complaint or feedback by email, letter or telephone call - see the contact details below. If you wish to make your complaint or provide feedback anonymously, it will still receive our genuine attention, although of course we will be unable to report back or seek further information which may be able to assist us in dealing with any issue. We are happy to deal directly with you, or through a friend or adviser.

Element 3 - People

We take complaints and feedback seriously. All complaints will be handled by our Executive Director, unless it is inappropriate for him or her to do so, eg due to absence or a lack of independence, in which case another senior member of staff or a Board member will handle it. In matters of great significance, we may outsource the handling of a complaint to an external adviser or consultant, to whom we will give complete co-operation.

Element 4 - Process

Our standard complaint handling procedures are as follows (although we reserve the right to approach a complaint more flexibly if we think it will achieve a more just and efficient outcome):

1. We will acknowledge each complaint promptly and give you the contact details of the person handling the complaint, ideally within 2 business days. If we have not finalised your complaint within 7 days after that, we will contact you to report our progress.
2. We will assess the complaint and assign it priority.
3. If investigation is required, we will plan how the investigation is to be carried out.
4. We will investigate all relevant factual issues and then review the complaint in light of those facts. We will then consider options for complaint resolution.
5. We will contact you to discuss the complaint. In doing so we will inform you of the relevant facts we have identified and ask you to comment and/or give us any other relevant information you may have. We will then discuss with you how we propose to resolve the complaint. If we were wrong or have acted inappropriately, we will apologise.
6. If you are not satisfied with the proposed resolution, our Chair will review the position, and we will contact you appropriately. If you are still not satisfied, and we believe that there are genuine issues involved, we may suggest an externally facilitated mediation via PeaceWise (<https://peacewise.org.au/>) or similar. Alternatively, you may pursue any other action which you believe is appropriate.
7. We will act on any systemic issues that are identified as a result of the complaint or feedback.

(Note – if we reasonably believe that a complaint is vexatious, trivial or not genuine we will inform you accordingly as soon as we form that view. If you wish to take matters further, you may pursue any other action which you believe is appropriate.)

Element 5 - Analysis

We appreciate that complaints and feedback can provide an insight into our programs and services, and may show that they are not working as well as they might. We will use information brought to light by any complaints and feedback to improve our service to our stakeholders by:

- highlighting service failings that need to be remedied; and
- revealing problems and trends that can be acted on by management.

We will address at Board level any significant issues which are revealed by our complaints handling and feedback procedures.

Contact details:

Telephone: : +61 2 9635 4409

Email: office@localleaders.org.au

Postal: PO Box 346 Springwood NSW 2777

Other Policies and Procedures

Local Leaders has a Whistle-blower Policy and Whistle-blower Procedures for the reporting by an employee or volunteer of concerns regarding illegal or corrupt behaviour or improper or unethical behaviour by other employees, volunteers or contractors. Reports about matters within the ambit of the Whistle-blower Policy and Whistle-blower Procedures will be dealt with under that Policy and those Procedures, and not under this Policy.

Amended by the Board on 28 July 2020
Updated with name change (August 2022)