

Generic Fundraising Complaints Process



Fundraising
Standards Board

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This procedure is meant as a guide to help you deal with fundraising complaints and develop a complaints process in line with FRSB regulations. We advise you to adapt it to suit your organisation.

Identifying a Complaint

Definition of a Complaint

The FRSB will deal with all complaints that are concerned with a breach of the Institute of Fundraising's Codes of Fundraising Practice or a breach of the Fundraising Promise provided that the complainant has first directed the complaint to the charity concerned but is not satisfied with the answer received.

This definition is a tool to assist members of the scheme, so that members of staff dealing with complaints can be clear about which complaints the FRSB will deal with and which you need to report on; it is not a suggestion for charities to use to define all complaints, or to give to the public.

Handling a Complaint

There are four golden rules when handling complaints:

Rule 1

Always handle complaints with honesty and communicate well. The complainant will appreciate a well managed complaint and this will build greater loyalty in the longer term. If a mistake has been made, it is far better to acknowledge the situation.

Rule 2

Some complainants will be emotional. Remain calm at all times, objective and just stick to the facts of the case. Do not get drawn into any debate or arguments over the case – just gather the relevant information.

Rule 3

At the end of a telephone call from a complainant, always summarise the situation to confirm to the complainant that you've understood the complaint.

Rule 4

Always aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible. If not, it is more likely that you will lose the goodwill of your supporter.

It is assumed that a designated member of staff will be responsible for seeing the complaint through from start to finish.

Key Steps

Complaints made by phone:

Step 1: Listen to the complainant, keep calm and don't argue. Show concern where appropriate. Gather the facts using open questions. At the end of the call summarise the call to confirm to the complainant that you've understood the situation. If you are knowledgeable about the area of the complaint, then try to resolve the complaint over the phone. If the complainant is satisfied, go to Step 3. If the complainant is dissatisfied, go to Step 2.

Step 2: Take the complainant's contact details and acknowledge the complaint in writing within 14 days including a summary of your telephone conversation and confirmation that the complaint will be dealt with within 30 days. Go to Step 3.

Complaints made in writing by post or email:

Step 1: Acknowledge the complaint in writing within 14 days, confirming that you will seek to resolve the complaint within 30 working days. At this stage further contact with the complainant should only be made where you have insufficient details to take the complaint forward. Follow the golden rules when speaking by phone to the complainant. Go to Step 3.

Step 3: Enter the details onto your complaints file using the format provided on the Fundraising Standards Board Resource CD-ROM or website. This can be done electronically or by using hard copy files. If the complainant is satisfied, this is the end of the process. If the complainant is dissatisfied, go to Step 4.

Step 4: Establish the area of your operation the complaint involves. Having first consulted with relevant managers, make contact with the appropriate person and gather any relevant information regarding the materials and/or circumstances of the case.

Step 5: If a third party is involved (for example a supplier), you should also speak to them to gather any information about the circumstances of the complaint. Take care to record all the important points and file these with the case.

Step 6: Having gathered all the relevant information, you will need to seek a meeting with the Head of Department (or relevant person with authority) and the line manager for the area concerned. Include suppliers, if they have been implicated, at this meeting.

Step 7: The assessment meeting should set out the nature of the complaint and determine what action needs to be taken. If the complaint is about fundraising then you should make a note on whether it is about an alleged breach of the Institute of Fundraising's Codes of Fundraising Practice and/or the Fundraising Standards Board Fundraising Promise. The FRSB will need this information if the complaint is referred to them. The outcome of the meeting will typically produce one of two options:

- ◆ The complaint is justified. You should write to the complainant to apologise and let them know that the complaint has been used to improve on your future fundraising activities. You should take action to prevent any recurrence of the problem.
- ◆ The complaint is not justified. You should write to the complainant to explain that you take complaints very seriously, but in this case you will not be changing your fundraising practices and give a reason for your position.

In exceptional circumstances, you may need more time than 30 days to gather all the information (for example, if a key member of staff is on annual leave or sick). If this happens, contact the complainant in writing with a copy to the Fundraising Standards Board outlining the situation.

Step 8: When writing to the complainant, you should make it clear that if they are not happy with your response, they should contact the Fundraising Standards Board within 2 months of receiving your response.

Step 9: Make sure that all correspondence is on file and that this can be made available to the Fundraising Standards Board if the complaint is pursued further.

Reporting to the Fundraising Standards Board

A record of the number and nature of all the complaints you receive about your fundraising activity should be made in order to file your annual return to the Fundraising Standards Board.

A template for the annual return is available on the members area of the FRSB website (www.frsb.org.uk).

Key Timescales to Incorporate in Your Procedure

- ◆ 14 days to acknowledge a complaint
- ◆ 30 days to advise the complainant of the outcome of the investigation
- ◆ 2 months is the time period which the complainant has to refer the complaint to the FRSB

More Information

For more information about what your complaints process should include, please see the FRSB document 'The Complaints Process for Charities'. This is available on the FRSB website, www.frsb.org.uk.