



Complaints Handling Policy

Details

Policy & Procedure Owner	ERFA Board	
Approved by	ERFA Board of Directors	
Date Approved	Date of Last Revision	Next Review
August 2015	April 2024	April 2027

Abbreviations

ACFID	Australian Council for International Development
CHO	Complaints Handling Officer
CHP	Complaints Handling Policy
CPP	Child Protection Policy
CS	Child safeguarding
ERFA	Edmund Rice Foundation Australia
ICCF	Incidents, Complaints and Compliments Form
ICCR	Incidents, Complaints and Compliments Register
PSEAH	Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment
QP	Quality Principle
SEAH	Sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment

Definitions

ACFID Member	A not-for-profit organisation that has obtained accreditation with ACFID
Board Members	Voluntary directors of ERFA's Board
Donor	Members of the public including individuals or organisations who contribute to ERFA in cash or in-kind
Partner	Any organisation which has an MOU or contract with ERFA
Primary Stakeholder (beneficiary)	Children and adults who participate in and are directly impacted by ERFA partner projects
Program	Programs are overarching development approaches and initiatives that set priorities and guide project outcomes, results and activities. Programs can comprise ministries or entities
Project	Projects are the development activities of a Program
Staff	Employees, contractors, subcontractors, outworkers, apprentices and trainees, work experience students, volunteers and any other person who performs work for ERFA or ERFK
Stakeholder	Anyone who interacts with ERFA/ERFK and its Partners including but not limited to suppliers, contractors, volunteers, donors, etc.

Incident reporting

All "high-risk" incidents, suspected or alleged, are to be reported to the ERFA CEO within 24 hours of them first being received. Where DFAT funds are involved, DFAT are also to be contacted within 24 hours of the incident first being received. For more information on ERFA's triage system for classifying complaints and incident reporting see Sections 7.0 and 9.0.

ERFA CEO contact for high-risk incident reporting	ceo@erf.org.au or +61 7 3621 9649
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Contact information

Chief Executive Officer / Child Protection Officer / Safeguarding Officer	Bren Arkinstall - barkinstall@edmundrice.org
Programs Director, Second Complaints Contact	Emily Faller – eifaller@edmundrice.org
ERFA Board Chair	Paul Gallagher – chair@erf.org.au
ERFA	www.erf.org.au or +61 7 3621 9649
ACFID	http://www.acfid.asn.au or +61 6 02 6285 1816

Attached documents

- Incidents, Complaints & Compliments Form (ICCF)

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1.0 Policy overview

ERFA is committed to being accountable to its stakeholders and maintaining transparency. To achieve this, it is not only necessary to actively solicit feedback from stakeholders, ERFA must establish avenues that stakeholders can access at any time to submit feedback. This Complaints Handling Policy (CHP) aims to establish a permanent system for processing feedback from ERFA stakeholders, one that stipulates clear processes on how to lodge, register, triage, investigate and finalise feedback.

Where necessary, this policy makes a distinction between ERFA's stakeholder categories of: Staff (internal) and implementing Partners (internal), Project Stakeholders (external) and Donors (external). This policy provides unique avenues for each of these stakeholders to file a complaint.

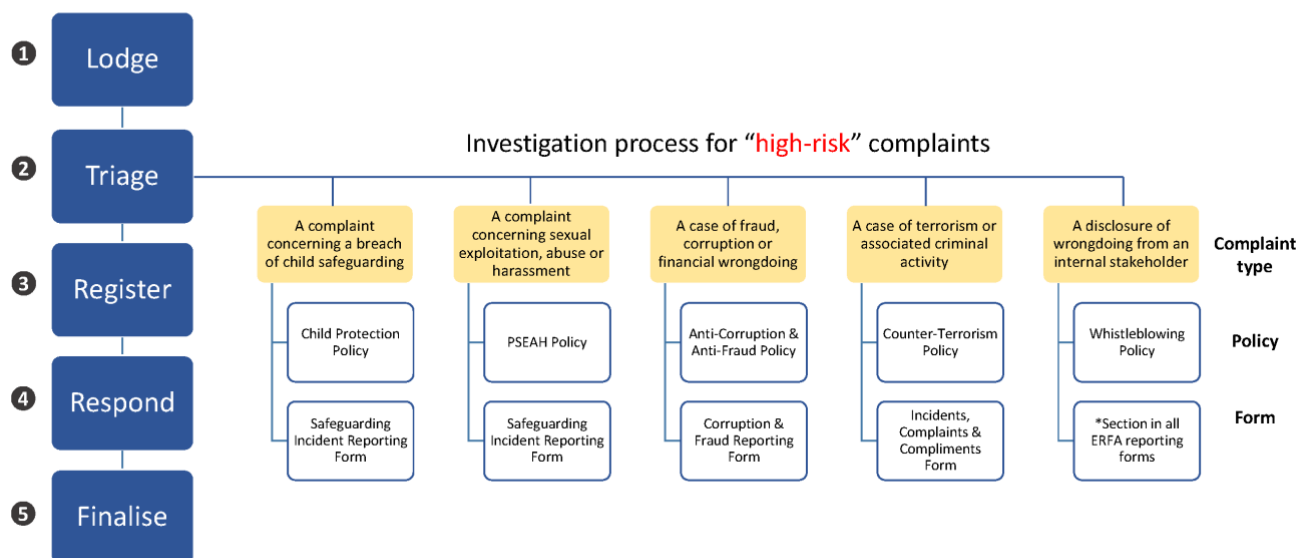
The purpose of this policy is to:

- enable Staff, including management, contractors and volunteers of ERFA, Partner organisations, or any individual associated with programs managed or funded by ERFA, to bring to the attention of the ERFA CEO or Board, a complaint against the organisation or any individual(s) associated with it;
- provide protection for persons who disclose misconduct or bring forward a complaint including allowing complainants to de-identify themselves;
- establish a documented investigation procedure that keeps an organisational record of all complaints;
- establish a triage system for classifying the severity of complaints raised; and
- provide appropriate assistance and referrals to complaints that fall outside the scope of this policy.

This CHP is the first point of contact for all complaints brought to the attention of ERFA, including but not limited to those related to child safeguarding concerns, sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH), organisational misconduct, breaches of the ACFID Code of Conduct and supporter concerns. Every complaint will be processed through the *1. Lodge*, and *2. Triage* stages. Certain categories of 'high-risk' complaints warrant extra care and are subject to the unique investigation and finalisation procedures of other ERFA policies. Complaints that fall outside these parameters will be processed through the *3. Register*, *4. Respond* and *5. Finalise* stages as specified in this CHP. High-risk complaint types that require the ERFA stakeholder refer to external policies other than this CHP include the following:

- For alerts of child safeguarding incidents, ERFA's **Child Safeguarding Policy** is to be consulted.
- For complaints of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment (SEAH), ERFA's **Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy** is to be consulted.
- For disclosures of wrongdoing originating from internal stakeholders, ERFA's **Whistleblowing Policy** is to be consulted.
- For cases of terrorism or associated criminal activity, ERFA's **Counter-Terrorism Policy** is to be consulted.
- For cases of fraud, corruption or financial wrongdoing, ERFA's **Anti-Corruption & Anti-Fraud Policy** is to be consulted.

Complaints handling flowchart



Complaints Handling Process Flowchart:

1.1 Communication of policy to Partners

This CHP is to serve as a guide for ERFA's implementing Partners in Australia and overseas. ERFA's Partners are encouraged to develop their own CHP catered to the unique characteristics of their country and project. Partners also have the option to adopt ERFA's CHP, pending the approval of their governing authority. ERFA monitors and evaluates the quality and implementation of a Partner's CHP. A robust CHP is a precondition for receiving ERFA support.

2.0 Definition

Definition of 'complaint' and 'misconduct'

The ACFID Code defines 'complaint' as an 'expression of dissatisfaction' made to an organisation related to its product or its services. This is the definition that ERFA chooses to adopt.

In this policy 'misconduct' is classified as:

- corrupt conduct;
- a substantial mismanagement of ERFA resources;
- a serious breach of ERFA policy;
- conduct involving substantial risk to a child or children, public health or safety, or to the environment that would, if proved, constitute either a criminal offence or reasonable grounds for dismissing or terminating the services of a manager, staff member, or volunteer of ERFA or Partner organisation who engaged in that conduct.

3.0 Complaint handling principles

A person who believes on reasonable grounds that an ERFA stakeholder, be they internal or external to the organisation, has engaged or proposes to engage in misconduct in their capacity as a representative of ERFA, will not be discriminated against in any way for making such a complaint. ERFA prioritises the rights, needs, wishes and empowerment of complainants over any other stakeholder involved in a complaint. To ensure that complainants are protected, and thus, that the process of submitting complaints is encouraged, ERFA practices the following key principles:

3.1 Accessibility

This CHP and ERFA's Incidents, Complaints and Compliments Form (ICCF) are made readily accessible for stakeholders to use. ERFA provides various avenues for complaints to be issued for both domestic and overseas stakeholders, including online, via email and telephone, or in-person.

3.2 Impartiality

If an individual makes a complaint, it will be investigated in a fair and impartial manner. No judgments or assumptions will be made and no action will be taken until the investigation is complete, except in the case of a child abuse or any unlawful act where, in these instances, legislative and legal obligation will be observed.

3.3 Detailed information

If a complaint is made against an individual, that individual's rights will be protected and they will be entitled to know detailed information about the substance of the complaint and will be given an opportunity to put forward their interpretation of the situation.

3.4 Confidentiality

Individuals can feel secure that if they do make a complaint it will remain confidential. The only people who will have access to information about the complaint will be the parties involved in the complaint and the person investigating.

3.5 Fairness

The complaints management process will be conducted in a manner that is respectful of all parties.

3.6 No victimisation

ERFA will ensure, to the best of their abilities, that a complainant will not be victimised in any way.

3.7 Good faith

It is expected that complaints are made in good faith and are not vexatious or malicious.

3.8 People-focused

ERFA is committed to fulfilling the needs of the most vulnerable stakeholders during the complaints handling process. This includes any person considered vulnerable because of factors of race, religion, ethnicity, indigeneity, disability, age, displacement, caste, gender, gender identity, sexuality, sexual orientation, poverty, class or socio-economic status. At all times ERFA recognises the implicit power disparity between itself and the underprivileged stakeholders it supports in developing communities.

3.9 Responsiveness

Every effort will be made to finalise complaints within one month. Complainants will be advised if their matter cannot be finalised within this timeframe.

4.0 Roles and responsibilities

This CHP outlines the different responsibilities designated to the internal stakeholder categories of ERFA Staff and overseas implementing Partners. This includes the responsibilities of specific ERFA Staff positions, including the CEO, Programs Director and Programs and Compliance Officer, as well as specific Partner positions, including the Complaints Handling Officer (CHO). The CHO is a specialty position of an implementing Partner; each Program that ERFA funds must designate at least one CHO.

4.1 Responsibilities of ERFA Staff

The responsibilities of Staff are as follows:

- sign ERFA's Code of Conduct; ERFA's Code of Conduct outlines expectations of Staff conduct. This CHP is one of several related policies incorporated into the document;

- adhere to ERFA's CHP;
- immediately notify ERFA's CEO of any lodged complaints;
- assist the CEO with the complaints investigation process as required.

The responsibilities of the CEO include those of all ERFA staff as well as the following:

- act as a first recipient of all lodged complaints;
- assess the severity of a complaint by allocating it a risk score using the Complaints Triage Framework;
- assess whether a complaint falls within the scope of this CHP per the triage process;
- assess whether a complaint concerns a high-risk incident per the complaints triage process;
- report to the ERFA Board complaints that receive a risk level of high;
- work with the ERFA Board to investigate complaints allocated a risk level of high;
- work internally to investigate complaints allocated a risk level of low or medium;
- for complaints that fall outside the scope of this CHP, make every effort to ensure that the complainant concerned is provided with the necessary means of safety and rehabilitation;
- manage entries into the ICCR as required.

The responsibilities of the Programs Director include those of all ERFA staff as well as the following:

- manage entries into the ICCR as required;
- assume the responsibilities of CEO in when contacted directly with a complaint in the capacity as a secondary contact.

The responsibilities of the Programs and Compliance Officer include those of all ERFA staff as well as the following:

- manage entries into the ICCR as required.

4.2 Responsibilities of Partners internationally

The responsibilities of Partner Staff are as follows:

- sign and adhere to their Program-specific Complaints Handling Policy or Position on CH;
- complete CH training as instructed by their CHO;
- immediately notify their CHO of any lodged complaints.

The responsibilities of CHOs include those of all Partners as well as the following:

- create a PCHP or Position on Complaints Handling that complies with ERFA's CHP and update it when necessary;
- monitor their Staff's compliance towards their PCHP;
- provide regular CH training for their staff;
- create a Complaints Notice and publicly display it and other complaints handling procedures in their local language so it is visible to all stakeholders;
- create and apply a triage process to classify complaints according to different risk levels;
- consult their policies or positions on CP, PSEAH, whistleblowing, anti-terrorism and corruption and fraud when complaints concerning these respective incidents are lodged;
- report to their Governing Authority complaints that receive a risk level of high;
- report to the ERFA CEO complaints that receive a risk level of high within 24-hours;
- work internally to investigate complaints allocated a risk level of low or medium;
- for complaints that fall outside the scope of their PCHP or Position on CH, make every effort to ensure that the complainant concerned is provided with the necessary means of safety and rehabilitation;
- comply with ongoing CH monitoring and evaluation by ERFA.

5.0 Survivor-centred approach

ERFA takes particular care to protect the rights, needs and wishes of complainants. ERFA takes extra

care towards complaints that have survived a CS or SEAH incident. ERFA is committed to providing appropriate assistance to survivors of CP or SEAH, be that of a medical, social, legal or financial variety.

ERFA is committed to preventing and responding to cases of SEAH to safeguard the interests of the survivor. For complaints involving SEAH, please refer to our PSEAH Policy and contact ERFA's Safeguarding Officer at ceo@erf.org.au or +61 7 3621 9649. To be eligible for funding and ongoing capacity-building support ERFA requires that each of its Partner organisations, including both international and domestic programs, adopt and practice ERFA's PSEAH Policy. This requires, among other things, for Partners to conduct regular training on PSEAH and to ensure that vulnerable stakeholders, including program beneficiaries, are aware of the process to lodge an SEAH complaint. These measures are more extensively outlined in ERFA's PSEAH Policy.

ERFA is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children. For complaints involving child protection, please refer to our Child Protection Policy and contact ERFA's Child Protection Officer at ceo@erf.org.au or +61 7 3621 9649. To be eligible for funding and ongoing capacity-building support ERFA requires that each of its Partner organisations, including both international and domestic programs, adopt and practice ERFA's Child Protection Policy. ERFA also requires Partners to adopt their own Partner-specific Child Protection Policy (PSCPP). This requires, among other things, for Partners to nominate a Child Protection Officer, to conduct regular training on CP and to ensure that children are aware of the process to lodge a CP complaint. These measures are more extensively outlined in ERFA's CPP.

5.1 Complaints outside the scope of this policy

For CP or SEAH complaints that fall outside the scope of this policy (i.e., complaints of CP or PSEAH that concern an employee or volunteer of another organisation other than ERFA), ERFA will make every effort to ensure that the complainant concerned is provided with the necessary means of safety and rehabilitation. There is no requirement for ERFA to report complaints that fall outside the scope of this policy to the Board of Advisors. Likewise, there is no requirement for implementing Partners to report complaints that fall outside the scope of their PCP to ERFA.

Whether a CP or PSEAH complaints falls within or outside the scope of this policy will first be determined by the ERFA CEO by using the Complaints Triage Framework, as outlined in Section 7.0.

How these complaints are handled is highly contextual and will differ on a case-by-case basis. To assist, below are a list of guiding principles for how to handle these types of complaints:

- An ERFA representative should make every reasonable effort to ensure that the complainant's immediate safety is guaranteed.
- An ERFA representative should refer the complainant to an external organisation or service that is better equipped to handle the complaint.
- An ERFA representative should liaise personally with the complainant and make every reasonable effort to guarantee their immediate safety up until the point where a referral is made and the representative is satisfied that the complainant's safety is now guaranteed by the external organisation or service.

6.0 Lodging complaints

ERFA acknowledges that the context for lodging a complaint differs across regions and programs. To ensure that all of ERFA's stakeholders and members of the public have the ability to submit a complaint, ERFA provides several communication avenues domestically and overseas.

The core avenue through which stakeholders can submit a complaint is via ERFA's Incidents, Complaints and Compliments Form (ICCF), available from the ERFA website at: <https://erf.org.au/policies/complaints-incident-reporting/>. The ERFA CEO is the first primary contact to receive complaints through the ICCF. Complaints can also be lodged to secondary contacts,

including the ERFA Programs Director when the complaint concerns the CEO or other Staff members. Complaints can also be lodged to the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee if a complainant wishes to notify that ERFA has breached the ACFID Code of Conduct. These alternative contact details are included at the bottom of the ICCF.

6.1 Lodging complaints domestically

In Australia, complaints are formally lodged through the completion of an Incidents, Complaints and Compliments Form (ICCF). The ICCF can be accessed through three different avenues:

- online via the ERFA website (<https://erf.org.au/policies/complaints-incident-reporting/>);
- in person, by accessing the ICCF from ERFA’s Australian offices, the locations of which are tabulated below;
- by contacting the ERFA CEO, via email (CEO@erf.org.au) or via telephone (+61 7 3621 9649).

Location of ERFA’s Australian offices:

ERFA Program	Location
ERFA Brisbane Office	Address: Conference Centre, St Joseph’s Nudgee College Gate 1, 2199 Sandgate Road, Boondall QLD 4033 Postal address: Chief Executive Office, PO Box 130, Virginia BC, QLD, 4014
ERFA Melbourne Office	Address: 126 The Avenue, Parkville VIC 3052

The ICCF can be lodged through three different avenues, tabulated below.

Contact	Contact avenue
Primary contact: ERFA CEO, Bren Arkininstall	Via email: CEO@erf.org.au
	Via telephone: +61 7 3621 9649
	Via post: Chief Executive Office, PO Box 130, Virginia BC, QLD, 4014
Secondary contact: ERFA Programs Director, Emily Faller	Via email: ejfaller@edmundrice.org
	Via telephone: +61 7 0400 882 812
Alternative contact: If you are not completely satisfied with ERFA’s response, please lodge a complaint externally to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID).	Via online portal: https://acfid.asn.au/content/complaints
	Via telephone: +61 6 02 6285 1816
	Via post: C/- ACFID, Private Bag 3, Deakin, ACT, Australia 2600

Outside of these official avenues, ERFA also provides for the informal lodgment of complaints, for example, via social media, or at a fundraising event. For exceptional cases where the lodging of a complaint is made apparent to an ERFA Staff member other than the CEO, this policy requires them to immediately notify ERFA’s CEO. In addition to providing these avenues, ERFA regularly communicates the existence of this CHP and encourages stakeholder feedback via newsletters, public notices and at all professional development opportunities.

6.2 Lodging complaints overseas

Implementing Partners are encouraged to develop their own CHP and ICCF, catered towards the unique characteristics of their country and project. Partners are offered the opportunity to adopt ERFA’s CHP and ICCF, translated into their local language, pending the approval of their governing authority.

For overseas Programs, ERFA Partners are required to provide at a minimum both of the following pathways for the lodgment of complaints:

- via email or telephone to the Project CHO;
- in person by accessing a complaints form from a Project’s office, the locations of which are tabulated below.

7.0 Triage system for classifying complaints

Once a complaint has been received, the ERFA CEO will apply the Complaints Triage Framework to determine the relevance of the complaint, the severity of the risk posed and what steps should be taken to protect the safety of the stakeholders involved and ameliorate the conditions that led to the incident.

The Complaints Triage Framework is a systematic tool that makes ERFA’s complaints assessment process impartial, transparent and responsive. The Complaints Triage Framework has the following purposes:

- to determine whether a complaint falls within or outside the scope of this policy. For guidance on how the ERFA CEO is to act when a complaint is deemed to be outside the scope of this policy, please see Section 5.1 Complaints outside the scope of this policy;
- to determine whether a complaint concerns a high-risk incident (issues of CS, PSEAH, whistleblowing, terrorism or fraud). For guidance on how the ERFA CEO is to act in this circumstance please see Section 1.0 Policy overview;
- to guide the ERFA CEO of the appropriate response to varying levels of risk;
- when multiple complaints are received at once, to ensure that more urgent complaints are processed to the front of the ‘queue’ and are addressed with greater immediacy than those that pose a lower risk.

The objective of the Complaints Triage Framework is to allocate a risk level to each lodged complaint. Guidelines for how to allocate risk levels, with accompanying examples are included in the framework below:

Complaints Triage Framework:

Risk level	Guidelines	Example
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Able to be dealt with locally - No external implications - This includes compliments and incidents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A supporter submits a compliment - A supporter advises ERFA of their marketing and communications preferences
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerns a one-off breach of ERFA policy / laws / regulations - Poses an impact on operations / financial implications - Requires corrective action at an individual level - No external implications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A supporter express dissatisfaction about an ERFA fundraising event - A Partner expresses dissatisfaction about the inefficient internal processes of their Project - ERFA is made aware of a stakeholder who has ignored ERFA’s Privacy Policy
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerns an ongoing breach of ERFA policy / laws / regulations - Poses an impact on operations / financial implications - Requires corrective action at an organisational level - The wellbeing or safety of a stakeholder is at risk - Potential interest from external regulatory authorities - Risk of reputational damage, adverse PR or media attention - A complaint is lodged concerning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o child safeguarding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A complaint is made regarding a beneficiary’s wellbeing or safety - A partner informs ERFA of the ongoing and deliberate choice of a Program to provide misleading information in their acquittal reports - ERFA is made aware of an ongoing breach of policy or Staff misconduct

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ PSEAH ○ whistleblowing ○ terrorism ○ corruption or fraud 	
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7.1 Process for responding to high-risk complaints

A complaint that concerns a high-risk incident, that is, any incident that concerns a case of CS, SEAH, whistleblowing, terrorism or fraud is to be allocated a risk level of high. The CEO is to immediately refer to the policy of the relevant incident and carry out the required procedures.

- For alerts of child safeguarding incidents, ERFA’s **Child Safeguarding Policy** is to be consulted.
- For complaints of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment (SEAH), ERFA’s **Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy** is to be consulted.
- For disclosures of wrongdoing originating from internal stakeholders, ERFA’s **Whistleblowing Policy** is to be consulted.
- For cases of terrorism or associated criminal activity, ERFA’s **Counter-Terrorism Policy** is to be consulted.
- For cases of fraud, corruption or financial wrongdoing, ERFA’s **Anti-Corruption & Anti-Fraud Policy** is to be consulted.

8.0 Registering complaints

ERFA maintains an Incidents, Complaints and Compliments Register (ICCR) of all complaints lodged, regardless of their risk level, their high-risk status, or whether they were deemed to fall within or outside the scope of this policy. A historical register of all received incidents, compliments and complaints is important to ensure that ERFA’s complaints handling process is transparent and to enable a process of continuous reflection and improvement.

It is required that an initial entry be made into the ICCR within 24 hours of the complaint being received. The CEO reserves the right to delegate the task of inputting records into the ICCR to either the Programs Director or the Programs and Compliance Officer. ICCR entries will be continuously updated throughout the course of the investigation process until the record is deemed closed.

Fields required to be filled out by the person managing the record include:

- The date ERFA were notified of the record.
- The nature of the record: complaint or a compliment.
- The parties involved (complainants or survivors reserve the right to de-identify their complaints).
- A description of the issue.
- A description of the outcome.
- The name of the Staff Member who managed the record.
- The date the record was closed.
- Whether the record was referred to an external service.

9.0 Responding to complaints

9.1 Responding to complaints with a risk level of low or medium

For complaints that have been allocated a risk level of low or medium, the investigation process is to be conducted internally by the CEO. Since the safety of stakeholders is not at risk and there no external implications, the process is less formal than for complaints allocated a risk level of high. The CEO will adhere to the following steps:

- The complainant will be informed that their complaint is being handled. If the complainant has provided their contact details, ERFA will provide them with regular updates throughout the investigation procedure. The frequency and timeframe of such updates will vary depending on the subject matter of the disclosure.

- The CEO will ensure that an investigation of the allegations is established and resourced.
- Terms of Reference for the investigation will be drawn up to clarify the issues to be investigated and the scale of the investigation in proportion to the seriousness of the allegation(s). This includes necessary information that the CEO needs to gather before they can make a decision about how to ameliorate the conditions that led to the complaint.
- The CEO will seek to hear from all relevant witnesses of the complaint. Where the complainant's safety is not jeopardised by doing so, the CEO will require all relevant witnesses to complete their own copy of the ICCR form. Where further, detailed information is required, witnesses may be interviewed.
- The CEO will ensure the investigation is completed within a reasonable time depending on the circumstances and within no less than 90 days of the investigation commences, subject to extraordinary circumstances justifying extension beyond this time.

9.2 Responding to complaints with a risk level of high

The CEO is required to notify the ERFA Board of Advisors of all complaints that have been allocated a risk level of high within 24 hours of the complaint having been received. The investigation process is then to be conducted by the Board of Advisors and the CEO, with assistance from any other ERFA Staff members as required.

If the Board receive multiple complaints at once, those that have been allocated a higher risk level during the triage process will automatically jump to the front of the queue and receive prioritised attention.

The first decision to be made by the Board of Advisors is whether they deem the complaint warranted for further investigation, and thus, whether they will expend the time and resources necessary to investigate the complaint further. It may be necessary to gather more information before this decision is made.

The following steps are to be adhered to in the event that the ERFA Board decides that an investigation of the received complaint is warranted:

- The Board will seek to clarify whether the complainant's immediate wellbeing or safety is secured. If they determine that this is not the case, they will work until they are satisfied that the complainant's wellbeing and safety has been safeguarded. This may require liaising with relevant stakeholders, including the complainant themselves, in-country Partners, Child Protection Officers and local authorities.
- The complainant will be informed that their complaint is being handled. If the complainant has provided their contact details, ERFA will provide them with regular updates throughout the investigation procedure. The frequency and timeframe of such updates will vary depending on the subject matter of the disclosure.
- The CEO or Board Chair will ensure that an investigation of the allegations is established and adequately resourced.
- Terms of Reference for the investigation will be drawn up to clarify the issues to be investigated and the scale of the investigation in proportion to the seriousness of the allegation(s). This includes necessary information that the Board needs to gather before they can make a decision about how to ameliorate the conditions that led to the complaint.
- The Board will seek to hear from all relevant witnesses of the complaint. Where the complainant's safety is not jeopardised by doing so, the Board will require all relevant witnesses to complete their own copy of the ICCR form. Where further, detailed information is required, witnesses may be interviewed.
- The investigation must commence within 1 business day of it being provided to the Board.
- The Board will ensure the investigation is completed within a reasonable time depending on the circumstances and within no less than 90 days of the investigation commences, subject to extraordinary circumstances justifying extension beyond this time.

Should the complaint arise from a partner, the following investigation procedures must be followed:

- The ERFA CEO will contact the Governing Body of the partner to request they conduct an investigation into the incident. The ERFA CEO will provide guidance to the partner's Governing Body as required to assist with an investigation.
- The ERFA CEO will continue to liaise with the partner's Governing Body on a regular basis to discuss outcomes of the investigation.
- The ERFA CEO will file all relevant documentation regarding the case, including emails, meeting minutes with the Program's Governing Body, meeting minutes with the ERFA Board of Directors in ERFA's designated database, Sharefile.
- At the completion of the investigation conducted by the Program's Governing Body, if the ERFA Board of Directors is dissatisfied with any aspect of the investigation, including its conduct and recommended remediation procedures, they reserve the right to initiate a separate investigation and forensic audit.

During the investigation procedure, the ERFA CEO and Board will adopt the following principles:

- The principles of procedural fairness (natural justice) will be observed. In particular, where adverse comment about a person is likely to be included in a report, the person affected will be given an opportunity to comment beforehand and any comments will be considered before the report is finalised.
- The person or persons conducting the investigation will be as far as possible unbiased.

During the investigation procedure, the following steps are to be adhered to in the interests of privacy protection:

- All information obtained will be properly secured to prevent unauthorised access and disclosure in accordance with this policy.
- Notes will be made of all discussions, phone calls and interviews.
- Without the complainant's consent, ERFA cannot disclose information that is likely to lead to the identification of the complainant as part of its investigation process, unless: the information does not include the complainant's identity; ERFA removes information relating to the complainant's identity or other information that is likely to lead to the identification of the complainant (e.g. name, position, title, other identifying details); it is reasonably necessary for investigation the issues raised in the disclosure.
- At all times the complainant will be informed of their ability to escalate the complaint to the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaints handling process.
- A complainant who makes an anonymous report may choose to remain anonymous while making a disclosure, during the investigation and after the investigation is finalised.
- Accordingly, a complainant can refuse to answer questions that they feel could reveal their identity at any time.

ERFA's investigation process may be subject to some limitations, including that ERFA may not be able to undertake an investigation if it is not able to identify the complainant, for example, if a disclosure is made anonymously and the complainant has refused to provide or has not provided a means of contact for any further questions or follow up which ERFA may need as part of the investigation.

(Note: Natural Justice and procedural fairness do not require that the affected be informed of the identity of the person making the initial disclosure, unless that communication constitutes part of the evidence relied upon in making the eventual finding).

9.3 Process for responding to complaints deemed unwarranted for investigation

Determining whether a complaint should be investigated is often not easy. Below are a limited number of cases where a complaint may be deemed unwarranted for investigation:

- If it is based on a misunderstanding or insufficient information it might be that the provision

of clarifying information immediately satisfies the complainant and thus the complaint can be recorded as an inquiry.

- A complaint may be frivolous or capricious. With care, it ought to be possible to negotiate its early withdrawal.
- A complaint may be vexatious. A vexatious complaint may arise from time to time and refers to an allegation made without grounds or where it is not necessary/possible for the pursuit of a legitimate end. A vexatious complaint is made with the intention, or inevitable effect, of causing distress, trouble and annoyance to the person or body who has to deal with it. Again, careful negotiation at the outset might achieve withdrawal, but often it will be necessary to take the matter further and ultimately refer it to the external complaint entity that is the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee.

The following steps are to be adhered to in the event that the ERFA Board decides that an investigation of the received complaint **is not** warranted:

- The CEO or Board Chair will contact the complainant informing them of their decision.
- The complainant will be informed of their ability to escalate the complaint to the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaints handling process.
- A record of the complaint will be logged in the ICCR.

10.0 Finalising complaints

A report will be prepared for the Board when the investigation is complete. The report will include:

- a summary of the allegation(s);
- a statement of all relevant findings of fact and the evidence gathered and upon which conclusions have been based;
- the conclusions reached, including the damage caused, if any, and the impact on ERFA and any other affected parties;
- recommendations, based on the report's conclusions, to address any wrongdoing identified and any other matters that arose during the investigation;
- the Report will be provided to the complainant, including, if necessary, any applicable confidential stipulations.

11.0 Implementation

11.1 Staff, organisational personnel and governing body members

Where changes to this CHP have been made, updates will be captured in refresher training sessions for ERFA Staff. The new elements of the CHP will also be incorporated into future training processes, including Staff induction training packages, introductory workshops for in-country programs and pre-departure training for overseas trips etc.

11.2 In-country Partners and suppliers

Partners will be asked to provide either their program-specific Complaints Policy or their position on Complaints Handling in annual funding applications. Partners will also be asked to provide photographic evidence of their Complaints Notice publicly displayed in an accessible location for project beneficiaries. During the application assessment process ERFA Staff will inform Partners whether they are compliant with this CHP and if not, will be asked to provide clarifying information or to improve their CH processes.

ERFA Staff will conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of Partners' CH compliance in quarterly acquittal reports. ERFA will deliver online training sessions for the benefit of all implementing Partners whenever major changes to this CHP are made.

11.3 In-country primary stakeholders

It is the responsibility of overseas implementing Partners to communicate the purpose and processes of this CHP to their primary stakeholders. ERFA will collaborate with and provide advice to Partners when necessary to determine the most appropriate method for reaching communities of primary stakeholders. Forms and formats will depend on the Partner organisations whom ERFA partners with. All communication of this CHP to primary stakeholders should include consideration of the need for translation of materials, as well as effective methods for explaining the policy that go beyond documented words, such as role plays, group briefings, or picture-based descriptors. Most consideration should be devoted to teaching vulnerable people about their right to complain and how to lodge a complaint.

11.4 Donors/supporters and other external stakeholders

Donors and supporters will be informed of their right to complain and how to lodge a complaint through online touchpoints, including the ERFA website, emails distributed to supporters for marketing and communications purposes and ERFA's social media pages. By navigating to the prominently displayed 'Policies' page on the ERFA website, supporters can access a copy of this CHP. Under the heading, 'Incident Compliment and Complaint Forms', supporters can also submit an online complaint, contact ACFID, or access the following forms:

- Incidents, Compliments and Complaints Form;
- Safeguarding Incident Reporting Form;
- Corruption & Fraud Reporting Form;
- Complaints Notice.

12.0 Policy review

ERFA's CHP will be reviewed every three years. The ERFA Board of Directors will manage the review of the CHP. ERFA Staff, Partners, children and young people will be consulted to assist this process. Any changes made to the Policy will be signed off by the Board.

ERFA is committed to the continuous improvement of its policies and provides internal and external stakeholders with the opportunity to provide feedback and communication on this CHP. This can be achieved through any of the channels used by ERFA to communicate with the public, including newsletters, public notices and professional development opportunities

13.0 Related ERFA Policies and Documents

ERFA policies and processes are regularly updated. For the most up to date policies refer to ERFA's website at www.erf.org.au/policies.

- Child Protection Policy
- Gender Equality & Female Empowerment Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse & Harassment Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy