Australian Government
Department of Industry, Innovation and Science

1. SOP – Handling Feedback and Complaints

Program	Business Grants Hub
Version No	[Enter version number]
Effective date	[Enter date month year]

1. Background

This standard operating procedure outlines the process and procedures to be followed when a customer requests feedback on an unsuccessful application. The individual feedback on applications is primarily suitable for competitive grants with limited funding and future rounds.

2. Definitions and abbreviations

SGMS = Strategic Grants Management System

CSM = Customer Service Manager

CRM = Customer Relationship Manager

SOP = Standard Operating Procedure

3. Guiding principles

The handling feedback and complaints SOP is based on the following principles:

- Understand the policy context and requirements of our policy partners
- Demonstrate the department's commitment to our policy partners and customers
- Every encounter will be handled as a learning opportunity
- Handling feedback and complaints will adhere with departmental and APS policy for conduct and handling of information.
- Staff will have an understanding of the Departments Feedback and Complaints Handling procedures, Customer Service Charter, basic understanding of using the Microsoft suite of applications (Outlook to book meetings, Word for papers and agenda creation, etc.).

4. Relevant contacts

The AusIndustry Feedback mailbox is designated for program specific feedback or complaints that cannot be handled by the contact centre and are therefore escalated to be handled by the program manager. Program Managers then update the Feedback and Complaints register.

s 47E(d)   @industry.gov.au

For any questions regarding the Feedback and Complaints Handling procedure please contact the Operations Branch at s 47E(d)   @industry.gov.au.
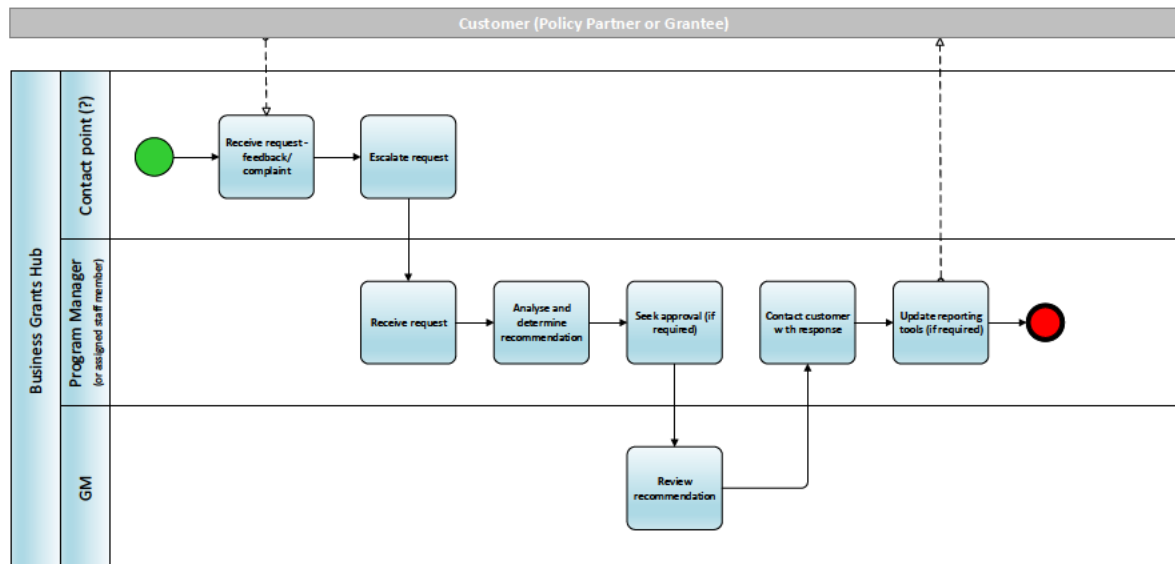

Contact Centre Manager: s 22   @industry.gov.au

AusIndustry Assurance Manager: s 22   l@industry.gov.au

5.   Related SOPs and other documents

- Related SOP No 0xx
- List of relevant related documents that are referred to in this document

6.   Process map

Insert flow chart or diagram outlining process.

7.   Procedures

Feedback should be sent to applicants from a program group inbox and not a personal inbox. Feedback can involve providing the applicant a report or a discussion (only at request). Ensure the feedback officer will be an officer with suitable understanding of the application and skills relating to providing feedback. Feedback for the applicant should include:

Feedback should:

- give a clear reason why the applicant was unsuccessful
- be in clear and concise language that can be understood immediately
- Be personal. It is not appropriate for feedback to consist of a brief reason for rejection in the third person

Phone feedback:

- Pre-check for common comebacks, including covering discretion of Minister in choosing applications.
- Ensure to have guidelines, application, application assessment, feedback script, a complaints form, application feedback report and Feedback form (for officer providing feedback) on hand for reference.

Sensitivities: some grants are subject to Ministerial discretion. Feedback on these grant types may not be suitable due to sensitivities regarding the selection process once grant application recommendations have been sent to the Ministers office.

7.1.   Receiving a request for feedback

Step	Action
1.	Customer request for feedback may be received through various means, including: - via direct contact with AusIndustry staff - via the contact centre - via third party providers - web feedback forms - referred from other government departments - referred from Ministerial offices - referred from Commonwealth Ombudsman In line with our Customer Service Charter feedback by phone and email should be responded to within one working day, and mail correspondence within 10 working days.

7.2. Escalating a request for feedback

Step	Action
1.	All feedback requests should be referred to the relevant program manager in the first instance.
2.	You should refer to the program documentation to confirm the published escalation processes. Program guidelines clarify the escalation points for individual programs. Program Managers have responsibility for managing all escalations. If you are in doubt about whether an issue requires escalation, seek the advice of your Program Manager or relevant State Manager.

7.3. Managing feedback

Step	Action
1.	As the Program Manager (or the staff member they assign the responsibility to): - contact the customer - outline any proposed action or plan to resolve the matter including an estimate of timeframes - record the details of the request (and the outcome when available). Keep records of actions in the CRM in accordance with departmental record keeping practices.
2.	When dealing with the request for feedback: - ensure to determine the facts - identify relevant legislation, guidelines and policy - treat all requests fairly – remain impartial, confidential and transparent - draw logical findings and conclusions based on all available information - seek advice from the department's Legal, Audit and Assurance Branch as necessary.
3.	Based on your review of the request, consider the appropriate actions such as: - no action required (claims are not substantiated) - whether you need to change a previous decision - amend or change program guidelines or process (in consultation with policy partner) - correct any official records - determine whether financial compensation is warranted - other relevant actions such as disciplinary action against staff or referral of the matter for criminal investigation.

Step	Action
4.	Draft correspondence to the customer and: • use plain English • avoid including personal feelings or opinions • clearly explain all aspects of the complaint • include your considerations and decision • include any avenues of review available to the complainant. It is important that the customer clearly understands the response. You may need to consider how to respond e.g. meeting or phoning the customer. Where the feedback contains a complaint, they are not always resolved to the complainant's satisfaction. Facts may remain in dispute, evidence may be evenly balanced or there may be scant or inconclusive evidence. Sometimes you may need to negotiate with the complainant to reach a satisfactory outcome. Program Managers (at a minimum) will be signatory to all written responses to complaints.
5.	Validate the conclusion and proposed course of action with the relevant General Manager.
6.	If the customer is not satisfied with the feedback or complaint resolution, they may seek an independent review. If the customer indicates they wish to seek a review of the feedback /complaint handling decision, determine what they seek to have reviewed and refer the matter to a senior staff member (usually the Head of Division). Note: Sometimes customers may have misunderstood the original decision and may be only seeking to clarify or understand the original decision.

7.4.   Letter templates

Letter and minutes templates:

Feedback complaints data form

Acknowledgment of Feedback letter

Unsuccessful application letter

Standard Unsuccessful application tagged letter

7.5.   Confidentiality and privacy considerations

Step	Action
1.	Customers have a right to expect that we will handle their complaint confidentially and investigate with appropriate sensitivity and without bias To ensure this: • request details and data is restricted to those with a genuine requirement to know • personal details are not disclosed to other staff • customer names are not detailed in management report. On each program page there is guidance to customers on how to provide feedback or make a compliant or fraud allegation and what to expect from AusIndustry.

7.6.   Complaints involving people with particular needs

Step	Action
1.	The AusIndustry Contact Centre offers: • access via the National Relay Service (a phone solution for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impediment) and • access to the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National), to assist non-English speakers.
2.	AusIndustry staff may access TIS National to assist them communicating with non-English speaking clients.

7.7.   Complaints involving contractors and joint agencies

Step	Action
1.	Arrangements with third party providers should stipulate how contractors report and refer complaints to AusIndustry.
2.	Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) arrangements should ensure a seamless approach for complainants, where program delivery and policy are jointly managed across agencies. During the MOU negotiations, consider identifying and documenting relevant complaint handling exchange and processes. The MOU should define areas of responsibilities for complaint resolution and sharing and reporting of complaints data.

Step	Action
3.	Where our business involves a contracted service, then contract provisions should define any complaint handling processes and referrals. It should also include requirements for reporting complaints in regards to the contracted party, their complaint handling responsibilities and escalation processes.

7.8. Referring a request outside of AusIndustry

Step	Action
1.	It may be necessary to refer a request for feedback, complaint or issue to another part of our department or to another government department for resolution. The Program Guidelines template provides standard words around managing feedback and complaints.
2.	All referral process should be seamless to the customer.

7.9. Public Interest Disclosure

Step	Action
1.	The Public Interest Disclosure legislation promotes internal reporting of suspected wrongdoing in public sector agencies. It provides a framework and robust protections for public officials who make qualifying disclosures under the scheme. All complaints must be handled in accordance with the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 2013 (PID Act)*. The PID Act promotes the integrity and accountability of the Commonwealth public sector by: • encouraging and facilitating the disclosure of suspected wrongdoing • protecting people who make disclosures • ensuring disclosures are properly investigated and dealt with