

Welcome

Having an effective complaints handling process is crucial to any government or industry body that engages with the public.

We have designed this new self-assessment tool so that any sized agency, industry body or entity that deals with complaints is able to conduct a health check on their current complaint handling function.

Informed by my Office's [Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide](#), this self-assessment tool can help you to analyse and assess your current complaint handling processes.

The self-assessment tool incorporates lessons learned from our experience in handling complaints and our knowledge of best practice complaint handling frameworks, such as those included in our [Lessons in good complaint handling](#) report.

Acknowledging it can be difficult to review complaint data in an objective way, we have designed this tool to help you engage with your complaint data critically and to help identify areas for development and change.

I recommend a regular internal review and reflection on your complaint handling process. Regular reviews are a foundational behaviour for any organisation adhering to best practice complaint handling. It ensures continuous improvement in your processes, which in turn assists in better service to the public.

If you have any questions about this self-assessment tool or want to improve your complaint processes, please contact us via education@ombudsman.gov.au.

Iain Anderson
Commonwealth Ombudsman

Self-Assessment Tool

Self-guided health check for complaint handling frameworks.

This self-assessment tool has been developed as a resource for agencies, industry bodies and other organisations to independently assess their complaint handling framework, in line with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's [Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide](#) (the Guide). Good complaint handling is essential to good administration. Regular review and analysis of your complaint handling framework will help your agency continuously improve.

The self-assessment is divided into three parts: collecting data, complaints process review and a detailed checklist of assessment criteria. This tool is meant to complement the Guide, so we recommend reading through the Guide before starting.

Completing the self-assessment

Part 1 – Collect data

In this Part, you need to collect specified complaint data for a minimum of one financial year, and ideally three. You may wish to revisit the assessment once you have collected three years' data. The amount of data you need may also depend on the size of your organisation.

In completing the table below, you will have data available for quick assessment and 'at a glance' analysis as you work through the self-assessment tool. This can help prompt deeper questions regarding trends in your complaint handling processes.

<p>Complaints received</p>	<p>Insert the total number of complaints received in the financial year, irrespective of whether the complaint has been actioned or finalised.</p>
<p>Complaints finalised</p>	<p>Insert the total number of complaints finalised in the financial year, irrespective of when the complaint was received.</p>
<p>Remedies/outcomes provided to complainants</p>	<p>List the types of remedy or outcome provided to complainants. Agencies may have different ways of categorising outcomes e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better explanation provided • apology • decision revisited • compensation provided.
<p>Relevant KPIs/Service Standards</p>	<p>List the relevant KPIs/service standards, relevant to your complaint handling processes (e.g. timeliness, customer satisfaction etc.).</p>
<p>Percentage of complaints which met KPIs/service standards</p>	<p>List your performance against each KPI/service standard for the financial year.</p>

Part 2 – Complaints process review

In this part, you collect general information on your complaint handling structures and processes in the table below. Once completed, you will be able to visualise your complaints handling process and perform a wholistic review of the workflow.

<p>Map the complaint journey from when it is received by the agency until finalisation.</p>	<p>Aim to fully visualise the end-to-end complaints handling process. This may be a flow chart or step by step process list or any other suitable 'map'.</p>
<p>Outline which staff handle complaints at each step and how complaints are referred internally and monitored.</p>	<p>This is a more detailed breakdown of who does what within your complaints handling framework. This includes what tasks are completed by teams receiving complaints, and how complaints are monitored to ensure they are not 'lost' during internal transfer processes.</p>
<p>Provide an overview of the governance, management and organisational structure of your complaint handling system.</p>	<p>This is an organisation chart showing organisational structure, lines of reporting and governance of your complaints handling framework.</p> <p>Also show any governance or senior committees in your organisation that have oversight or are provided with updates on complaints.</p>
<p>Include the number of staff who handle complaints in each team/role.</p>	<p>This question is about resourcing. Review numbers of staff in the various teams or roles within your complaints handling framework, and any other relevant resourcing information you wish to consider.</p>

The final two questions in Part 2 ask you to identify challenges in delivering a best practice complaint handling framework and reflect on what would assist.

This is an opportunity to think both in practical and realistic terms, as well as 'blue sky' and 'ideal world' scenarios. You may wish to come back to these questions after you have completed Part 3, as the self-assessment process is likely to sharpen your focus.

What do you see as the main challenges you face in delivering a best practice complaint handling framework?

In an ideal world, what would assist you to deliver a best practice complaint handling framework?

Part 3 – Better Practice Checklist

In this part, you will complete a detailed checklist, comparing your current complaint handling practice with best practice indicators, as outlined in our [Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide](#).

Completing the checklist will allow you to identify strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement.

The checklist consists of a number of columns:

Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your complaint handling framework feature the best practice indicator? The options are 'Yes' or 'No'.
Explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain your 'Yes/No' response – providing reasons, details and/or context.
Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally, existing documents will suffice. Part 3 does not require you to create new documents to answer the self-assessment. You can refer to documents and processes (e.g. relevant policies, training, reports etc.). We suggest including page references for any attached documents or links to relevant agency webpages and resources here.
Areas for improvement and actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can identify opportunities for improvement and what actions will be taken or explored. Often, these will be improvements which will bring the framework in line with best practice.

Question	Response	Explanation	Evidence	Areas for improvement and action
Commit: The cornerstone of good complaint handling is a culture where all staff understand the value of complaints and are committed to delivering a high-quality service.				
We have complaint handling standards, policies and procedures in place to guide complaint handling staff (including review processes).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Staff who manage complaints receive specialised training on handling complaints.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Sufficient resources are allocated to complaint handling to ensure complaints are resolved in accordance with KPIs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
We regularly undertake quality assurance (i.e. health checks, internal audit) of our complaint handling framework.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Regular reports are produced on complaint trends, quality assurance and timeliness and provided to the executive and other areas of the agency.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Regular public reports are prepared on complaint trends and issues (i.e. in annual reports and corporate documents).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			

Question	Response	Explanation	Evidence	Areas for improvement and action
Design and Deliver: Our Better Practice Guide outlines 8 key design principles and 8 steps for delivering a high-quality complaints service.				
We provide information to the public about how we handle complaints (i.e. on our internet).	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Information about how to make a complaint is easily available and accessible.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
People can complain in a variety of ways – for example, by telephone, by mail, email or in person.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
We are alert to the needs of vulnerable complainants and what assistance can be provided.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
We look for and remove barriers – physical and psychological – to making a complaint.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
We keep complainants informed of progress.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Our complaint handling framework supports early resolution of complaints.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
We communicate the outcome and reasons for decision clearly to the complainant.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			



Question	Response	Explanation	Evidence	Areas for improvement and action
<p>We give complainants the opportunity to respond and to seek internal review.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No</p>			
<p>Staff know the pathways to escalate unresolved complaints effectively, if necessary.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No</p>			
<p>Staff have been trained in the management of Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No</p>			
<p>Internal processes are documented clearly and are easy to understand and apply.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No</p>			
<p>There is an electronic complaint handling system to record, track, monitor, analyse and report on complaints.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No</p>			

Question	Response	Explanation	Evidence	Areas for improvement and action
<p>Improve: The best systems are reflective, self-critical and innovative, with a culture that encourages all staff to look for opportunities to continuously improve programs and services.</p>				
<p>Complaint data is regularly analysed to improve our processes with insights shared with all relevant staff.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No</p>			
<p>We report publicly on our performance against both quantitative and qualitative complaint handling measures.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No</p>			
<p>We seek feedback about the complainant's experience for continuous improvement e.g. client survey.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No</p>			
<p>We analyse complaint data to identify and resolve systemic issues.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/>Yes <input type="checkbox"/>No</p>			

Conclusion & next steps

After completing your analysis, you will be able to identify areas for improvement in your complaint process. The next steps are to:

- **commit** to incorporating the improvements into the design and delivery of your continuously improving complaint handling system, and
- **monitor** the implementation of your improvements, recommendations and remedies.

Regular monitoring and review will ensure constant improvement in your complaints handling procedures. As you identify issues and improve your complaint handling system, the better practice cycle continues.

Should you have any questions regarding this self-assessment tool or want to improve your complaint processes further, please contact us via education@ombudsman.gov.au.

