

# Client Responsive Programming: The IRC's organizational AAP\* framework

\*Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP)

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# Programming is client responsive when we engage people receiving aid and services in the decisions which affect their lives.

The purpose of this document is to present the IRC's approach to institutionalize accountability to affected populations (AAP) across all Country Programs, sectors and through the organizational strategy.

## What is Client Responsive Programming at the IRC?

Client Responsiveness is an organizational priority for the IRC strategy (Strategy 100): our 13 year strategy culminating in the IRC's 100 year anniversary. Our S100 Ambition for "clients to inform program design and delivery" reflects our commitment to meaningfully engage our clients (and others in the communities we serve), every time we make a significant decision about program

design and delivery. At the IRC, clients may participate in decision making in different ways: they may be consulted for their opinion or the IRC and its partners may collaborate with them to take programming decisions which affect their lives. The S100 Clients Ambition also reflects our commitment to promoting the means through which clients may hold us accountable for the decisions that affect them.



A **client** is a person for whom the IRC has provided, or intends to provide, assistance or services.

We use the term "client", to signal our belief that the people we serve have the right to decide what kind of aid and services they need and want. We also want to learn from clients whether they have benefitted from the aid and services provided and how we can improve our work to meet their needs.

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## Why is Client Responsiveness important for the IRC?

Meaningful consultation of and collaboration with people receiving aid and services is an essential condition of principled, effective programming at the IRC. Participation promotes empowerment of people, strengthens mutual trust between clients and the providers of aid and services. It is our goal to put clients at the center of the way we design and deliver services through Client Responsive Programming.

Engaging clients in the decisions about what aid to deliver, to whom, where, when, how and why will make our assistance more:

### Effective



Successful in achieving the results and change clients want to see

### Relevant



Suitable for meeting clients' priority needs and expectations

### Appropriate



Right for the clients in the context and situation they are living in

### Accountable



Responsible to our clients, affected communities and other key stakeholders for the decisions and actions we take

## How does the IRC integrate AAP into our programming?

The IRC's approach is to institutionalize Client Responsive Programming and to create and enhance the enabling conditions which promote meaningful participation and maximize the potential influence clients can have over programming decisions. It is integrated into our programming through:



### Program quality standards:

Country Programs have the opportunity to assess

their current work and progress using IMPACT Framework<sup>1</sup>, where “C” represents the Client-Centered standard that we expect to see across all programs over time. This reflects our commitment to engage clients to shape our programs.



### Strategy Action Plan:

Country Programs have a Strategy Action Plan (SAP)

detailing how they intend to advance S100 in their County Program. Country Program SAPs are informed by client priorities, preferences and feedback, and may be developed in direct collaboration with clients. In their SAP Implementation Plans Country Programs make actionable commitments to advance their strategic choices, including actions on client engagement for service design and delivery.



### Technical support:

Country Program MEAL teams set up accountability

mechanisms covering all programs and locations at the national level. They have access to the Client Responsiveness toolkit and MEAL

Handbook which includes guidance and tools to implement Client Responsive Programming. In addition to these resources, Country Programs receive regular technical support from the Client Responsiveness Team at Head Quarters (HQ) that includes but is not limited to:

- contextualization of the tools
- set up and operationalization of inclusive feedback mechanisms accordingly
- integrating client feedback into decision making.

Country Programs also receive support from sector-focused Technical Advisors to implement Client Responsive Programming as part of program quality assurance. The Measurement Team supports data management and security, while the Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) Team advises on equitable engagement with all clients.

## How do we inform clients about our services?

Client Responsiveness starts with providing accessible information about:

- existing services
- client feedback mechanisms
- the IRC values
- the IRC's mandate, and
- expected staff behaviors as per the IRC Code of Conduct

We aim to provide information in different formats to ensure equal access to participation by all clients:

- messages
- visuals
- other information, education and communication (IEC) materials

Client Responsiveness also contributes to Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), and to mitigate the risk and impact of an outbreak or the COVID-19 pandemic by developing two-way communication and engaging with communities to prevent exposure, stop disease transmission, and mitigate the harmful effects of the outbreak.

## How does the IRC engage clients in the decisions which affect their lives?

The IRC implements Client Responsive Programming throughout the whole project lifecycle either through routine use of client feedback data in program management or through direct collaboration with clients. We put in place mechanisms to collect, analyze and respond to client feedback and inform our programmatic decisions. In the first place, the IRC Country Programs seek to ensure that they are systematically consulting clients through a combination of proactive and reactive channels<sup>2</sup> when making programmatic decisions. According to context, capacity and resources available, Country Programs go beyond consultation and collaborate with clients in decision making, as described below in the IRC's participation spectrum (adapted from the IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation).

<sup>1</sup> IMPACT is an acronym that stands for the program following quality standards: Informed, Measure, Partner, Adapt, Client-centered, Transformative

<sup>2</sup> Proactive feedback channels are mechanisms through which the IRC is actively soliciting feedback from clients, for example: a survey, a focus group discussion (FGDs), an individual interview, etc. Reactive feedback channels are mechanisms that the IRC provide to its clients and other stakeholders to communicate with us – at the time and subject they choose, for example toll-free line, office walk-in hours, suggestions box, etc.

# Increasing Clients Participation to Decision-Making

Adapted from the [IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation](#)

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<p>People in the communities we work in have information about the IRC, the principles we adhere to, how we expect staff to behave, the programs we are implementing and what we intend to deliver.</p>	<p>People in the communities we work in have access to a combination of feedback mechanisms (proactive and reactive) to communicate their concerns, preferences and aspirations to the IRC. The IRC uses their feedback to inform our programming, strategic and / or operational decisions and we provide feedback to people in those communities on whether and how their feedback was acted upon.</p>	<p>People in the communities we work in join and actively participate in the IRC decision making processes about the programs that we design and deliver.</p>	<p>People in the communities we work in make decisions together with the IRC about programmatic, strategic and / or operational choices. People and the IRC share decision making power.</p>	<p>People in the communities in which we work take the lead in making decisions about the programs we deliver, with the IRC's support and facilitation where required.</p>



## How do we integrate and act upon client priorities, preferences and feedback into our programming?

We collect clients' feedback through a variety of feedback channels to identify their priority outcomes and preferences. To achieve this, the IRC Country Programs establish Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) governing the collection, use and response to feedback from clients and communities, applying best practice as defined by the sector in ensuring that feedback channels are accessible to women and men, girls and boys of all ages with or without disabilities, and marginalized groups according to the operational context. The SOPs also integrate Safeguarding prevention and preparedness. Each project should also have a Client

Responsiveness Plan as part of the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, which align with measurement activities where possible.

Data on client priorities and preferences is regularly reviewed during routine project cycle meetings to inform project design, implementation and close out.

## How do we assess clients' experiences and whether they are satisfied with our services?

We conduct regular evaluations of client satisfaction with the IRC services using the Core Feedback Themes<sup>3</sup>. The standard Client Satisfaction survey tool is available to use digitally on CommCare with integrated analysis through a PowerBI dashboard. This data is used by Country Programs to

inform decision-making and assess performance based on clients' experience of our services.

## How do we close the loop and provide clients with an opportunity to hold us to account?

When clients provide feedback, we explain and discuss with them how their feedback was taken into account, what we were able to do (or not), and the rationale behind this decision. We communicate to clients what has been done in response to their feedback as a collective or individual response based on the feedback category specified in the SOPs. The best way to demonstrate that we value client participation and communication is with timely and respectful responses.

<sup>3</sup> The Core Feedback Themes provide a list of key topics (priority needs, preferred activities, and engagement preferences, perceptions of the relevance, quality, impact, access, safety, and respectfulness of the response, as well as perceptions of their voice and empowerment within the response) that all the IRC country teams should be collecting and interpreting client feedback on.





## How does the IRC's approach reflect industry standards and commitments?

The IRC's approach reflects the sector-wide commitment and efforts to advance the meaningful participation of and accountability towards people affected by crisis in the way that humanitarian actors design and deliver aid and services.

The IRC's Client Responsive Programming Framework internalizes the goals and commitments made by the sector through:

- the IASC Results Group 2 (IASC RG2) on Accountability and Inclusion

- Grand Bargain Participation Revolution (GB PR)
- and CHS commitments

In particular the IRC's approach reflects GB PR aspiration to include crisis affected people in decision making processes<sup>4</sup>; CHS Commitment Four that emphasizes the need for safe, accessible and appropriate participation, feedback, and Commitment Five that states that complaints should be welcomed and responded to<sup>5</sup>; as well all five IASC Commitments for Accountability to Affected People (CAAP) on improved leadership, transparency, participation and feedback and complaints mechanisms as well as involvement of affected populations in the design, monitoring and evaluation

of programs<sup>6</sup>. We routinely review our achievements and methodology to ensure that we are meeting and exceeding sector standards.

The IRC is a member of ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance) and a Grand Bargain signatory. We continue to share learning and resources developed through our approach to Client Responsiveness amongst colleagues in the sector, as we seek to learn from others. We actively participate in relevant networks and discussions and collaborate with peers in seeking to advance policy and practice across the sector.



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<sup>4</sup> IASC. A participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives. Available at: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/a-participation-revolution-include-people-receiving-aid-in-making-the-decisions-which-affect-their-lives>. Accessed 10 August 2021.

<sup>5</sup> CHS Alliance. The Standard. Available at: <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>. Accessed 10 December 2019.

<sup>6</sup> IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected People and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. July 2018. Available at: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-revised-aap-commitments-2017-including-guidance-note-and-resource-list>