HO 2.6: Feedback Channel Pros and Cons

This table gives a summary of the pros and cons of different feedback channels. The choice of feedback mechanisms should be based on community members’ preferences, but there are other factors to consider.

| **Feedback channel** | **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Suggestion box  A secure box for written feedback and complaints using free text or forms | Can have a wide reach if placed in high-traffic areas  Easy to set up in small-scale projects  Accessible to people who are not program participants  Suitable for anonymous or confidential complaints (but the location of the box could limit privacy)  Can be placed in the community for a long time, so members can access it at any time  Can be mobile | Not suitable for community members who cannot read or write  Can exclude people with limited mobility—such as those in remote locations or older people  Not ideal for communities spread over large areas or for urban or large camp settings  Processing and responding to written feedback can be slow  It may be difficult to respond to individuals or communities if they do not give enough contact information  Can be destroyed in a disaster—such as a cyclone, flood or earthquake  Responders may not be able to manage written communication in local languages |
| Hotline and short message service (SMS): single prepaid account (managed in-house)  A number for community members to call or text to give feedback directly to a staff member | Very accessible if the location has good network coverage and if diverse program participants use mobile phones  Suitable for remote areas and large-scale responses  Suitable for anonymous or confidential complaints; however, if calls can be traced, this could be a barrier  Easy to use for people with low digital literacy  Accessible to people who are not program participants  It is possible to quickly acknowledge, respond to and refer complaints.  Can be used to tell disaster actors about a disaster event and ask for prompt support  Can be multilingual | Requires set-up time, which may be unsuitable for short projects  Excludes community members without access to a cellphone, electricity to charge one or phone credit  Can be expensive for callers if there is no toll-free number  Personal data may not stay confidential  There may be long delays in responding if the hotline has high traffic  Some disaster events can interrupt phone coverage |
| Hotline: Interactive voice response (IVR)  A dedicated number for community members to access information and record a message | High accessibility (24/7) if there is good network coverage  Program participants can call at any time  Can help decrease the amount of feedback and complaints received because questions can be answered with key information  Can be free for communities  Suitable for anonymous or confidential complaints (the caller can decide if they want to leave contact information)  Easy to use for people with low digital literacy  Can be multilingual | More effective for sharing information than managing feedback and complaints  Excludes community members without access to a cellphone, electricity to charge one or phone credit  Can be expensive for users if there is no toll-free number  High staffing and resource costs: there must be an agreement with a service provider and staff time to listen to and log messages  Feedback may not include details needed for follow-up (e.g., name of agency the feedback is about, contact information), especially if feedback does not fit into set categories  Audio must be transcribed and translated to manage multiple languages |
| Face-to-face with staff  Staff (such as community liaison officers with specific feedback mechanism tasks) approached  by individuals in the field to receive and record feedback and complaints directly | Often one of the most popular channels with communities  Can reveal if programs are having unintended effects that are not being monitored  Makes it possible to respond to urgent questions and refer people quickly; can resolve many issues immediately  Can be multilingual | Staff may find recording feedback time-consuming and tiring  Staff may think complaints reflect poorly on them and be reluctant to process them  If there is a disaster event, it can be difficult to reach people in remote areas because roads may be damaged  During recruitment, it is necessary to make sure staff have the appropriate language skills |
| Community focal point (or feedback and complaints committee)  Locally managed focal point/committee appointed by community members trained to collect and document feedback and complaints | Often a popular channel because community members may feel more comfortable talking to a community member than to a staff member  Increased ownership by community  Can build on existing social and cultural channels to resolve issues rather than imposing an unfamiliar approach  Many issues and urgent questions can be resolved immediately; referrals can also be made immediately | Requires training, time and effort from community members  Complaints go through too many channels  Risk of high turnover or low effort if community members are not paid for this work  Marginalized languages may be overlooked |
| Help desk near project sites or designated drop-in at the office  Desk or hub set up at the office or in the field, with designated operating hours and trained staff or community volunteers to answer questions and listen to concerns | Easy to set up  Highly accessible when set up with other program activities—such as at a distribution site  Good visibility if set up in high-traffic areas  Useful in communities with low literacy  Suitable for confidential feedback and complaints; however, complainants may not want to share information if the help desk is in a public place  Offers face-to-face contact, which community members often prefer  Fast and immediate response; possible to resolve many issues immediately  Staff/volunteers can follow up or ask for more detailed information  Can offer quick support and orientation if there is a disaster event  Can be multilingual | Low accessibility for those who are far from the project or office location  Can be difficult to set up after a natural disaster event if infrastructure was damaged or destroyed  Less accessible to people who are not program participants if it is set up as part of project activities  It is not possible to stay anonymous  Staff must be selected based on language skills |
| Open community meetings  Meetings organized at project locations bringing together large groups of people to share information and collect feedback and complaints | Easy to set up  Can ask for feedback and complaints from many people in a limited time  Can involve people who are not program participants  Can be adapted to the audience (e.g., using child‑friendly approaches)  Suitable for communities with low literacy  Low staffing and resource costs  Allows immediate responses  Can respond to common questions and concerns immediately and for many people simultaneously  Can be multilingual | Discussions may be limited if some people dominate group  May not be suitable in cultures where public criticism is not acceptable  Can exclude most marginalized groups (such as women and children) who may not feel comfortable attending or sharing their concerns  Not suitable for anonymous or confidential complaints  May need interpreters for speakers of marginalized languages |
| Social media and instant messaging platforms (e.g., Twitter, WhatsApp)  A dedicated account available for individuals to share written or voice messages and pictures | Can have a wide reach if the location has good network coverage  Good way to quickly collect information about immediate needs in the first phase of an emergency response across a large area  Can manage anonymous or confidential complaints if user accounts do not contain identifiable information  Can be multilingual | Requires good network coverage and access to smartphones or computers  Requires digital literacy to set up and use  Can create a lot of feedback and questions, which can overwhelm staff  Risk of online safeguarding issues  In remote areas, it may be difficult to share phone numbers or accounts with the community  Requires staff to manage platforms  Some natural disasters can affect internet coverage  Requires fast translation to send and receive messages in several languages |
| Dedicated email address  A dedicated email address set up for individuals to send messages | Very accessible if the location has good network coverage and if communities have access to smartphones or computers  Suitable for anonymous complaints if user email accounts do not contain identifiable information  People may see emails as a formal and respectable way to give feedback  Easy to set up | Requires good network coverage and access to smartphone or computer  Requires digital literacy  Risk of online safeguarding issues  There may be delays in response and flexibility  Follow-up depends on the user supplying contact information  Some natural disasters can affect internet coverage |