NRCS Hotline Internal Q+A

1. What is the purpose of the NRCS Telephone Hotline?

The NRCS Telephone Hotline enables people across Nepal to contact the Red Cross through a single free-to-call four-digit telephone number.

Callers can ask questions relating to their own situation, humanitarian needs, and how they can access support, request assistance, make suggestions on how services can be improved or make a comment or complaint.

This will enable people from across the country to make quick contact with the Red Cross to ask questions, give feedback, and quickly flag any potential problems. This in turn will help the Red Cross better support communities across the country, particularly in earthquake affected areas where activity is most intense.

1. Is this an emergency number?

The NRCS Telephone Hotline is NOT an emergency number – in an emergency people should continue to call the relevant emergency services, and this will be part of the key messaging as we promote the line.

If any calls of an emergency nature are received, hotline staff will seek to redirect callers to the emergency services required.

1. How does the system work?

Calls through the four-digit hotline number will initially be directed to a third-party call centre. Staff in this call centre have received Red Cross training and are equipped with a comprehensive Q+A document covering a range of the most common questions.

We anticipate around 80% of call will be able to be answered directly referred on to other organisations by call-centre staff.

All questions will be logged to give us an understanding of what the most common questions are and where they are coming from. These logs will be submitted to the Red Cross twice a week.

Questions which cannot be answered at the call centre level will be passed to the Call centre focal point (within the NRCS) to follow up. These unresolved queries will be shared with the most relevant internal department or PNS for resolution. All queries should be resolved within two weeks of the initial call.

Any serious allegations involving, for example, breach of the Red Cross code of conduct will be Red Flagged at the call centre level and immediately passed to the NRCS focal point for further investigation.

1. What other feedback mechanisms are in place?

Several feedback mechanisms have already been established, however the aftermath of the earthquake highlighted that an easy-to-access free-to-call telephone line with capacity to receive and respond to calls was lacking.

Existing systems in place for receiving information from the public include Facebook, email, SMS and the NRCS switchboard number.

The NRCS Communications Team also run a weekly radio show which regularly features voices and questions from communities, as well as a weekly newspaper Q+A column in which people can submit their questions to the Red Cross.

By far the most common form of feedback is through face-to-face interaction with staff and volunteers at the community level. However the subjects of feedback and how they are resolved are rarely recorded, providing limited opportunity to learn and share best practice.

While all these channels provide numerous avenues for feedback, none has the accessibility or confidentiality of a free-to-call four-digit helpline.

We would not pretend the Hotline is a panacea to all the challenges of enabling people to ask questions and give feedback to the Red Cross – or indeed the task of ensuring feedback informs future Red Cross activities - but we do feel a well-resourced and widely promoted telephone line has an important role to play in addressing those challenges.

1. How will this support and/or tie in to grass-roots accountability to communities?

The Red Cross hotline is in no way a replacement for or instead of grass-roots accountability at the district chapter and community level.

Accountability to the communities where we work is a vital part of the relationship we hold with those communities and this cannot be replaced with a telephone line.

But this is not an either/or situation

The telephone hotline will bolster universal access to the Red Cross, giving people a line in if they are unable or unwilling to contact their local chapter directly for any reason, and will be launched alongside training and increased support for accountability activities at grass-roots level.

Both the telephone line, and increased grass-roots support, should combine to safe guard our relationships with communities and ensure we meet the accountability needs of the people we serve.

1. Is this just for NRCS/IFRC? How can PNS access this tool?

The hotline is open to calls from across the earthquake affected districts and the entire country, so we anticipate receiving calls from people who fall under the project areas of all PNS.

While we expect the vast majority of calls to resolved at the call centre level, those questions which cannot be resolved immediately will be passed on to an ERO focal point in the relevant district for follow up and resolution. If a question relates to a specific programme then the corresponding PNS should be consulted and made aware of the feedback.

Monthly reports looking at all calls – both those resolved at call-centre level and those which progressed further - will be made available and will be searchable by area for PNS to see the most common questions and feedback relating to the communities where they are working.

As a call centre staffed by human beings – as opposed to an automated system – should PNS require call centre services to support their operations, the hotline can easily be adapted to handle additional calls.

PNS can also submit additional Q+As they anticipate their activities generating to aid call centre staff in effectively handling their response to callers.

1. Will there be costs for PNS wanting to use this tool?

Initially, as this service is available nationally and accessible by all PNS equally, there is no plan to levy a fee on individual PNS.

However, if the line proves popular and additional staff are required at the call centre we may request PNS to assist with funding to support that additional capacity.

Similarly if a PNS wished to have its own dedicated member of staff in the call centre to deal specifically with calls relating to its programme, we would request that the PNS contribute to support that position – this would cost in the region of 30,000NPR per month per additional member of staff.

1. How can we/PNS access the information coming from the Hotline?

Queries relating to activities carried out by specific PNS will almost certainly come to that PNS for response and resolution. In this way PNS will be aware of queries coming in relating to their work.

In addition data will be made available monthly with a report highlighting key areas. Data will be searchable by geographic location etc, so will enable PNS to see the main issues arising in the areas where they are working.

1. Will this support the wider OCHA-led Common Feedback Project?

Anonymised data will be shared regularly with the Common Feedback Project team whilst it continues to consolidate feedback from partners to create monthly reports.

Given that the Common Feedback Projects is interested in overall trends and patterns, Red Cross reserves the right not to include specific sensitive cases within the data it submits to partners.

1. How much does the system cost?

The cost of the system currently works out at approx. US$4,000 per month. We currently have a contract with an external provider for one year. We will regularly review the hotline’s performance during the year to establish if it is providing a cost effective service, and reserve the right not to continue beyond the initial one-year contract.

The initial contract was awarded following an open, transparent and fair procurement process in accordance with IFRC rules. We believe we have selected a provider who is both technically competent and good value for money.

1. How will the system be sustainable?

Funding has been provided to fully cover the first year of the hotlines operation. The hotline has also been included in budget planning for subsequent years, though funding is still to be fully secured.

Should the hotline prove to be an appreciated, successful and cost-effective service in its original format, we hope partners will support funding to cover at least the earthquake recovery period – anticipated to continue until 2018.

Once the earthquake recovery programmes have been drawn down, it is anticipated that either demand for the line will reduce and the National Society, should it wish to continue the service, will be able to bring the hotline service in-house. Alternatively, should the hotline retain popularity and effectiveness beyond the earthquake recovery period the National Society may again seek funding from partners to continue the service at full capacity with a third party provider.