

Strengthening and expanding Feedback mechanisms in the Solomon Islands



1 SIRCS Volunteers in Malaita, Solomon Island

Introduction

This case story outlines the strategies employed by the Solomon Islands Red Cross Society (SIRCS) to develop a comprehensive feedback mechanism with support of IFRC during the implementation of a USAID BHA-funded Trust in vaccines project. Initial feedback was collected during the COVID-19 response in the Solomon Island and in spring 2024 the feedback mechanism was strengthened and expanded with support of the regional CEA team and support delegate.

By fostering timely and meaningful dialogue with communities, SIRCS aimed to identify broader issues voiced by community members about the Solomon Islands Red Cross and their local communities. Trusted communication channels and responsive feedback mechanisms are critical to

establishing two-way dialogue with communities, building trust and ensuring alignment with community needs and aspirations. In turn, strong feedback mechanisms that are embedded into organisational decision-making processes ensure the effectiveness of, and continued support for, Red Cross activities in communities.

A feedback mechanism that utilised existing channels was established in 2023 as part of the COVID-19 response, and new modes and methodologies to receive, analyse, and act on community feedback, were introduced in early 2024. The mechanism identified concerns, questions, requests, suggestions, beliefs or perceptions, and expressions of praise, and during the project collected these through:

Managed by headquarters:

- A mobile phone hotline
- An Email address for the public
- Facebook
- Talkback Radio (national)

Provincial offices

- Door to door feedback collection

To deliver the mechanism, SIRCS assembled a dedicated local team trained by the regional team to drive the process, facilitate two-way communication, analyse feedback and disseminate insights. A standard operating procedure was also adapted to the Solomon Islands context to support the ongoing delivery of the feedback mechanism.

Leveraging its extensive provincial branch network and support from the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC), SIRCS provided in person training to over 60 volunteers to undertake door to door feedback collection in their local communities using Kobo software on tablets. For instance, the team of dedicated volunteers collected data from 12 communities across Malaita, Guadalcanal (East) and Western Provinces between February and March 2024.

SIRCS developed basic tracking and reporting methods, particularly on email and social media platforms like Facebook/Meta, to capture and analyse community sentiment and feedback through these channels. The IFRC Regional CEA team provided support to clean data and generate Insight Reports from online and in person data to disseminate to community leaders, specialist professional networks and relevant government bodies.

One National Talkback Radio session was conducted as part of SIRCSS's community engagement efforts during this period, providing a platform for direct interaction with community members and feedback collection across the nation.

Understanding what communities want to know

Digital feedback collection

Over the month of March 2024, SIRCS created 11 public Facebook posts, receiving 708 "likes" and 52 comments, covering topics such as volunteering, job opportunities, condolences, requests for information, and expressions of praise. Feedback was acknowledged online by the Feedback Team within 48 hours.

In addition to social media interactions, SIRCS received nine emails during the same period, encompassing inquiries about special needs, job opportunities, donations, volunteering, first aid certificates, membership, and marketing opportunities. Emails were forwarded to their respective program areas for response.

A Radio Talkback session conducted in March 2024 resulted in 23 questions from listeners, primarily seeking more information on blood donation, volunteering and first aid training programs. Answers to these questions were provided in real-time during the one-hour session.

Calls received on the national Mobile hotline were addressed but further work is needed to develop effective methods to record call information for the purposes of analysis.

Face-to-face feedback collection

Insights gathered from three Provincial branches between February and March 2024, highlighted some unexpected community concerns whilst also evidencing known needs. It is important to note that community feedback is *indicative* in nature, not representation, and requires further triangulation.

For instance, in Western Province, most of the feedback focused on requests or suggestions to the Red Cross, including concerns about a lack of support for people with disabilities, livelihood struggles, housing repairs, climate change impacts, sanitation, and malaria prevention.

In Guadalcanal East, requests for improved water supply and sanitation dominated the feedback, followed by requests for support for people with disabilities, questions about Red Cross services, and concerns regarding miscommunications about different Red Cross programs.

In Malaita, the majority of collected insights were requests for information about Red Cross scope or activities, followed by requests for support for people with disabilities, and praise and encouragement for the Red Cross.

Lessons Learned

The community feedback work of SIRCS provided several important lessons for future feedback initiatives. A multi-channel approach is vital for effectively reaching diverse audiences and should be

regularly updated to adapt to context and events. Continuous mentoring for volunteers is crucial to improve feedback collection and management, as evidenced by the initially high rate of incomplete feedback in some areas. Volunteers need better support to use resources like the Frequently Asked Questions document effectively.

Clear Red Cross branding and communication about the purpose of feedback collection are essential for community trust. Staff also need ongoing coaching to build technical skills, and understand best practices on feedback collection, including the importance of sharing answers to common concerns broadly as well as answering questions individually.

Feedback must be used in decision-making at all levels of SIRCS, with leadership committed to discussing its impact. Collaboration with government agencies can enhance disaster response and planning. While initial CEA training workshops were well-received, ongoing follow-up is necessary for lasting impact. Funding challenges, especially related to maintaining equipment long term and traveling to remote areas, must be addressed.

Community leader support is crucial for accessing and collecting feedback, and combining feedback collection with previously requested training can reinforce its value. Where volunteers are also community leaders, it's important to ensure respondents feel comfortable providing honest feedback offering alternative channels and explaining the fundamental principles as well as confidential feedback. Environmental, technical, and cultural challenges—such as difficult travel conditions, limited ICT infrastructure, and culturally sensitive topics—require tailored approaches. Variations in education levels among volunteers and respondents also necessitate adjustments in communication, including translation when needed.

Overall, community leaders and volunteers have shown strong support for the feedback process, which has been valued by respondents for its potential to bring positive change.

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