What is the purpose of this tool?

This tool guides you through the process of defining the communication channels you need for your feedback mechanism. This involves reviewing what already exists, gathering information and collectively taking a decision with the community, your colleagues and partners if relevant.

How to use this tool:

1. Review the [options for communication channels below](#_Communication_channels_for) and make sure you understand the different functions of communication channels, and the available options.
2. Go through the [key considerations when defining communication channels](#_Key_considerations_when) to make sure you are equipped for the planning discussions
3. Familiarize yourself with the [key questions to answer before setting up a new communication channel](#_Key_questions_to) to get a better understanding of what you need to find out before moving ahead.
4. Go to the section on collecting the information on communication channelswhich will guide you through the process of collecting the information you need to take a decision on which communication channels you need. You can also find questions tailored to the different stakeholders there.
5. [Section 5](#_Review_and_analyse) and the following sections (5 to 10) provide the main steps for taking a decision on the channels, validating it with the community, advertising the mechanism and reviewing it on a regular basis.

# Communication channels for a feedback mechanism

Depending on the stage you are in the feedback process, you will need channels for providing information, for receiving community feedback, and for responding to the community feedback:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| INFORMATION PROVISION CHANNELS | FEEDBACK CHANNELS | RESPONSE CHANNELS |
| Are channels through which **we can share information about our organisation, partners, programs, and response plans with the community i**n the areas where we work. These channels can be used to advertise the feedback mechanism, as well as share requested information. | Are channels through which **we collect insights from communities about our work and services, about specific concerns including complaints, and anything else of importance to the community**. This can include broad information about cultural and contextual conditions for the target population and misinformation spreading as rumours in the community. | Are the channels through which **we respond to community feedback, usually during our process of “closing the loop”**. It is important to remember that channels for collecting feedback are not always the appropriate channels to respond to the feedback. |

Every channel will be more or less accessible to different groups in a community, therefore only a combination of these can ensure the process is inclusive, and all community groups can be heard and are able to contribute.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| WRITTEN communication | | VERBAL communication | | |
| **offline** – no internet access needed | **online** – internet access needed | **face-to-face** | **phone calls** | **voice or video recorder** |
| *For example:*   * *SMS messaging* * *Suggestion boxes* * *Letters* | *For example:*   * *Social media* * *Messaging applications* * *Chatbots* * *Emails* | *For example:*   * *Helpdesks* * *Conversations during regular activities* * *Focus group discussions* * *Community meetings* * *In-person surveys or interviews* * *Household visits* * *Community committee* | *For example:*   * *Hotline* * *Call-ins during radio or TV show* * *Interactive Voice response* * *Phone-based survey or interview* | *For example:*   * *Recorder is placed at a safe place for community member to use them independently* * *Community members record their feedback on their own devices* |

For an overview of the different options, and their advantages and disadvantages, see this [communications methods matrix](https://communityengagementhub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/12/TOOL-19.-Communications-methods-matrix.pdf).

# Key considerations when defining communication channels

Consider the sensitivity and criticality of the feedback

When thinking about your channels for communication, you should also consider the sensitivity and criticality of the feedback that you will be sharing, receiving, and responding to. Here is what we mean by that:

Sensitive Feedback – Any information that can put the person sharing it or other people linked to it at risk and needs to be handled with care.[[1]](#footnote-1) This involves any allegation related to serious violations of national or international law pertaining to the rights of the individual; any breach of the code of conduct or safeguarding policies; and/or safety and security threats targeting the humanitarian community.[[2]](#footnote-2) Sensitive feedback can be received as any type of feedback, such as report, a question, or a suggestion as it depends on the specific situation if it puts a person at risk if shared with others.

Critical feedback **–** Any feedback that requires urgent/timely follow-up. This can include issues like the delivery of spoiled food, potential security risks, signs of an outbreak of disease, or new rumours in the community that might directly threaten upcoming programming. Critical feedback comments need to be shared immediately with the person in the best position to address the comment.

Any feedback channel you open might receive feedback that is sensitive in nature, and/or that needs to be handled urgently, but some channels might be better suited than others. Again, a variety of channels helps us to handle all kinds of community feedback appropriately.

Use a variety of channels

There must be multiple channels *within* each stage of information-provision, feedback, and response. This can help ensure:

* that they are accessible to everyone in the community, including those who may be blind and deaf, have low or no literacy levels, people with limited mobility, children, etc.
* that there are different channels for receiving and responding to different kinds of feedback (e.g. sensitive information, big-picture feedback, and more urgent project-related feedback)
* that people’s personal preferences are taken into account (e.g. someone may simply not be comfortable speaking up in community meetings and would prefer individual, face-to-face chances to share thoughts)

# Key questions to answer before setting up a new communication channel

Before setting up any channel, you need to be able to answer the following questions. Some of the answers might be clear already, and for others you will need to consult with the community members, colleagues and partners.

1. Which channels are you currently using to share information, receive feedback, and respond to communities?

* Which colleagues are already in regular contact with communities?
* Do we have feedback channels for specific programmes and operations?

1. Are there structures managed by the community or other partners that you can use?

* Do partners have feedback channels?
* Does the Government have feedback mechanisms?
* Which community structures are in place to communicate and manage grievances?

1. Are these channels suitable and working?

* Are they used by the community?
* Are these channels the preferred and trusted channel of the community? How satisfied are community members with these channels?
* Are these channels suitable for feedback that might be sensitive or critical?
* Is feedback treated confidentially? Are channels open at all times so that urgent feedback can be shared?
* Are there groups of the community which might not be able to access the existing channels?

1. Do you need additional channels?

* Can current channels be strengthened?
* Are additional channels needed to address gaps?
* Are there changes in the context that require new channels?
* Are the roles that can be taken over by the community?

# Collecting the information on communication channels

For answering the questions above, you will have to engage different stakeholders involved in the feedback process, and most importantly the community.

STEP 1 Gather information about communication channels that is already available

Collecting primary data always costs time and resources – both on your side, as well as on the side of those we want to engage. To avoid collecting information that is already available, first of all look for the answers to the questions above in secondary data sources. Ask colleagues if this kind of information exists and/or where it would be saved in case it’s not obvious where to access it. Look for:

* Reports of ongoing and past programmes and operations (assessments, monitoring reports, evaluations, operations updates and sitreps)
* Feedback data from your own, as well as other organisations or the Government if available
* Case studies, articles, reports for your location and context

The information you will find will likely be fragmented but can give you first ideas on the situation and what kind of data you still need to gather. Keep in mind that contexts and preferences can change quickly. Even if communities shared their preferences and views before, this does not mean the information is still relevant.

STEP 2 Identify the stakeholders who can provide answers

While communities can provide insights on their preferences and thoughts on the process, volunteers can provide insights on their experience and perception of the regular activities, colleagues will be able to provide more insights on the operational context, and other partners can share insights on the mechanisms they are using and their experience with them.

Looking at the questions in Section 3 of the document, think about who will be best placed to answer the questions and list them.

STEP 3 Select the most appropriate data collection method for collecting additional data

Review the options below to choose the most suitable methods to find out what you need to know:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| DATA COLLECTION METHOD | ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
| **Focus group discussions** with communities | * Face-to-face is usually peoples’ preferred form of communication * More in-depth discussion * Allows marginalized opinions to be voiced * Share information simultaneously with community members (stops rumours) * Supports community discussion | * Limited reach * Can exclude some community members, for example the elderly, disabled or women * Relies on physical access to the population * Needs good communication skills |
| **Structured in-person surveys/inclusion of questions on feedback mechanisms in broader surveys** | * Face-to-face usually peoples’ preferred form of communication * Share information simultaneously with community members (stops rumours) * Allows for a wide and diverse range of the community to be visited | * Can be time consuming and labour intensive * Requires support from enumerators who speak the appropriate languages and who may be difficult to identify in volatile contexts * Relies on physical access to the population * Will not provide in-depth insights |
| **Key informant interviews with key stakeholders** | * Low cost * Share information simultaneously with leaders * Can access quickly and in a timely manner * Helps to create buy-in and good relationships with key influences in the community | * May not provide a representative perspective for the wider community * Can lead to local leaders becoming the gatekeepers of information if not combined with other ways to seek input form the community * Limited reach |
| **Focus group discussions** with volunteers | * A good way to involve volunteers * Emphasizes the important role of volunteers * Uses the insights of volunteers who are in regular contact with communities | * Volunteers cannot talk for the community * Relies on physical access to volunteers * Needs good communication skills |
| **Discussions with colleagues, partners and other stakeholders** who might be collecting community feedback | * Inexpensive * Good to involved colleagues, partners and other stakeholders from the onset and build relationships * Avoids duplication | * Learnings from previous projects might not be relevant anymore * Risk of bias * Cannot speak for communities’ preferences |

Make sure you select methods that allow you to gather insights from everyone you listed in STEP 2. You may need more than one method to gather information from your target population. It is important to ensure that, when possible, you ask community members about their preference directly.

STEP 3 Use the selected methods to gather the information you need

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| DATA COLLECTION METHOD | QUESTIONS TO ASK |
| **Focus group discussions** with communities  Identify several key stakeholder groups in your target population. Consider the appropriate structure for these groups (e.g. men only, women only, community leaders, youth etc.). You want to ensure that you have a representative group. This [FGD Guide](https://communityengagementhub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/12/Tool-16.-FGD-guide.docx) provides you with the information you need. | **About communication provision:**   * How would you prefer our organisation to share information with you, for example about this feedback mechanism? * Would everyone in the community have access to these channels? How do we make sure the information reaches the most vulnerable?   **About feedback:**   * How do you feel about sharing feedback or concerns about any issue, person, or service? * What do you do if you have any concerns or feedback about something? * Have you had any opportunity to give feedback and share your concerns about aid received or not received in the past? * If yes: Did you provide feedback or share concerns? * If yes: how did you provide feedback or share your concerns? * What would your preferred way be to share feedback? * What would your preferred way be for you to share sensitive feedback or concerns?   **About response:**   * How do you prefer to receive an answer to your feedback? * How would you prefer receiving a response to sensitive feedback? * In what timeline do you expect to receive a response to your feedback?   **About the feedback process:**   * How would you like to be involved in the feedback process? |
| **Structured in-person surveys/inclusion of questions on feedback mechanisms in broader surveys**  See if there are any surveys for assessments or monitoring planned that you can integrate your questions into. Only conduct a separate survey if that is not the case.  Make sure the data collectors are trained on communication skills and understand the purpose of the survey. The training materials for data collectors and the [CEA in assessments tool](https://communityengagementhub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/03/TOOL-13.-CEA-in-Assessment-tool.docx) provides useful information. | **About communication provision:**   * How would you prefer our organisation to share information with you, for example about this feedback mechanism?\*   *Answer options:*  *Television; Newspaper; Radio; Online sources; Notice boards and posters; Leaflets; Government; Social workers; Local community-based organisations; International non-governmental organisations; Local organisations; social media; Messaging Apps; Politicians; Family; Friends, Neighbours; Community theatre or cinemas; Community Meetings / Community Leaders; Places of worship; Youth Leaders; Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers or staff; Other (free list); I don’t want to answer*   * Are the members of your community who might not be able to access these channels?   *Answer options:*  *Yes/no*   * If not, who are they?   *Answer options:*  *Women; Young people; members of a specific ethnic group, members of a religious group; supporters of a political party; elderly people; people with disabilities; other (free list); I don’t want to answer*  **About feedback:**   * How do you feel about sharing feedback or concerns about any issue, person, or service? [single choice]   *Answer options:*  *We are willing to provide feedback; I worry about letting organizations know my feelings about their work; I worry about letting individuals know my feelings about their work; I have concerns about discussing services that are provided to me; I would not like to provide feedback about any service or individuals, but I can speak about other things; I prefer not to say anything; other (free list); I don’t want to answer*   * What do you do if you have any concerns or feedback about something? [multiple choice]\*   *Answer options:*  *Tell a (non-religious) leader in my community; Tell a religious leader in my community; Contact a media organization (e.g.: local radio station, news outlet); Discuss it with a community group; Discuss with my friends; Share and discuss on social media; Use an NGO feedback mechanism; I prefer not to say anything.; I would make a public protest.; I would put up posters; Produce an article/story/poem/song for public performance or for publication; (free list); I don’t want to answer*   * Have you had any opportunity to give feedback and share your concerns about aid received or not received in the past?   *Answer options:*  *Yes/no*   * If yes: Did you provide feedback or share concerns?   *Answer options:*  *Yes/no*   * If yes: how did you provide feedback or share your concerns?   *Answer options (adjust answer options to those available)*  *Face-to-face with a representative of the organisation (privately); In community meetings; By telephone and speaking to someone; By telephone, but must be anonymous; By writing and posting in a suggestion box; Through a community committee; By email; Online through social media like Twitter or Facebook; By recording my comment using a voice recorder; Other (free list); I don’t want to answer*   * What would your preferred way be to share feedback?\*   *Answer options same as above*   * What would your preferred way be for you to share sensitive feedback or concerns?   *Answer options same as above*  **About response:**   * How do you prefer to receive an answer to your feedback? * How would you prefer receiving a response to sensitive feedback? * In what timeline do you expect to receive a response to your feedback?   **About the feedback process:**   * How would you like to be involved in the feedback process?   *\* If integrated into another survey and you only have a limited no. of questions you ask, those highlighted with are suggested to be prioritized* |
| **Key informant interviews with key stakeholders**  If you have strong relationships with leaders or other key stakeholders in the community you can conduct key information interviews with them.  This process should be coupled with another method, as leaders or specific key informants are not representative of the entire community – but they can provide valuable in-depth insights. | **About communication provision:**   * How would you prefer our organisation to share information with your community, for example about this feedback mechanism? * Would everyone in the community have access to these channels? How do we make sure the information reaches the most vulnerable?   **About feedback:**   * How do members in your community feel about sharing feedback or concerns about any issue, person, or service? * What do members of your community do if they have any concerns or feedback about something? * Have you had any opportunity to give feedback and share your concerns about aid received or not received in the past? * If yes: Did you provide feedback or share concerns? * If yes: how did you provide feedback or share your concerns? * What would your preferred way be to share feedback? * What would your preferred way be for you to share sensitive feedback or concerns?   **About response:**   * How do you prefer to receive an answer to your feedback? * How would you prefer receiving a response to sensitive feedback? * In what timeline do you expect to receive a response to your feedback?   **About the feedback process:**   * How would you like to be involved in the feedback process? * What is the best way to involve your community in the feedback process? |
| **Focus group discussions with volunteers**  Organise meetings with volunteers who know your target community. You can focus on those who will be involved in the feedback process, but it can be valuable to talk to volunteers involved in any kind of programme or operation, as they will have valuable insights on the community to share. | **About communication provision:**   * What do you think is the best way to share information with the community you are supporting, for example about this feedback mechanism? * Would everyone in the community have access to these channels? How do we make sure the information reaches the most vulnerable? * What is the best way to share information with you, so that you can pass it on to the community?   **About feedback:**   * What do members in the community do if they have any concerns or feedback about something? * Have community members shared feedback including with you in the past? * If yes: how did they share it? * Have you encountered any challenges in relation to receiving and sharing the feedback or concerns with colleagues?   **About response:**   * How do you think the organisation should provide answers to community members about their feedback? * How to best respond to sensitive feedback? * In what timeline do you think we are able to provide = a response to community feedback?   **About the feedback process:**   * How would you as a volunteer like to be involved in the feedback process? * What kind of support do you need to receive feedback, respond to it and refer it to the right colleagues? |
| who might be collecting community feedback in the same areas  Organise meetings with partner organisations, Government representatives or colleagues within your organisation who might be managing other feedback mechanisms. This will allow you to learn from their experience, as well as to link your mechanism to theirs to enable referrals. | **About communication provision:**   * How are you sharing information with the community you are supporting, for example about your feedback mechanism? * Would everyone in the community have access to these channels? How do we make sure the information reaches the most vulnerable? * Have you encountered any challenges when sharing information with communities?   **About feedback:**   * What are the types of feedback that community members mainly share with you? * Have you encountered any challenges in relation to receiving feedback form community members? * How could we best refer feedback to your mechanism?   **About response:**   * How are you providing answers to community members about their feedback? * How to do you respond to sensitive feedback? * In what timeline are you responding to community feedback?   **About the feedback process:**   * If we refer feedback to you, can we find out once you have responded to the feedback? * How can we best collaborate, including on how to jointly learn from feedback findings and advocate for necessary action? |

# Review and analyse the information

Now that you have gathered the information you need, you can analyse the information and answer the questions from Section 3. This will allow you to decide if new channels will be needed, and to be clear on what the best steps are to introduce new one or strengthen existing one. The preferences will not be the same for all community groups, so you need to identify different channels.

# Organise a workshop to decide on the channels

To decide which channels you need, it is best to organise a workshop with the key stakeholders who will be part of the feedback process. This includes your colleagues and may include community representatives and Government officials. You can include representatives from women's groups / adolescents / marginalized populations to understand their preferences and discuss options. Here is an agenda for the workshop.

The decision taken on the channels will have to balance preferences of the community as well as the contextual considerations such as safety, access, mobile networks, budget and more. The decision tree (point 3) in [the Communications methods matrix](https://communityengagementhub.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/12/TOOL-19.-Communications-methods-matrix.pdf) can help you in the decision process.

# Discuss the communication channels with the community again

Once it has been decided which channels will be used for the feedback mechanism, organise discussions with communities again to check the planned feedback mechanism meets peoples’ expectations and they will feel comfortable using it. You can organise focus group discussions with diverse community groups, as well as community volunteers to identify areas of improvement and check for any potential problems.

# Close the loop with your target population

Make sure to inform the community what channels were selected and the process that was undertaken to identify the appropriate channels.

* Use the preferred information provision channels to share information about how to use the feedback channels, their purpose, the populations right to give feedback and your commitment to being accountable to them.
* Use this time to respond to questions about the channels and begin to collect any feedback.
* Ensure that most of the target population are aware of the channels. Try using multiple formats for sharing information to reach more (and harder to reach) people.

# Periodically review the functionality and adapt

The community preference and the context both constantly evolve, so you might need to make changes every now and then. Carry out regular checks to make sure the feedback mechanism is working, and people still feel comfortable using it.

Some questions to ask regularly include:

* **Are the feedback channels being used?**

If the amount of feedback received is low, is it because people do not trust the mechanism? Have you received sensitive feedback?

* **Who is sharing feedback – and who isn’t?**

Are there certain groups of people (e.g. women, elderly, certain ethnicities, or locations) that you are not hearing from?

* **What are communities’ views on the process?**

Are they satisfied? Do they feel heard?

* **Are people hearing back about the feedback they shared?**

If not, why?

Answers to the questions above can be found by reviewing the feedback data and documentation of how the feedback was handled, having discussions with colleagues and community members, and collecting structured data.

1. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2021). Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Contexts. Operational Guidance, p.30. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/operational-response/iasc-operational-guidance-data-responsibility-humanitarian-action [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Danish Refugee Council (2022): Community Feedback Mechanism. Guidance and Toolkit., p.8. https://www.drc.ngo/media/vzlhxkea/drc\_global-cfm-guidance\_web\_low-res.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)