



1. PURPOSE

The Australian Political Studies Association Limited (APSA) commits to handling any complaints it receives fairly, effectively and efficiently.

This policy sets out the key principles and concepts of APSA's complaint handling system and provides guidance to individuals wishing to make a complaint and to the APSA representatives who are responsible for managing complaints.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- directors, office holders, committee members and convenors
- employees (fulltime, parttime, casual), agency staff and contractors
- members and volunteers,

who as a collective may also be referred to as the representatives of APSA.

3. DEFINITIONS

A **complaint** is an expression of dissatisfaction made to or about APSA, its services, representatives or the handling of a complaint where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required. This includes complaints made directly to APSA as well as those made on social media.

The **complaint handling system** includes the policies, procedures, practices, documents and equipment used by APSA in the management of complaints.

A **dispute** is an unresolved complaint escalated either internally or externally of APSA.

Feedback includes opinions, comments and expressions of interest or concern made directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, to APSA where a response is not explicitly or implicitly expected or legally required.

A **grievance** is a clear, formal written statement by an individual employee or volunteer about a work-related problem.

A **policy** is a statement of instruction that sets out the position of APSA in relation to a particular matter, issue or topic.

A **procedure** is a statement or instruction that sets out how policies will be implemented and managed and the individuals responsible for these actions.

4. COMMITMENT

APSA representatives are expected to commit to the fair, effective and efficient handling of complaints.

4.1 Chair/President and the Board

Promote a culture that values complaints and their fair, effective and efficient resolution by:

- reporting to the Board on APSA's complaint handling system
- providing adequate support and direction to representatives responsible for handling complaints
- regularly reviewing reports about complaint trends and issues arising from complaints
- encouraging all representatives to be alert to complaints and assist those responsible for handling complaints to resolve them fairly, effectively and efficiently
- encouraging representatives to make recommendations for system and process improvements, and
- supporting recommendations for complaint handling improvements arising from the analysis of complaint data.

4.2 Representatives Responsible for Handling Complaints

Demonstrate exemplary complaint handling practices by:

- treating all individuals with respect, including those who make complaints
- assisting individuals to make a complaint if needed
- complying with this policy and its procedures
- providing regular feedback to the Chair/President and/or the Board on issues arising from complaints
- providing suggestions for ways to improve the complaint handling system, and
- implementing changes arising from individual complaints and from the analysis of complaint data as agreed by the Board.

4.3 Representatives

Understand and comply with APSA's complaint handling system by:

- treating all individuals with respect, including those who make complaints
- being aware of the complaint handling policy and its procedures
- assisting individuals who wish to make a complaint with accessing the complaints process, and
- being alert to complaints and assisting those representatives handling complaints to resolve these fairly, effectively and efficiently.

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

An effective complaint handling system is modelled on the principles of fairness, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency and integration into organisational culture.

5.1 Making a Complaint

Complaints can be made to the Company Secretary via email to secretary@auspsa.org.au

Complaints can also be made directly to the Chair/President or any Board member.

5.2 Facilitating Complaints

People focussed: APSA is committed to seeking and receiving feedback and complaints about its activities, benefits, systems, practices, procedures, services, representatives and complaint handling system.

Any concerns raised in feedback or complaints will be managed within a reasonable time frame.

No reprisals: APSA will take all reasonable steps to ensure that any individual making a complaint is not adversely affected because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

Anonymous complaints: APSA will accept an anonymous complaint if there is a compelling reason to do so and will confidentially investigate the issues raised where there is sufficient information provided to enable it to do so.

Accessibility: APSA will ensure that information about how and where complaints may be made to or about APSA is well publicised and is available on its website.

APSA will ensure that its complaint handling system is easily understood and accessible to everyone, particularly individuals who may require assistance.

If an individual prefers or needs another individual or organisation to assist or represent them in the making and/or resolution of their complaint, APSA will communicate with them through their chosen representative in accordance with their wishes. Anyone may represent an individual wishing to make a complaint with their consent (e.g. advocate, family member, legal or community representative, another organisation).

Free of charge: There will be no charge for APSA to address complaints it receives.

5.3 Responding to Complaints

Early resolution: Where possible, complaints will be resolved at their first contact with APSA. When appropriate, APSA may offer an explanation or apology to the individual making the complaint.

Responsiveness: APSA will promptly acknowledge receipt of complaints.

APSA will assess and prioritise complaints in accordance with the urgency and/or seriousness of the issues raised as determined by APSA. If a matter concerns an immediate risk to safety or security as determined by APSA the response will be immediate and will be escalated appropriately.

APSA is committed to managing expectations, and will inform of the following as soon as practicable:

- the complaint process
- the expected time frames for APSA actions
- the progress of the complaint and reasons for any delay
- their likely involvement in the process, and
- the possible or likely outcome of their complaint.

APSA will advise individuals as soon as practicable when it is unable to deal with any part of their complaint and provide advice about where such issues and/or complaints may be directed (if known and appropriate).

APSA will also advise individuals as soon as possible when it is unable to meet certain time frames for responding to their complaint and the reason for delay.

Objectivity and fairness: APSA will address each complaint with integrity and in a fair, objective and impartial manner.

APSA will endeavour to ensure that the representative handling a complaint is different and separated from any representative whose conduct or service is being complained about.

Conflicts of interest, whether actual, potential or perceived, will be managed responsibly and in accordance with the Conflicts of Interest Policy. Internal reviews of complaint management will be conducted by a representative other than the initial complaint handler/decision maker.

Responding flexibly: APSA representatives are empowered to resolve complaints promptly and with as little formality as possible. APSA will adopt flexible approaches to its complaint handling system to enhance accessibility for individuals making complaints and/or their representatives.

APSA will assess each complaint on its merits and involve the individual making a complaint and/or their representative in the process as far as practicable.

Confidentiality: APSA will keep the identity of individuals making complaints confidential where it is practical and appropriate.

Personal information that identifies individuals will only be disclosed or used by APSA in accordance with APSA's privacy policies.

5.4 Parties to a Complaint

Complaints involving other organisations: Where a complaint involves other organisations, APSA will work with the other organisation/s where practicable, to ensure that communication with the individual making a complaint and/or their representative is clear and coordinated.

Subject to privacy and confidentiality considerations and other applicable legal obligations, communication and information sharing between the parties will also be organised to facilitate a timely response to the complaint.

Where a complaint involves multiple areas within APSA, responsibility for communicating with the individual making the complaint and/or their representative will also be coordinated.

Where APSA's activities are contracted out, contracted service providers are expected to have an accessible and comprehensive complaint management system. APSA will receive complaints not only about the actions of its representatives but also the actions of APSA's service providers.

Empowerment of APSA representatives: APSA representatives responsible for managing complaints are empowered to implement its complaint handling system as relevant to their role and responsibilities.

Representatives are encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness and efficiency of all aspects of APSA's complaint handling system.

Managing unreasonable conduct by individuals making complaints: APSA is committed to being accessible and responsive to all individuals who approach APSA with feedback or complaints. The success of this depends on:

- APSA's ability to perform its functions in the most effective and efficient way possible
- the health, safety and security of APSA representatives, and
- APSA's ability to allocate its resources fairly across all complaints it receives.

When individuals behave unreasonably in their dealings with APSA, their conduct can significantly affect the progress and efficiency of APSA's functions. As a result, APSA will take proactive and decisive action to manage any conduct that negatively and unreasonably affects APSA and will support its representatives to do the same in accordance with this policy.

Alternative avenues for dealing with complaints: APSA will inform individuals who make complaints about any internal or external review options available to them (including any relevant Ombudsman or oversight regulatory bodies).

Levels of complaint handling: The three levels of APSA's complaint handling system are outlined below.

1. APSA aims to resolve complaints at the first level, the frontline. Wherever possible representatives will be adequately equipped to respond to complaints, including being given appropriate authority, training and supervision.
2. Where this is not possible, APSA may decide to escalate the complaint to a more senior representative. This second level of complaint handling will provide for the following internal mechanisms:
 - assessment and possible investigation of the complaint and decision/s already made, and/or
 - facilitated resolution (where an individual not connected with the complaint reviews the matter and attempts to find an outcome acceptable to the relevant parties).
3. Where an individual making a complaint is dissatisfied with the outcome of APSA's handling of their complaint, they may seek an external review of its decision (by a third party authorised body).

6. ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

6.1 Analysis and Evaluation of Complaints

APSA will ensure that complaints are recorded in a systematic way so that information can be easily retrieved for reporting and analysis by the Board.

APSA will provide regular reports on:

- the number of complaints received
- the outcome of complaints, including matters resolved at the first contact
- issues arising from complaints
- systemic issues identified, and
- the number of requests for internal and/or external review of the complaint handling system.

Regular analysis of these reports will be undertaken to monitor trends, measure the quality of APSA's service and make improvements.

Both reports and their analysis will be provided to the Board for review at least annually.

6.2 Monitoring the Complaint Handling System

APSA will continually monitor its complaint handling system to:

- ensure its effectiveness in responding to and resolving complaints, and
- identify and correct deficiencies in the system.

Monitoring may include the use of audits, complaint satisfaction surveys and online listening tools and alerts.

6.3 Continuous Improvement

APSA is committed to improving the way it operates, including the effectiveness and efficiency of its complaint handling system. To this end, APSA will:

- support the making and appropriate resolution of complaints
- implement best practice in complaint handling
- recognise and reward exemplary complaint handling by its representatives
- regularly review the complaint handling system and complaint data, and
- implement appropriate system changes arising from the analysis of complaints data and continual monitoring of the system.

7. COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURE

When responding to complaints and feedback, representatives must act in accordance with this procedure as well as any other internal documents that provide guidance to APSA's complaint handling system. Consideration should also be given to any relevant legislation and/or regulations.

8. KEY STAGES

The five key stages in APSA's complaint handling system are set out below.

8.1 Receive

Unless the complaint has been resolved at the first contact, the complaint and its supporting information will be recorded. The complaint file will be assigned a unique identifier/number.

The record of complaint will document:

- contact information of the individual making the complaint, the date received and the representative receiving the complaint
- issues raised by the individual making the complaint and the outcome/s sought
- any other relevant information, and
- any additional support the individual making the complaint requires.

8.2 Acknowledge

APSA will acknowledge receipt of each complaint promptly, and within 5 working days where practicable. When and if appropriate, APSA may offer an explanation or apology.

Consideration will be given to the most appropriate method (e.g. email, letter) for communicating with the individual making the complaint. This will include consideration of any preferences advised by the individual making the complaint.

8.3 Assess and Investigate

Assessment: After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, APSA will confirm whether the issue/s raised in the complaint is/are within its control.

APSA will also consider the outcome/s sought by the individual making the complaint and, where there is more than one issue raised, determine whether each issue needs to be separately addressed.

When determining how a complaint will be managed, consideration will be given to:

- how serious, complicated or urgent the complaint is as determined by APSA
- whether the complaint raises concerns about an individual's health and safety
- how the individual making the complaint is being affected
- the risks involved if resolution of the complaint is delayed, and
- whether a resolution requires the involvement of other organisations.

Investigation: Following assessment, APSA will consider how to best manage the complaint.

APSA will:

- give the individual making the complaint information or an explanation
- gather information about the issue/s, individual/s or area/s that the complaint is about, and
- investigate the claims made in the complaint.

APSA will keep the individual making the complaint updated on the progress of the complaint handling process, particularly if there are any delays.

8.4 Outcome

Following consideration of the complaint and any investigation into the issues raised, APSA will communicate the outcome of the complaint using the most appropriate medium.

APSA will advise:

- the outcome of the complaint and any action taken or to be taken by APSA
- the reason/s for APSA's decision
- the remedy or resolution/s that APSA is proposing or has implemented, and
- any options for review that may be available to the individual making the complaint, such as an internal review, external review or appeal.

Any action proposed or implemented by APSA will be tailored to each individual complaint and consider any statutory or regulatory requirements.

8.5 Document and Analyse

Document: APSA will keep records of:

- how the complaint was managed
- the outcome/s of the complaint (including whether it or any aspect of it was substantiated, any recommendations made to address problems identified and any decisions made on those recommendations), and
- any outstanding actions to be followed up, including analysing any underlying or root causes.

Analyse: APSA will ensure that outcomes are properly implemented, monitored and reported to the representative handling the complaint and to the Board.

9. RELATED POLICIES / DOCUMENTS

- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Member Code of Conduct

10. REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed by the Board at least every two years, or sooner if required by changes in law, regulation or organisational circumstances.

Version	Amendments	Approved By	Date	Next Review
2024.1	Initial policy – based on ACNC endorsed template policy developed by Volunteering Australia	APSA Board	19Dec24	Dec26
2026.2	Revised policy – align terms (staff etc) to reflect terminology and operations of APSA – procedure added by way of a five stage complaint handling system based on ACNC endorsed template – updated policy format	APSA Board	07Apr26	Apr28