

Complaints Handling and Whistleblowing Policy



Last Updated: 8 June 2026



Registered Charity



Vanni Hope (ABN: 19614675231) is a charity registered with the ACNC.

Overview

The Complaints Handling and Whistleblowing Policy (**the Policy**) is designed to ensure that Vanni Hope is able to resolve complaints or any concerns about our organisation, staff, volunteers, partners or anyone acting on our behalf, in the most effective and efficient manner. Vanni Hope will respond to all complaints fairly and in a timely manner.

The effective resolution of complaints provides Vanni Hope with opportunities to improve its delivery of projects and engagement with the public and key stakeholders.

Commitment to good complaints handling

Vanni Hope is committed to promoting a culture in which the highest quality community engagement and experience is delivered at all times, including when a complaint or concern is raised. As part of this, Vanni Hope shall ensure that all its staff are provided with the required training to review, analyse and resolve complaints in the most effective manner possible.

Objectives and scope of the Policy

The Policy explains the processes that all staff must follow to ensure that complaints are managed in a professional and consistent manner.

A **complaint** is any expression of dissatisfaction about Vanni Hope, our staff, volunteers or directors, our partners or anyone acting on our behalf, that is made to Vanni Hope, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

Whistleblowing is defined as deliberate, voluntary disclosure of individual or organisational wrongdoing by a person who has access to data, events or information about an actual, suspected or anticipated wrongdoing within the organisation, and a **Whistleblower** refers to any Representative who attempts to make or wishes to make a report in connection with a wrongful act under this policy and who wishes to avail themselves of the protection offered by this policy.

The Policy applies to all Vanni Hope staff, volunteers and directors who deal with others on Vanni Hope's behalf.

Vanni Hope requires all implementing project partners to maintain an equivalent complaints mechanism and to report any serious complaints, including any complaints involving sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment (SEAH), to Vanni Hope immediately. Partner obligations in relation to complaints handling are set out in the relevant Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Vanni Hope and each implementing partner.

This Policy is intended to apply to any complaint, regardless of who makes it.

Communicating this Policy

The Policy is published on the Vanni Hope website (www.vannihope.org).

For all our projects implemented in Sri Lanka, the Policy is to be published in English (and Sinhala/Tamil if in a non-English dominant area) and displayed on a notice-board at the project site, or if no such notice-board is available, in the local office of the implementing project partner. The implementing project partner is to communicate the existence of the Policy to beneficiaries of the project and provide beneficiaries with a copy of the Policy if requested.

How to make a complaint

A complaint may be made in writing (whether by letter, email, etc), or verbally (by phone or in person) and may be made anonymously.

A complaint may be made directly to a Vanni Hope staff member, volunteer, director or any person acting on Vanni Hope's behalf.

A complaint may be made directly to an implementing project partner.

We will clearly publicise information to those who work with us about how and where to complain.

Where to submit complaints

Complaints by letter should be addressed to:

*Vanni Hope
136 Dean Street
Strathfield South NSW 2136
Australia*

Complaints by email should be addressed to:

ranjan@vannihope.org. OR contact@vannihope.org

Complaints can also be made by phone, by contacting the Vanni Hope Managing Director on: +61 428138232

Within Sri Lanka, Vanni Hope works with local implementing partners. Primary point of contact for communities involved in our projects should be the local partner.

Responsibility for resolving complaints

Primary responsibility for managing, investigating and resolving complaints rests with the Vanni Hope Managing Director.

For any complaints considered to be of a serious nature (that is, where the complaint carries high or extreme reputational, financial or legal risk to Vanni Hope), the complaint is to be managed, investigated and resolved by the board of directors of Vanni Hope (**Vanni Hope Board**).

Process for the handling of internal or external complains

1. **RECORD:** If a Vanni Hope staff member, volunteer, director or person acting on Vanni Hope's behalf receives direct notification of a complaint, they must use their best endeavours to ensure the complaint is put into writing, whether by assisting the complainant to put the complaint into writing or by writing it down themselves as faithfully as possible.
2. **NOTIFY:** The person receiving the complaint should immediately notify the Vanni Hope Managing Director of the complaint.
 - a. If the Vanni Hope Managing Director is involved or the complainant feels uncomfortable discussing the matter with the Vanni Hope Managing Director, then the complainant should approach another director.
 - b. If the Chairperson of the Vanni Hope Board is involved or the complainant feels uncomfortable discussing the matter with the Chairperson of the Vanni Hope Board, then the complainant should approach another director.
 - c. If both the above options are unavailable to the complainant, then they should approach any member of Vanni Hope's staff.
3. **ASSESS:** The person receiving the complaint shall assess the severity of the complaint to determine whether it is minor (such as, a misconception based on an error), moderate (requires some investigation and possible remedial action) or serious (carries high or extreme reputational, financial or legal risk to Vanni Hope). The Vanni Hope Managing Director must escalate the complaint to the Vanni Hope Board if it is assessed to be serious.
4. **INVESTIGATE:** Complaints that are of minor or moderate nature must be investigated by the Vanni Hope Managing Director. Complaints that present a high or extreme risk to Vanni Hope will be investigated by the Vanni Hope Board and appropriate action taken.
5. **RESOLVE:** Once investigated, the Vanni Hope Managing Director or Vanni Hope Board must determine whether any formal apology is to be provided to the complainant, whether any remedial action is to be taken, whether any disciplinary action is to be taken against any Vanni Hope staff, volunteers, directors or representatives. If the complaint relates to, or could potentially relate to a public liability claim against Vanni Hope, the complaint must be referred to the Legal Advisor for Vanni Hope who will determine whether to notify the public liability insurer. This assessment must be undertaken **before** any decision is made to take remedial action and/or issue an apology to the affected party.

If remedial action is required, any changes identified to the way in which we operate, training, counselling or disciplining of staff or volunteers etc, then these actions will be implemented as a matter of priority.

6. **COMMUNICATE:** Vanni Hope will inform the person making the complaint in writing of its escalation within the organisation and action taken to address the issue, where appropriate. When responding to the complainant and resolving the problem, staff should seek feedback from the complainant as to whether the complainant is satisfied. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response, the complaint must be escalated to the Vanni Hope Board.
7. **OBJECTIVITY AND FAIRNESS:** We will address all complaints in an equitable and fair manner and process evidence submitted by both the complainant and any person(s) allegedly responsible for the act or omission on which the complaint is based. Every effort will be made to ensure fairness in the investigation on of all complaints, the outcome of the investigation, and any subsequent appeal process that may take place.

Principles for managing and resolving complaints

If we receive a complaint, we must ensure that we act in a professional and courteous manner at all times and apply the following principles:

Principle	Details
Listen to the complaint	● Accept ownership of the problem ● Apologise ● Thank the person for bringing the problem to our attention
Be understanding	● Be calm and helpful ● Let the complainant know that you shall take responsibility for resolving the problem
Record the complaint	● Complaints must be recorded in writing. If the complaint is made verbally, every effort must be taken to record it faithfully in writing as soon as possible after the complaint is made to ensure it accurately reflects the verbal complaint.
Make sure you have all the facts	● Check that you understand the details while the complainant is making the complaint – ask questions if necessary
Discuss options for fixing the problem	● Assess the complaint and attempt to resolve the complaint on the spot if appropriate ● If the complaint is not resolved on the spot and within 48 hours, the complaint must be escalated to a director of Vanni Hope
Be prompt	● Ensure that a response is provided promptly to the complainant

Timeframes

Complaints should be resolved as soon as practicable after the complaint is made. Any complaint that relates to sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment of vulnerable person(s) will be regarded as serious and investigated immediately, recognising during the investigation the rights of both the victim and the alleged perpetrator. Any action to investigate any allegation of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment must prioritise the rights, needs and wishes of the victim/survivor, treating him/her with dignity and respect, involving him/her in decision-making, providing information on rights, and protecting privacy and confidentiality.

Vanni Hope staff should seek to resolve complaints made in Australia within 2 business days of the complaint being made. Complaints arising in the field (eg, on project sites) should be handled

in accordance with the principles above and within 5 business days. Complainants will be notified of the outcome of the investigation within 5 business days of Vanni Hope receiving the complaint, subject to the paragraph below.

If initial assessment of the complaint indicates that the complaint is not serious but further investigation is warranted, this will take place within 15 days of the receipt of the complaint, either by the Vanni Hope Managing Director or by a person nominated by the Vanni Hope Managing Director

Complaints Register

All serious complaints and all complaints received by Vanni Hope that are not resolved within 2 business days should be added to the Complaints Register on the Google Drive.

The recording of complaints in the Complaints Register will allow Vanni Hope to be able to identify any recurring issues and implement appropriate solutions.

Complaints entered into the Complaints Register must include the date and nature of the complaint, name and contact details of complainant, name of person recording complaint, action to resolve complaint and conclusion and date resolved.

All information contained in the Complaints Register is confidential and should be treated as such. Information entered should be factual.

Copies of supporting documentation must be retained by the staff member who is notified of the complaint.

Confidentiality

Unless the complainant sets out in writing that they do not want the details of their complaint (including their personal details) to be kept confidential, the complainant's name or personal details will not be revealed to anyone other than those within Vanni Hope who are required to know such details in order to progress the investigation.

Reporting about complaints

Complaints information shall be reported to the Vanni Hope Board on a quarterly basis, including a summary report on the types of complaints (minor, complex or 'serious'), subject matter of complaint, action taken, time taken to respond to complaints, number of complaints received, number of days between receipt, response and resolution of complaint, and complaint trends, systemic issues and recommendations for improvement.

The Responsibility and Protection of Whistleblowers

Staff, volunteers, contractors, and partners who are aware of possible wrongdoing have a responsibility to disclose that information.

If a wrongful act, or suspected wrongful act, is reported, Vanni Hope will endeavour to protect the whistleblower's identity. They will not disclose the whistleblower's identity unless:

- the whistleblower consents to the disclosure;
- the law requires or authorises the identity of the whistleblower to be revealed, and/or
- the disclosure is necessary to further the investigation.

The whistleblower is also expected to keep the fact that they have raised a concern and the content of their report confidential.

Vanni Hope will also take reasonable precautions to store any records relating to a disclosed wrongdoing or suspected wrongdoing securely and to permit access by authorized personnel only. Volunteers, donors and partners who in good faith disclose perceived wrongdoing will be protected from victimisation, harassment or any other adverse consequences. In so far as possible, if necessary, they will also be supported emotionally throughout the proceedings.

At the time of raising their concern, whistleblowers should be asked to specify in writing whether they wish their identity to remain confidential.

The person to whom the issue is raised shall manage the disclosure, if appropriate, identifying a suitable Vanni Hope individual to investigate the allegation.

The person investigating the disclosure will prepare a report to be reviewed by the person to whom the allegation was made, if this is not the person doing the investigation. This report must be prepared within 20 business days of the allegation being made.

The person or persons who are the subject of the allegation will be given every opportunity to respond to the allegation both before and after the report is completed.

If the suspicion of the whistleblower is found to be baseless or unfounded, he or she will be informed, and no further action taken.

Where an investigation does not substantiate the disclosure, the results of the investigation and the identity of the person who was the subject of the investigation must continue to be handled confidentially.



Review

This Policy will be reviewed once every two years to ensure that the policy is operating effectively.

Date	Version	Review Description	Reviewed by	Approved by
Feb 2025	1	New template created	Virosh Poologasundaram	Board of Directors
June 2026	2	Complete reformat and general update of policy	Abinaja Yogarajah	Board of Directors