## **Part I: Introduction**

## **What is Client-Responsive Programming?**

Programming is client-responsive when we design and implement in a way that takes into account the views of our intended and direct clients. This requires that we systematically, deliberately and regularly listen to and collect the diverse perspectives of our clients. We must also analyse and use their feedback to make decisions and to plan for, or course correct, an action. Client-Responsive programming entails that we communicate and explain to our clients how their feedback has (or has not) informed our programmatic decisions and actions.

## **Definitions:**

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|  | **Client**  | A person or institution for whom the IRC provides, or intends to provide, assistance or services. We make a distinction between intended clients, direct clients and indirect clients.  |
|  | **Intended Client**  | A person or institution who is targeted by planned or existing IRC aid / services (e.g. eligible people living in a programme catchment area) |
|  | **Direct Client**  | A person or institution who is receiving the IRC aid and / or services (*e.g. patients in an IRC clinic*) |
|  | **Indirect Client**  | People and other institutions who are not directly receiving assistance from the IRC, but who are connected to people or institution which are, and therefore might potentially also benefit in some way from the IRC’s provision of assistance to those people/ institutions (e.g. families and dependants of IRC’s direct clients) |

## **Why is Client-Responsive Programming Important for the IRC?**

Placing people affected by crisis at the centre of our decisions about what aid to deliver, to whom, where, when, how and why will make our assistance more:

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|  | **Effective** | Successful for achieving the results and change clients wants to see |
|  | **Relevant** | Suitable in meeting clients ‘priority needs and expectations |
|  | **Appropriate** | Right for the clients in the context and situation they are living in |
|  | **Accountable**  | Responsible to our clients, affected communities and other key stakeholders for the decisions and actions we take |

## **What is the Client-Responsive Programming Approach?**

This is the IRC’s methodology for delivering Client-Responsive Programming. The Approach comprises two main elements:

* **8 Client-Responsiveness Actions:** Eight Actions which we implement in order to collect and use the perspectives of our clients at the different phased of the programme cycle: Design, Start-up, Implementation and Close-out.
* **8 Client-Responsiveness Enablers:** The Eight internal and external operating conditions which enable the Actions to be effective in delivering Client-Responsive Programming.

## **Client-Responsive Programming at the Stages of the Programme Cycle:**

**At the Design Phase**: The influence of clients on the types and modalities of aid and services they receive provides them with the opportunity to influence the major decisions that are made during project design and that may not be substantially reviewed afterwards. Clients could, for instance, express their views about their priority needs, the type of aid that they receive, their preferred communication channels with the IRC, and their willingness to participate in decision-making processes. While it may be challenging to proactively collect clients’ perspectives at the design phase of a project (a lack of financial or human resources, a lack of time, etc.), teams who are designing a project in a location where they already had programmes in place should use clients’ data from previous projects to inform new projects design. At this stage, country teams should also plan and budget for the resources they will need to implement the feedback cycle (see Enabler “Resourcing Client-Responsive Programming” in Section 3 of this Framework).

**At the Start-up Phase:** Country teams need to collect information from their clients about how they want to engage with the IRC to provide their feedback; this information should be used to select and design the proactive and reactive feedback channels needed to collect information during the design phase. This is also the time (if it doesn’t exist already) for teams to ensure that the appropriate systems are in place to record and refer feedback data and to inform their clients about the project and feedback channels available.

**At the implementation and Close-Out phases:** Country Teams should implement at least one reactive and at least one proactive feedback channel – using this to inform decision-making on certain programmatic changes or corrective actions. Teams should routinely ask their clients for their perspectives about the quality, relevance, and impact of the IRC services, as well as their feedback about how safe, fair and accessible our services are. We should also gauge whether they felt treated with respect by IRC staff and partners and whether they feel have a voice in the decisions taken by the IRC (see Core Feedback Themes – Annex 1 of “Selection and Design of Feedback Channels” for the complete list of themes for collecting client feedback). Feedback collected at the Close-Out phase also helps teams to take decision on how to close the project and can inform the design of future projects. Teams are also encouraged to discuss and review the lessons learned on collecting, using and responding to feedback received from different clients, including women, girls and other vulnerable groups.

For the specific good and great practice standards that IRC teams should achieve at each phase of the project cycle, please refer to Section 4 of this Framework.

# **Part II: The Eight Actions**

In many ways, the IRC Eight Client-Responsive Actions are similar to those in a typical Feedback Cycle. – they encompass the same channels for collecting of client feedback and the process for acknowledging, analysing, responding, and utilising feedback to inform decision making. However, the IRC programmatic approach to client-responsiveness goes beyond feedback collection during the implementation phase, requiring our decisions to be informed by clients perspectives at all stages of our projects (design, start-Up, implementation and close-out). The IRC’s approach also emphasises the importance of optimising the operational and external conditions that can facilitate (the Eight Enablers) the implementation of the Eight Actions and the Feedback Cycle.



**ACTION 1: Assess and Prepare**

The first action is to assess and prepare the design of feedback channels appropriate to the context and clients and put in place the operational requirements. This requires that you:

* Select the proactive, reactive and open Feedback Channels you will use to collect feedback: Identify your clients and the information you want to collect from them, taking into account the different barriers different groups of clients (women and girls, vulnerable groups and persons with special needs) can face accessing information and/or providing feedback.
* Design your Feedback Channel Plan including timeframes, frequency and person/ unit responsible for each identified feedback channel.
* Draft your Survey, Focus Group Discussion and/or Individual interview questionnaires
* Set up your internal systems (plan and budget for data collection, recording, referral pathways, communicating the IRC response to clients)
* Develop operational protocols for reactive feedback channels (suggestion boxes, hotlines, etc)
* Define roles and responsibilities
* Set up internal and external referral pathways

**ACTION 2: Inform and Collect**

**Definition of the different types of Feedback Channels**

**Proactive Feedback Channels** are mechanisms through which the IRC is actively soliciting feedback from clients, for example: a survey, a focus group discussion, an individual interview, etc. This means that we choose the clients and other stakeholders to whom we want to ask questions and that we control the questions we are asking and the timing of when the information is collected.

Strength: the information we are collecting is more actionable, nuanced and easier to interpret.

Weakness: the information we are collecting is limited to the questions we are asking (issues that the IRC is interested in) and that we may miss broader and other important trends. Proactive channels also don’t provide a channel to communicate with the IRC and ask a question or lodge a complaint if they want or need to.

**Reactive Feedback Channels** are mechanisms that the IRC provide to its clients and other stakeholders to communicate with us at the time and on the subject they choose. This includes for example: suggestions boxes, hotlines, email addresses, office walk-in, etc.

Strength: clients can raise concerns as they arise about whatever concerns *them,* at a time which they choose

Weakness: often seen only as a complaints mechanism. Systematically recording feedback and ensuring that we are providing a response also requires time, resources and a good data management system and referral pathways.

**Open Feedback Channels** are feedback shared with staff in an ad-hoc manner during their interactions with clients in the field. This includes informal conversations that staff have during project activities and field visits.

Strength: spontaneous and direct way to hear what clients think

Weakness: difficult to systematically document and analyse.

The second action is to inform your clients about the purpose of feedback collection and how the IRC will respond to it, as well as the process of collecting their feedback. This requires that you:

* Inform your clients about how their perspective will be collected for what purpose
* Inform your clients by when they can expect an answer
* Inform your clients / ask your client how they would like to receive the IRC response
* Ensure client consent before collecting feedback
* Collect client feedback through multiple channels
* Allow anonymous feedback
* Acknowledge feedback was received (reactive channels)

**ACTION 3: Compile and Present**

The third action is to compile and present the feedback data which you have been collected through proactive, reactive and open Feedback Channels. This requires that you:

* Compile results from surveys, FGD, interviews
* Record and compile feedback received from reactive channels
* Share and record open feedback
* Classify and assign priority level
* Refer feedback to staff with relevant authority to act and respond

**ACTION 4: Interpret**

The fourth action is to interpret the data that you have collected. This requires that you:

* Compare with other type of data
* Discuss with team/ front-line staff and other stakeholders
* Pay attention and make sense of contradictory feedback

**ACTION 5: Decide and Plan**

The fifth action is to decide and plan what actions and decisions to take in response to the feedback. This requires that you:

* Consult and involve staff and stakeholders
* Document feedback case management and decision process

**ACTION 6: Explain and Discuss**

The sixth action is to explain and discuss those decisions with our clients. This requires that you explain:

* Who will implement the action
* How and by when this should be done
* Who, how and by when the IRC response will be communicated to the client

**ACTION 7: Act**

The seventh action is to act upon and implement the decisions taken by the IRC as a result of client feedback received.

**ACTION 8: Review**

The eight and last action is to review and monitor the progress and impact of the actions taken upon clients.

This requires that you:

* Periodically review the performance of the feedback cycle
* Take perspectives from clients, partners and other stakeholders
* Gauge level of clients’ satisfaction regarding the decisions and actions taken by the IRC as a result of their feedback

# **Part 3: The Eight Enablers**

1. This section details several critical factors that will enable the implementation of the Eight Actions throughout the project lifecycle. These factors are largely internal to how the IRC operates; in many cases, strengthening our existing processes can improve our ability to be client-responsive. **Defining roles and responsibilities**

The primary responsibility for client-responsiveness lies with the programme team at the Country level. Country management has a critical role to play in facilitating client-responsive programming by requesting and using client feedback to make decisions and to cultivate an organizational culture which values client-responsiveness (see also section D on Leadership below). Monitoring and Evaluation Teams support the setting up of systems for data collection, management and presentation and can help in drafting survey/ FGD/ individual interviews questions. Technical Coordinators ensure the implementation of the feedback channels and its use in designing/adapting/course-correcting programme interventions, while verifying that the IRC’s response is communicated to the client. Grants and Compliance teams help guarantee that proposal budgets contain adequate amounts for the personnel, equipment and activities to collect and analyse client perspectives and to ensure that donors’ commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations are met (see the IRC Quick Guide to Proposal Writing). Other teams such as Human Resources, Supply Chain or Security also all have an important role to play in supporting the implementation of client-responsive programming and can also take client feedback into account in the decision they are making in their own units.

At regional and HQ levels: The regional management team have a role in supporting country teams to implement client-responsive programming, by advocating for their needs and holding them to their commitments. They can lobbying donors, governments, and other humanitarian actors to create a broader enabling environment. Regional Measurement Action Coordinators (RMACs) / Regional MEAL Coordinators provide technical support to M&E staff and support programme teams to capture, manage, and make sense of client perspectives. Other Technical Units can help programme staff interrogate how client feedback informs project design and implementation and how to use client data to ensure programme quality and relevance. Finally, the Award Management Unit can support programme and grants staff to interpret donor requirements and and craft proposals that are competitive *and* include the resources that are important to client-responsive programming. They can also help lobby donors in contract negotiations for the kind of flexibility that facilitates client-responsiveness.

1. **Data management**

In order for country teams to act upon client feedback and incorporate the information in informed decision-making, data needs to be managed in a simple, accessible and safe way. All client feedback received through an open or reactive feedback channel (suggestion box, SMS, hotline, etc.) needs to be systematically recorded. Country teams must categorise the different type of feedback received and assign priority levels depending on the sensitivity, importance and level of urgency of each client feedback received. The Feedback Registry provides a template for country teams to record and manage client feedback they received from the time a feedback is received until the time the IRC response is communicated to the client. The user guidance also supports teams to use the Feedback Registry and to classify feedback per category and to define priority levels.

1. **Defining internal and external systems and pathways**

Sometimes, your programme will not be in a position to act upon or respond to a client feedback received. This could be because the feedback is related to aid or services provided by another IRC programme or a different organization. It could also be that the feedback received alleges a breach of the IRC Way by an IRC or partner staff, this must be referred to the Ethics and Compliance Unit (ECU). It is therefore critical to define internal (within the IRC at country, regional or HQ levels) and external (outside of the IRC) referral pathways through which client data can be passed, housed, managed and utilised.

1. **Leadership**

Leadership at country, regional and global levels has a critical role to play in creating a culture of responsiveness. They can communicate to their staff about the importance of client feedback to decision making and quality programming, requesting regularized summaries of the feedback received. They can help staff dissociate the link between negative feedback and poor performance, explaining that negative feedback should not be interpreted as a threat. A management team who values the perspectives of staff can also go a long way in creating a culture of responsiveness within our organization.

1. **Resourcing Client-Responsive Programming**

Implementing the Eight Actions to close the feedback cycle, requires human and financial resources. Budgeting for client-responsive programming doesn’t mean a series of new posts, but rather allocating a percentage of staff time to support the implementation of the Eight Actions. While they can often be implemented quite cheaply, it is also important to budget for the costs associated with administrating the feedback channels.

Donors can play a significant role in creating the conditions in which we can be client-responsive – providing flexible grant agreements and budgets that allow us to adapt our approach and activities, as a result of the client feedback we received. It is also critical for country teams to ensure they meet donors’ requirements on Accountability to Affected Population and demonstrate in the project proposal how the project promotes accountability and participation.

1. **Managing Risks**

Country teams need to have systems in place to manage the risks to staff, clients and partners of implementing client-responsive programming, most notably those inherent in the collection and use of clients’ feedback. This includes becoming overwhelmed by the number of feedback collected and limited capacity to respond and/or act, raising clients’ expectations and handling negative feedback. Teams also have a duty to protect the confidentiality of all data collected from our clients, including their personal data and information.

1. **Internal and partner organisations’ development and capacity building**

Our staff, and our partners’ staff, are a critical link between the IRC and our clients. We thus have a responsibility for supporting them and developing their capacity to be client-responsive. When the IRC is not delivering aid and services directly, we must ensure that our implementing partners uphold the same quality standards in the way they are listening and responding to client feedback

1. **Coordination and collective actions**

The IRC often operates in the same environment and communities as other actors. The way our peers engage with these communities can affect how our clients may perceive us, necessitating a greater coordination of client-responsive programming between organisations. Some of the feedback received by the IRC may go beyond our sole responsibility, requiring a collective response.

**Part 4: Standards**

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| **Standards**  | **Good Standard** | **Great Standard**  |
|  | Client Consultation: Clients routinely provide feedback that informs key decisions during project design, start-up, implementation and close-out | Client Collaboration: Clients collaborate in key strategic and programmatic decisions. |
| **Practices**  | **Good Practices**  | **Great Practices**  |
| **Design Phase**  | We plan the client feedback channels that we will use during implementation to inform project adjustments, with specific consideration for women and girls’ safety and accessibility in using feedback channels | We involve our intended clients in co-designing the project. We actively seek women and girls' input using appropriate communication methods.. |
| We use feedback from past projects or other organizations to inform project design. |
| **Start-Up Phase** | We plan the proactive and reactive channels that we will use to collect feedback from our clients during project implementation. | We involve clients in the process of planning the feedback channels that will be used during implementation. Particular attention to be paid to how IRC/partners engage with women and girls |
| We use best practice guidance to plan how they will record, manage and refer the feedback that we collect during implementation, with particular attention for reporting and responding to allegations of abuse & exploitation, including SEA, and other sensitive complaints |
| We inform our clients about the project and the feedback channels. Particular attention to be paid to how IRC/partners communicate this with women and girls.  |
| **Practices**  | **Good Practices**  | **Great Practices**  |
| **Implementation Phase** | We proactively collect and act on feedback at the mid-point for projects of 12 months, and at least once every year for longer projects. Particular attention to be paid to how IRC/partners engage with women and girls. | We involve clients in deciding on how to respond to feedback. Particular attention to be paid to how IRC/partners engage with women and girls. |
| We manage at least one reactive feedback channel through which clients can provide feedback / lodge complaints. Particular attention to be paid to the ability of women and girls to use the reactive channel. |
| We explain to our clients within the timeframe agreed how their feedback was taken into account.  |
| **Close-Out Phase** | We interpret the sex and age disaggregated feedback data, identifying its implications for close-out and future projects. | We involve clients in interpreting feedback data and planning future actions to address unresolved issues.. |
| We explain to our clients how their feedback was taken into account within the time agreed. |

## **Part 5: Resource Kit**

## The resources listed in the table below forms the IRC Core Resources to implement the Eight Actions to ensure Client-Responsive Programming. They have been compiled into a manual that is available to all IRC staff as well as for staff from other humanitarian organisations. The IRC Core Resource Manual can be [found here.](https://www.rescue.org/resource/client-responsive-programming-core-resource-manual)

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| **Type**  | **Title**  | **Description** |
| Tool 1 | Selection and Design of Feedback Channels | Supports teams to identify their clients, decide on the information they want to collect and select the appropriate feedback channels |
| Annex 1: IRC Core Feedback Themes | Provide the core themes or key topics that country teams needs to collect feedback on at each phase of the project |
| Annex 2: Writing Questions to Proactively Collect Client Feedback | Provide guidance (what to avoid, what to seek to) to design client questionnaires as well as illustrative questions for survey, focus group discussions and individual interviews for all Core Feedback Themes |
| Tool 2 | Feedback Registry  | Provides a template to document and manage individual pieces of feedback from the time it is received to the time the IRC provides the response to the client |
| Feedback Recording and Classification Guidance | Supports teams to use the Feedback Registry and to classify feedback per category and to define priority levels.  |
| Tool 3 | Feedback Logbook | Provides a template for teams to record and manage feedback received by staff on an ad hoc basis through their routine interactions with clients.  |
| Tool 4 | Feedback Data Visualisation Template | To be available in September 2018 – Supports teams to present feedback data in a way which can facilitate effective and efficient feedback data. |
| Guidance 1 | A Quick Guide for IRC Proposal Writing | Provides guidance to support teams (and those in AMU and GPP advising them on business development) to integrate Client-Responsiveness into their proposals and to meet specific donors’ accountability and participation requirements |
| Guidance 2 | Communicating Client Feedback  | Provides guidance on how to communicate client feedback within your team and how to refer feedback internally or externally if you cannot respond or act on it |
| Guidance 3 | Interpreting Client Feedback and Making Decisions about How to Respond  | Supports teams to understand how to interpret client feedback (including when it is contradictory to other feedback or data) and provides guidance on how to respond to clients |
| Guidance 4 | Closing the Loop | Provides a range of options for teams to communicate their response to feedback to clients. Outlines the strengths, weakness, and appropriateness of each option in diverse operational and cultural contexts |