IRC Client Voice and Choice Initiative

Client-Responsive Programming: Resource Considerations for Project Teams

July 2016

UKaid
from the British people

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

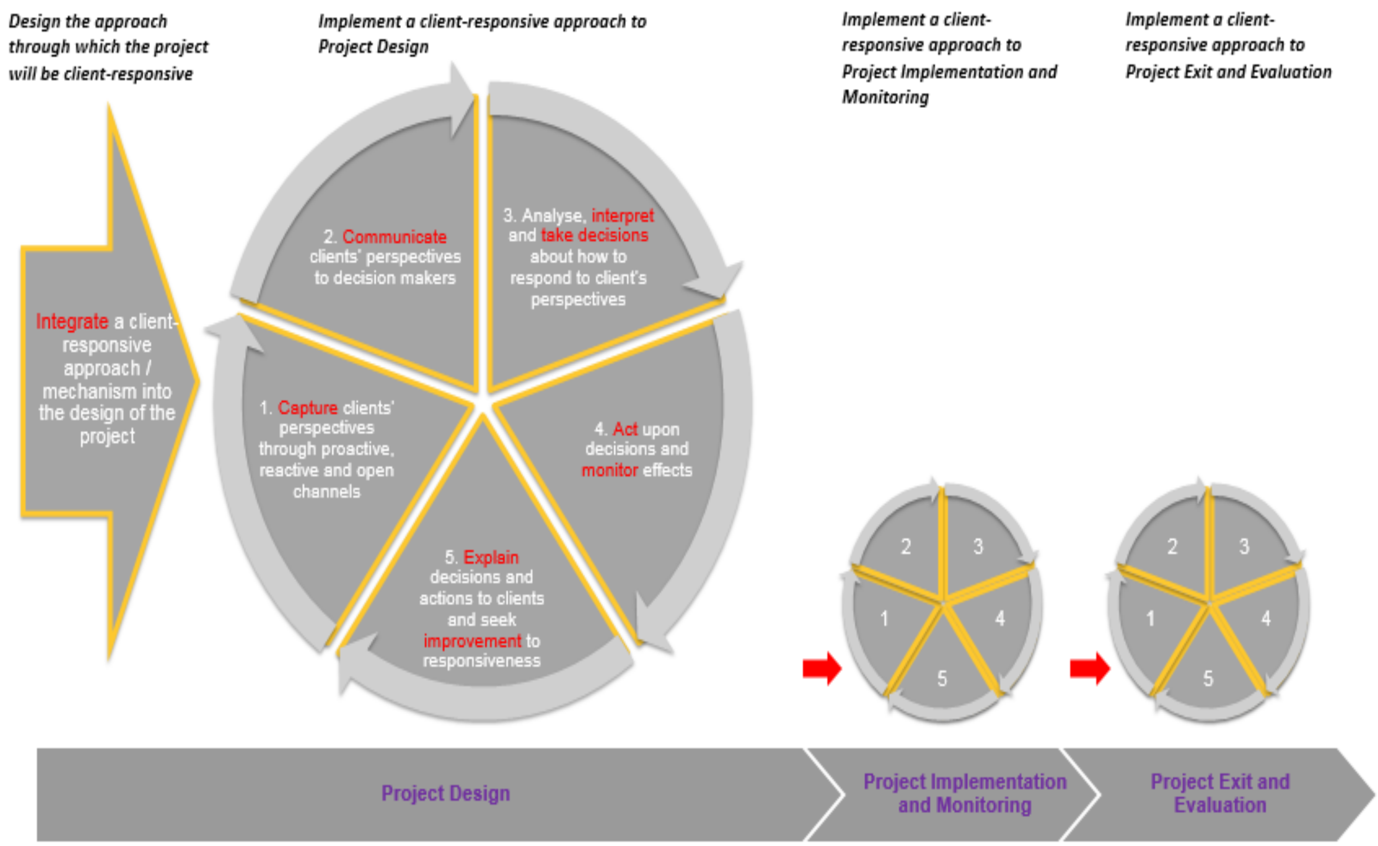
1. Purpose and Use

This briefing note provides Project Teams of humanitarian organisations with an outline of the main resourcing decisions that they need to take when designing, setting up and implementing a simple client feedback and response mechanism, or a more comprehensive approach to client responsive programming such as that advocated for by the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

The resources that this briefing note outlines do not and cannot provide an exhaustive summary of all cost implications of delivering more client-responsive programming. Nor does this briefing note aim to address the various other considerations that Project Teams will need to take into account, such as the appropriateness of various channels for client feedback, and their clients' preferred means of communicating with the team.

Note that while this paper addresses the Project Team, the questions and guidance can equally be extrapolated to a sector or country programme, or indeed to an organisation as a whole, with some self-evident revisions.

Client Responsive Programming Cycle



The IRC has outlined six different stages involved in implementing client-responsive programming, with the first stage being performed just once (usually during the project design phase, but it may also be introduced part-way through a project's implementation) and the next five, numbered stages, being implemented at key stages of the project cycle. See illustration, above.

The IRC seeks to take a holistic approach to delivering client-responsive programming, which builds upon the use of a client feedback and response mechanism, but extends to and has broader implications for project or programme management. Additional emphasis is placed on internal communication flow, analysis and interpretation, and decision-making.

The IRC has observed that only by strengthening the communication and decision making structures – as well as the motivations and incentives of humanitarian staff – will an organisation be able to be truly responsive.

2. The Guide

The advice that follows provides insight to project teams on the resources that they may need to plan for when implementing a client-responsive project or programme. The guidance is structured around the five stages of the client-responsiveness cycle. Guidance then follows on the integration / design stage, at the end of this paper.

Stage 1. Capturing clients' perspectives

In this stage, clients' perspectives are captured through any number and combination of channels. The available channels for capturing clients' perspectives fall into three broad categories:

- *Proactive channels*: Such channels are deliberately designed to allow for focused engagement with clients. These include focus groups, surveys, and interviews.
- *Reactive channels*: Such channels allow clients to voice complaints or raise issues during the course of a programme if and when they wish. They include suggestions boxes, hotlines, and drop-in centres.
- *Open channels*: Information is obtained from clients either during the course of programme activities or through casual communication with clients. The "channel" implies systematically harnessing the feedback that the Project Team hears through the day-to-day interaction with their clients in the field.

The key points at which these channels would be used are during: (1) project design; (2) implementation and monitoring; and, (3) evaluation. The channels that the Project Team would use at each of these key stages of the programme cycle may well differ from one to the next. For example, during project design and evaluation, proactive channels are going to be most appropriate. During implementation and monitoring, all three may be used in tandem.

Substantial guidance is available to help Teams to select among channels, depending upon what the Team intends to achieve by using the channel, and what is appropriate and feasible within the context. The guidance produced by World Vision, *Overview of NGO-Community Complaints Mechanisms*, may be a helpful starting point for many teams in selecting an appropriate channel. This and other resources can be found on the ALNAP Accountability and Participation Resources page: http://www.alnap.org/resources/results.aspx?tag=614&type=75

Resource Considerations, Stage 1

Staffing – Project Team

Designing and setting up the channel / one-off costs:

- Proactive channels: At this stage, the channel needs to be designed, tested, and revised. This normally takes between 2-5 days. A proactive channel is usually more time consuming, and requires more specialised knowledge and skills compared to the other two types of channels. If the Project Team doesn't have this knowledge and skills available within the team, they may wish to bring in additional technical support from within the organisation or from an external consultant. Even if the Project Team brings in technical support or a consultant to support this part of the process, they will still need to factor in several days staff time and effort to work with them to set it up in a way that is appropriate to their project / programme: the channel will only be useful and appropriate so long as the Project Team participate in ensuring that it is so.
- Reactive channels: These channels are relatively simple to set up. The Project Team can refer to available guidance (such as referenced above, available on ALNAP), and shouldn't take the more than a day or so.
- Open channels: The channel itself is already "open," in the sense that this channel refers to the feedback that the Project Team hears through every-day interactions with clients in the field. The Project Team may wish to budget for staff time and effort from the full Project Team to allow for them to participate in a group session to make them aware of the value of feedback, how to be receptive to it / to promote listening skills, and to provide them with direction on what they have the authority to respond to the feedback on and in what way.

Implementing the channel / recurring costs:

- Proactive channels: The time and effort of staff involved in proactive channels depends on: (1) The channel selected: e.g. each focus group discussion may last 2-3 hours and involve 10-15 clients; while surveys may take 10 minutes per client, but require time to move from one client to the next. (2) The depth of engagement (the number of clients being asked for their feedback) and how representative the Project Team wants the sample of clients to be. If the Project Team wanted to poll 10% of the client group they might be able to access them all in one particular project location. However, if they wanted the sample to be more representative they may need to go and poll 2% of the client group in 5 different locations, for example. The greater the number of clients polled for their opinion, the more reliable the data will be. However, the Project Team should also aim for a representative sample of different genders, ages, background etc. (3) How easy clients are to access / the point of contact: if the channel requires that it is administered at the clients' homes, for example, that will take more time than if all clients who the Project Team wants to poll can all be accessed at a single place, e.g. at a health centre or market place. (4) Whether the Project Team is administering the channel themselves or managing a consultant. If the project team is administering it themselves it may take two staff members between 1 and 5 days. However, if the Project Team has contracted this out to a consultant, the consultant would still need to be managed, but at a less intense amount of time and effort for the Project Team.
- Reactive channels: Once activated, reactive channels require relatively little time and effort to maintain. In the case of hotlines or drop-in centres, staff time should be made available to receive calls / clients.
- Open channels: There shouldn't be additional staffing costs that the Project Team needs to factor in at this stage for open channels: the Project Team should be available to interact with clients during the course of their daily activities and open to receiving their feedback and ideas.

Staffing – Technical Support

Designing and setting up the channel / one-off costs:

- Proactive channels: The Project Team may wish to bring in additional technical support to help design, test, and set these channels up. This may require time and effort of that person of 2-5 days.
- Reactive channels: These channels shouldn't require any additional technical support to set up: perhaps a few hours of remote advice depending on the Project Team's experience.
- Open channels: The Project Team shouldn't require additional support with these channels at this stage.

Implementing the channel / recurring costs:

- Proactive channels: During the administration of these channels, the Project Team may like to bring in additional support for the first time the channel is used, to accompany and build capacity of the team.
- Reactive channels: These channels shouldn't require additional technical support during this stage.
- Open channels: These channels shouldn't require additional technical support during this stage.

Consultancies and Contracts

Designing and setting up the channel / one-off costs:

- Proactive channels: If the design of a channel is being contracted out to a third party, the third party will provide a quote for their fees and expenses to support the design, testing and revision of the channel. Expect them to budget for 3-5 days' work for this. Costs will vary significantly depending on whether the Project Team is sourcing expertise internationally or within the country.
- Reactive channels: The Project Team wouldn't usually need to bring in a third party to support the development of these channels.
- Open channels: The Project Team wouldn't usually need to bring in a third party to support the development of these channels.

Implementing the channel / recurring costs:

- Proactive channels: The third party, if contracted to run the channel, would provide a quote of fees and expenses. The quotation will depend on the channel, sample size, geographic distribution of clients, the location, and the frequency with which the channel will be administered, as well as the firm's profile and experience.
- Reactive channels: The Project Team wouldn't usually need to bring in a third party to support the implementation of these channels.
- Open channels: The Project Team wouldn't usually need to bring in a third party to support the implementation of these channels.

Travel

Designing and setting up the channel / one-off costs:

- Proactive channels: Travel costs may need to be budgeted for the Project Team to access the clients for testing of a proactive channel. If the Project Team is bringing in technical support from within the organisation, they may also need to budget for travel expenses for that person. If the channel is being designed through a workshop format, the Project Team may need to budget for staff members to travel to participate in that.
- Reactive channels: Travel costs may be required by one or two key people in the Project Team to set up the channel, depending on the specific channel chosen. For example, hotlines can be set up remotely but a drop-in centre may require the Project Team leader or M&E staff to travel to the project site to help establish it.
- Open channels: No additional travel costs should be required during set-up.

Implementing the channel / recurring costs:

- Proactive channels: Travel costs may need to be budgeted for the Project Team to access the clients to administer the channels, and for the Team leader or M&E staff to quality assure the implementation of these channels from time to time, if they are not based at the same location.
- Reactive channels: Travel costs may be needed by the Project Team leader or M&E staff to quality assure the implementation of these channels from time to time, if they are not based at the same location.
- Open channels: No additional travel costs should be required.

Equipment

Designing and setting up the channel / one-off costs:

- Proactive channels: The Project Team may need to budget for tablets, if they intend to record data directly during the administration of the channel (this has been proven to be quicker and better at avoiding error than the use of paper, even in less developed contexts). If the Project Team have contracted a third party to collect the data, it is likely that they will already have their own tablets, which they can use. The Project Team should check this with the consultant during recruitment.
- Reactive channels: No equipment should be required.
- Open channels: No equipment should be required.

Other Activity Costs
Designing and setting up the channel / one-off costs: • <u>Proactive channels:</u> If the Project Team does not using tablets, then the Project Team would need to budget for clipboards, paper and pens for the team to record feedback during the administration of the channels. They may also need to factor in printing costs if surveys are being used. • <u>Reactive channels:</u> If the Project Team is using a hotline, this may require the purchase of phones and phone credit. If they are using a suggestions box, the Project Team will need to purchase a box, paper, pens, and a lock. Signage and instructions appropriate to the level of literacy of the client group to promote the channel may also be required. • <u>Open channels:</u> The Project Team may wish to budget for some basic stationary for the team to record feedback that they hear during the course of the day, or a white board to note down feedback at the end of the day at the office.

Stage 2. Communicate clients' perspectives to decision makers

At this stage of the process, the clients' perspectives that have been received through any one of the channels are communicated from the individual or team that captured them to others within the Project Team or the wider organisation who have responsibility for deciding how to act upon them. There is often an assumption behind the failure of traditional feedback mechanisms that once the information has been received (perspectives captured) that course correction will occur. In order for responsiveness to happen, though, the information needs to be communicated to those that have responsibility for taking decisions.

Further, the information needs to be presented to decision makers with an appropriate level of detail and analysis, at the appropriate time and transmitted into the appropriate decision making for a (such as meetings). To provide illustration:

- A Project Team lead (a coordinator or manager, depending on the title used by the humanitarian organisation) may require the client feedback on their project to be *relatively detailed*, *disaggregated*, to include some initial *analysis*, and may want it presented in a c. *10 page* report on a *monthly basis*, to be reviewed as part of the *monthly project progress review meeting*.
- Whereas a Country Director may require *less detailed*, *aggregated* information from across all the projects in the country programme, presented in a simple *2-page dashboard style format* on a *quarterly basis*, to be reviewed as part of their *quarterly programme portfolio review meetings*.

In either case, there is a step that must be taken by the Project Team to translate the captured feedback into the information that the decision makers can use.

The resource implications of this stage of the process are mainly about staff time and effort.

Resource Considerations, Stage 2

Staffing – Project Team
• Proactive and Reactive channels: The data that is received through proactive and reactive channels can often be difficult for a decision maker to understand the implications. The Project Team should thus budget for specialist skills and the time and effort of Project Staff to clean the data, conduct analysis (such as statistical analysis of quantitative data), and present the data in such a way that will be meaningful to the decision maker. For example, the Project Team may wish to disaggregate by project site only those datasets where there is a significant difference from one site to the next; there is no need for disaggregation if scores across all sites are very similar. The Project Team may wish to combine responses to certain questions to triangulate responses and ascertain a net promoter score. The Project Team should also be able to present the data in multiple formats to satisfy the different decision making audiences they are targeting. If the Project Team does not have the skills available within the team to perform these functions, they may wish to bring in additional support from within or external to the organisation. • Open channels: This step of the process in an open channel is particularly important. This is the point at which the person who has heard the perspective of one or more project clients during the course of routine project delivery communicates this information to their team and / or to the person responsible for forwarding it on to a decision maker. This shouldn't take a significant amount of staff time and effort. Rather what is important is creating the structure through which this information can be communicated onwards. This may be an end-of-the-day check in, team weekly meeting, or white board in the Project Team office. Staff should be encouraged to share ideas about how they feel most comfortable to share this information with each other and the Project Team leader.
Staffing – Technical Support
• Proactive and Reactive channels: Given that analysis and appropriate presentation of client perspectives may require some level of specialist skills, the Project Team may need to bring in some technical support with advising them on how to analyse and present the data, if this is available within the organisation. The amount of time and effort required would depend on the volume and complexity of the data, as well as the experience of the person charged with fulfilling this function. • Open channels: Some technical support may be required to support the team in this stage of the process. The Project Team may consider bringing in additional technical support to help foster a team culture in which this communication can flow.
Consultancies and Contracts
• Proactive and Reactive channels: If the skills are not available within the Project Team or in-house within the organisation, the Project Team may wish to bring in a third-party to help analyse and present the data. If a third party had been contracted to capture the data in the first place, this function may already be part of their work agreement. Once the Project Team receives the analysed and presented data from the third party, they will still be responsible for ensuring that it is communicated on to the appropriate decision making parties within the Project Team or elsewhere within the organisation. • Open channels: The Project Team may consider bringing in external support with promoting a culture of learning, and helping project management to encourage their staff in the field to pass on the feedback that they hear from clients to other team members and management.
Travel
• All channels: It is unlikely that any travel costs would be required for this stage in the process.
Equipment
• All channels: It is unlikely that any equipment costs would be required for this stage in the process.
Other Activity Costs
• All channels: It is unlikely that any this stage in the process would incur any additional costs.

Stage 3. Analysing, interpreting and taking decisions about how to respond to client's perspectives

At this stage in the process, those with responsibility for taking programming decisions receive information on client perspectives, analyse and interpret them – often together with other information inputs – and take decisions about how to act based on that collection of information. Decision makers may benefit from drawing up a simple management response plan to document the information considered, the decision taken and the rationale for it, and to identify responsibility, timing, and resource implications of action.

The resourcing considerations for this stage are primarily related to staff time and effort.

Resource Considerations, Stage 3

Staffing – Project Team
• The amount of time and effort and those who would need to be involved in the decision making process depends on the magnitude of the decision being taken. For example, the Project Team leader may wish to meet with key members of the team on a monthly basis to review client feedback obtained over the past month, review trends on previous months, and take decisions collectively about whether adaptation or course correction is necessary. Depending on the complexity of the decision, this stage in the process may take more or less time. The Project Team may also wish to consult with their clients about the feedback that they have received and to seek their participation in determining appropriate responses. Time and effort for staff involved in facilitating this process should be factored in.
Staffing – Technical Support
• The Project Team may wish to bring in external support from within the organisation to facilitate a particularly significant decision making process, such as when client perspectives are being considered as part of country programme strategy development. However, in most cases no additional technical support time and effort would be required at this stage.
Consultancies and Contracts
• If in-house support is unavailable, the Project Team may wish to bring in external support to facilitate a particularly significant decision making process, as above.
Travel
• Travel costs may be required to bring people together to collaboratively review the client feedback data and take decisions. • If the Project Team is consulting with its clients at this stage of the process, travel costs may also be required for the Project Team to access the clients.
Equipment
• No equipment costs are foreseen at this stage of the process.
Other Activity Costs
• If the Project Team is consulting with its clients at this stage of the process, they may wish to budget for refreshment costs.

Stage 4. Acting upon decisions and monitoring effects

At this stage of the process, the Project Team acts upon the decisions that it has taken about how to respond to client perspectives, and monitors the effects of doing so.

Resource Considerations, Stage 4

Staffing – Project Team
• The amount of time and effort required of the Project Team to act upon the decision depends on whether the decision indicated the need for any specific action. The management response prepared as part of the decision making process should outline responsibility and the expected amount of time and effort required of the Project Team.
Staffing – Technical Support
• Depending on the response that was decided, the Project Team may need to bring in additional technical support to implement the action. In many cases this may not be technical support related to "client responsiveness" but related to project design and delivery.
Consultancies and Contracts
• It is unlikely that this stage of the process would require any additional consultancies or contracts.
Travel
• The decision on how to respond to the feedback may necessitate some travel costs. These should be factored into the management response plan to the feedback received.
Equipment
• It is unlikely that this stage of the process would necessitate any additional equipment costs.
Other Activity Costs
• The likelihood exists that course correction or adaptation of the project in response to client feedback will necessitate budget being made available for those changes. Project Teams should consider building in a small contingency fund within project activities for minor adaptations. More significant course correction may require their realigning their project implementation plan and budget.

Stage 5. Explaining decisions and actions to clients and seeking continuous improvement to responsiveness

This stage of the process involves Project Teams "closing the loop" with clients to explain to them what they have heard in their efforts to capture their perspectives, what decisions they have taken about how to respond to those perspectives and the rationale for those decisions, and what action they have or will be taking. In this stage of the process, the Project Team should also take the opportunity to review with clients and among themselves how their approach to client responsive programming (or the client feedback and response mechanism that they are using) can be improved.

Resource Considerations, Stage 5

Staffing – Project Team
• Time and effort of the Project Team will need to be budgeted to communicate back to communities; there are many different ways of doing this, ranging from noticeboards, focus group discussions, and communication through routine activities. The time and effort level shouldn't be too significant, especially when offset against the benefit. Additionally, the Project Team should budget in time to review the implementation of their approach to client-responsive programming, together as a team and together with the project's clients. The Project Team should seek to identify ways to improve their implementation of the client-responsiveness cycle. The Project Team may wish to do this on a periodic basis, for example every 6 or 12 months. They may require half to a full day to do this, involving key members of the Project Team.
Staffing – Technical Support
• The Project Team may wish to budget from some technical support to support them in the process of reviewing their implementation of the client-responsiveness cycle, and in helping them to identify improvements.
Consultancies and Contracts
• It is unlikely that consultancy support would be required at this stage of the process, unless the Project Team wishes to bring in external help in reviewing their implementation of the client-responsiveness cycle and in identifying improvements.
Travel
• Travel costs may be required for the Project Team to access clients to report back to them and identify learning and opportunities for improvement. They may also need to budget for travel costs to convene the Project Team and any external support that is being brought in as part of a review workshop
Equipment
• It is unlikely that additional equipment costs would be needed at this stage of the process.
Other Activity Costs
• The Project Team may wish to budget for some refreshments costs when meeting with their clients. They may also wish to budget for venue, refreshments, and materials for a review workshop.

Integrating the a client-responsive approach to programming into the design of the project

This is the first stage that the Project Team will implement in order to identify how the five stages of the client-responsiveness cycle will be implemented. For example, the Project Team will decide what means of capturing clients' perspectives are appropriate to the particular programming methodology; how often should client perspectives be captured given the pace of programming; and what are the management meeting fora into which clients perspectives could be fed for analysis and decision making. These decisions are reflected in the project budget, staffing roles and responsibilities, work plans and other project implementation and management documents.

The human and financial resource recommendations below assume that these decisions are taken in a design workshop, conducted at the beginning of the project.

Resource Considerations

Staffing – Project Team
• Key Project Team members (including coordinators, managers, M&E focal points, as well as representatives of staff members interacting with clients on a daily basis) will need to be involved; their time and effort should be planned for. For most projects this planning process could be done in week, with key staff involved in a 1-2 days' workshop.
Staffing – Technical Support
• Depending on whether the Project Team has prior experience and existing capacity to design and integrate the five stages of the client-responsiveness programming cycle into their project plans (or setting up of a feedback mechanism), additional technical support may be required to accompany the process. For most projects between 2-3 days' technical support would be appropriate for this stage in the process.
Consultancies and Contracts
• If additional technical support is required, and cannot be provided by in-house technical resources, then the Project Team may wish to contract a consultancy firm to help facilitate the process of designing the approach and working with the team to integrate it into their project delivery plans. For most projects between 2-3 days' technical support would be appropriate for this stage in the process.
Travel
• Depending on where the various people (above) who should participate in the meeting are based, the Project Team may need to factor in travel costs, including international flights, local transportation, accommodation, and per diems.
Equipment
• No specific equipment should be needed for this stage of the process. If the Project Team has access to an over-head projector, this can be helpful for presenting project plans and different options for the implementation of the Approach for the Project Team to consider.
Other Activity Costs
• Depending on whether the Project Team has space available, they may wish to hire a venue space for the workshop and budget for refreshments during the workshop. Depending on whether it is already available, Project Teams should budget for flip chart paper and markers, sticky tape / blue tack, and large post-it notes to brainstorm during the workshop.