

Beneficiary feedback mechanisms

About this guidance

This guidance seeks to ensure that UK Aid Direct applicants and grant holders understand what the Department for International Development (DFID) means by beneficiary feedback mechanisms, and more specifically, that they:

- Understand the terms used that relate to beneficiary feedback mechanisms in UK Aid Direct guidance and templates
- Understand beneficiary feedback mechanisms and why they are a useful tool for project monitoring and learning
- Learn how to use beneficiary feedback mechanisms during project implementation.
- Can demonstrate that using beneficiary feedback mechanisms can lead to greater accountability.

These areas are addressed below. At the end of the document, there is a list of useful websites for further information and reference.

What is a beneficiary feedback mechanism?

A beneficiary feedback mechanism is a tool designed to gather and respond to the views of recipients of aid, often called beneficiaries. By responding to the views of aid recipients, organisations can improve or evaluate their projects and be held accountable for project implementation.

What kind of mechanisms are there?

There are multiple feedback mechanisms from which to choose. A thorough context analysis should be conducted before deciding on a particular feedback mechanism. Consider cost, literacy and other barriers to the success of your chosen mechanism. Consider using a range of mechanisms.

Examples of mechanisms include:

- Use of SMS and mobile phone technology
- Focus group discussions
- Questionnaires
- One-on-one interviews
- Meetings
- Billboards
- Radio
- Suggestion boxes

Why use a beneficiary feedback mechanism?

Beneficiary feedback mechanisms are used to collect feedback from those benefitting from projects, analyse the feedback and then respond to that feedback. Programmes need to flex to adapt to changing context and the needs of those benefitting from their interventions. By seeking feedback, analysing it then using it to make changes and adaptations the project will have a greater impact, greater sustainability and greater ownership from those it is seeking to support.

A good project design will ensure that potential beneficiaries have been consulted at the start of the project design period. This may mean that the original design envisaged by the implementer is adapted based on the initial feedback. The project will then be addressing a need that is of relevance for the beneficiaries, for stakeholders and for the context.

However, gathering regular feedback from beneficiaries is often neglected during the course of the project or if collected is not analysed or used to make changes to the programming accordingly.

By addressing problems early, time and money can be better spent. Not only will relationships with the communities improve, but the beneficiaries involved in beneficiary feedback mechanisms report a feeling of empowerment. It can also ensure that the most vulnerable are included and benefit from projects.

What needs to be done to ensure beneficiary feedback mechanisms are effective?

- Target beneficiaries and front-line staff must be aware of the purpose and process of giving feedback. This ensures that relevant feedback will be provided and beneficiaries will be assured that their feedback will actually be actioned upon.
- There must be capacity within the organisation to not just carry out the mechanism but to be able to analyse the results
- Use a range of mechanisms, rather than relying on a sole approach. This helps to reach a greater number of beneficiaries, some of whom may not respond well to one type of mechanism.
- In situations where beneficiaries have lower literacy and high poverty levels, face-to-face mechanisms have proved most effective
- Close 'the feedback loop', and respond back to beneficiaries on the changes that have been made as well as communicating the feedback higher up the delivery chain to inform upward accountability to the donor
- To enable the project to respond to feedback with revised flexible project activities and budgets, create clear referral pathways with stakeholders
- Ensure there is sufficient scope in the programme design to make changes and respond to requests
- Consider the sustainability and exit strategy for the feedback mechanism as part of the initial design phase.

Further reference material

- <http://feedbackmechanisms.org/2016/08/09/what-is-a-beneficiary-feedback-mechanism/>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5baxHyd_XM
- <https://www.intrac.org/beneficiary-feedback-mechanisms-whatever-happened-participatory-monitoring-evaluation/>
- <http://feedbackmechanisms.org/public/files/BFM%20End-point%20Synthesis%20-%20full%20report.pdf>
- <https://www.devex.com/news/dfid-s-evolving-approach-to-beneficiary-feedback-89059>