Australian Council for International Development

Code of Conduct
EFFECTIVE 1 JUNE 2017, REVISED 1 JANUARY 2019

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table of Contents

Introduction

This document contains the full text of the revised Code of Conduct. ACFID's members ratified the revised ACFID Code of Conduct and the separate but linked Quality Assurance Framework at the Special General Meeting on 1 December 2016. The revised Code of Conduct came into effect on 1 June 2017, with one revision taking effect 1 January 2019.

Preamble

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) is the peak body for Australian non-government organisations (NGOs) involved in international development and humanitarian action. ACFID aims to lead and unite its members in action for a just, equitable and sustainable world.

The ACFID Code of Conduct is a voluntary, self-regulatory sector code of good practice. It was developed in 1997 and comprehensively revised in 2010 and 2016. The Code aims to improve international development and humanitarian action outcomes and increase stakeholder trust by enhancing the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of ACFID's members. In conjunction with other aspects of ACFID's work, the effective delivery of the Code will contribute to the realisation of human rights and the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Code sets standards for practice rather than standards for results. It goes beyond the minimum standards required by government regulation and focuses on good practice. It articulates ACFID's members' understanding of good organisational and development practice for NGOs involved in international development and humanitarian action. This articulation is informed by member's own experiences, the Istanbul Principles for Development Effectiveness, the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), the Global Standard for Civil Society Organisations (GS), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ACFID's vision, purpose and values.

The Code applies equally to organisations working in development responses and humanitarian responses. While it does not replace the need for members engaged in humanitarian responses to adopt and be assessed against the Core Humanitarian Standard, the Code is aligned with the approaches and style of the CHS and the GS. This enables interoperability and ease of interpretation across these other codes.

The Code provides assurance to all ACFID's members' stakeholders by enabling high standards of practice. A suite of compliance mechanisms is designed to ensure that all Code signatories are compliant with its requirements. It also contributes to continuous improvement through guidance for good practice and a range of professional development opportunities.

Values

The Code is underpinned by a set of values which inform the behaviours of all members all of the time. These values are translated into Quality Principles which are then translated into specific Commitments and associated Compliance Indicators. As such, the Quality Principles translate the Values into observable behaviours against which members can be held to account. Where necessary, the Values will be used to assist in both the interpretation and application of the Code. These Values are:

INTEGRITY

We act with honesty and are guided by ethical and moral principles in all that we do.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We take responsibility for our actions and are accountable to all our stakeholders, and in particular primary stakeholders, for our performance and integrity.

TRANSPARENCY

We openly share information about our organisations and our work to all our stakeholders and to the public.

RESPECT

We recognise the value and diversity of every person and are committed to treating others with due regard for their rights, dignity and integrity.

EFFECTIVENESS

We strive to deliver outcomes that bring about positive change in the lives of people living in poverty.

EQUITY

We are committed to overcoming prejudices and disadvantage and promoting fair and just access to resources and opportunities.

COOPERATION

We work with and alongside others in a spirit of mutuality, respecting diversity and difference in the pursuit of common goals.

Purpose and Objectives

PURPOSE

The Purpose is to improve international development and humanitarian action outcomes and increase stakeholder trust by enhancing the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of ACFID's members.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable high standards of practice by ACFID's members.

2. To provide assurance to the stakeholders of ACFID's members.

3. To enable self-regulation and influence external regulation of the sector.

4. To champion standards of good practice for a broad range of development organisations.

Architecture of the Code

The Code is structured within nine high level Quality Principles. They describe high level principles of practice that, taken together, contribute to quality development and humanitarian action outcomes and increased stakeholder trust.

Conceptually, the Quality Principles are grouped into three clusters as shown in Figure 1 and Table 1 below. The central cluster of Quality Principles represents the approaches we take to achieve effective development and humanitarian outcomes. The middle cluster represents the processes that underpin our approaches outlined in the central cluster. The outer cluster represents the organisational systems, processes and policies which provide the enabling environment to implement the processes and approaches of the other clusters.

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL REPRESENTATION OF QUALITY PRINCIPLES

Quality & Effectiveness

Governance

Resource Management

Rights, Protection & Inclusion

Participation, Empowerment & Local Ownership

Communication

Sustainable Change

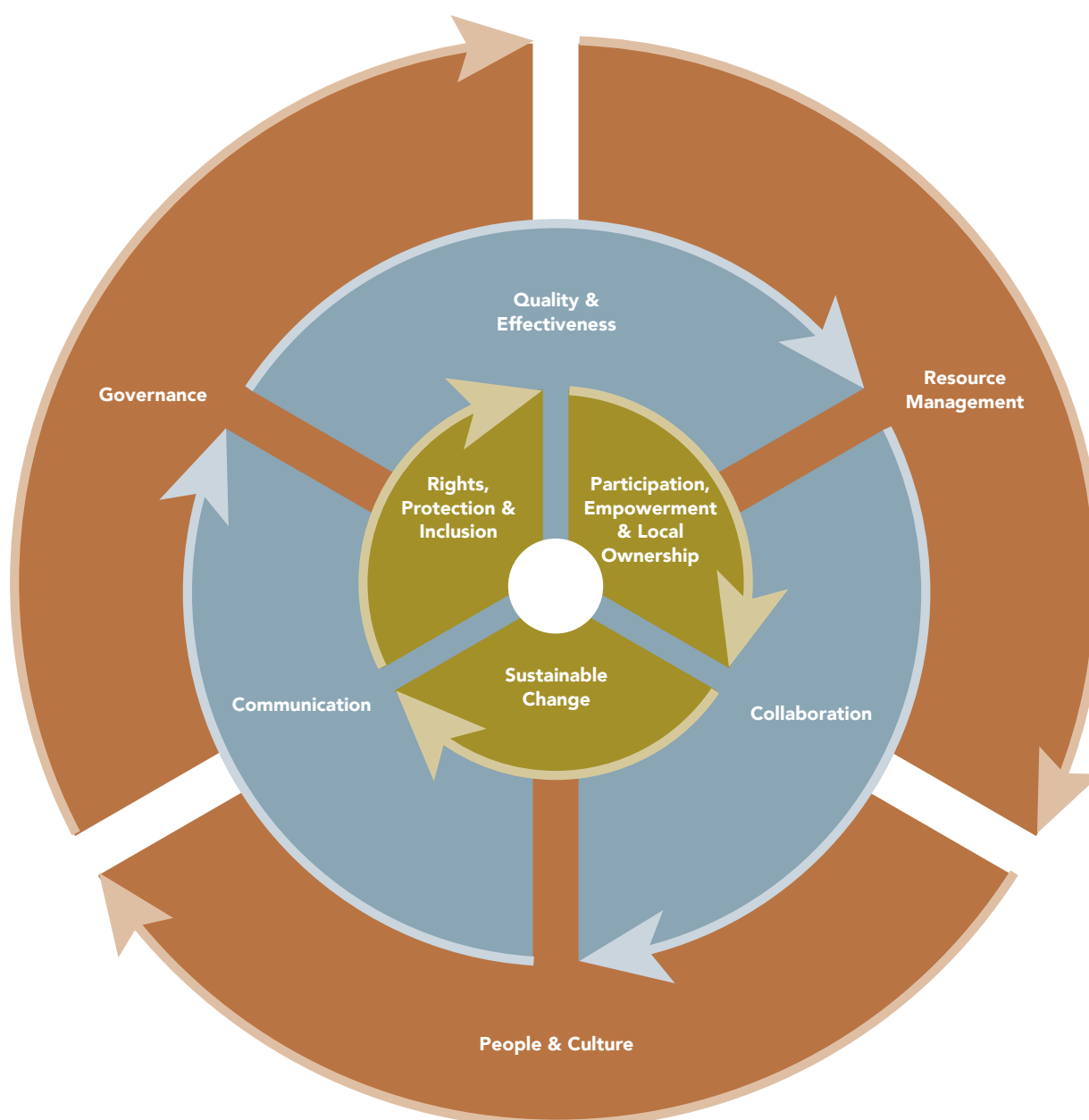Collaboration

People & Culture

TABLE 1: QUALITY PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERPIN EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN OUTCOMES

The central cluster of Quality Principles represents the **approaches we take to achieve effective development and humanitarian outcomes.**

The middle cluster represents the **processes that underpin our approaches** outlined in the central cluster.

The outer cluster represents the **organisational systems, processes and policies which provide the enabling environment** to implement the processes and approaches of the other clusters.

Each Quality Principle has a set of associated Commitments. The Commitments are the behaviours that apply directly to ACFID's members and to which ACFID's members commit.

Each Commitment has associated:

- Compliance Indicators: These are pitched at a relatively high level of practice while still being achievable by the diversity of ACFID's members. Each of the Compliance Indicators has a Verifier which describes the evidence that is required to substantiate compliance. These Verifiers recognise the diversity of the ACFID's membership and the variety of ways that different members will demonstrate their compliance. Members must meet the Compliance Indicators in order to be considered compliant with the Code.

- Good Practice Indicators: These describe a higher standard of practice than that set out in the Compliance Indicators. Members may work towards achieving the Good Practice Indicators over time. Members do not need to meet the Good Practice Indicators to be considered compliant with the Code.

Members deliver the commitment by both complying with the relevant Compliance Indicators and working towards achieving the Good Practice Indicators over time.

The Compliance Indicators, Good Practice Indicators and associated definitions and templates form part of a Quality Assurance Framework which is separate from but linked to the Code itself.

The Code and its implementation by ACFID's members is further supported with the Good Practice Toolkit which provides additional examples of good practice, tools, templates and resources.

Governance of the Code

The Code is owned by the ACFID's members and the ACFID Council must agree to any changes.

ACFID's Code of Conduct is independently governed on behalf of the ACFID Board and ACFID Council by the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee (CCC). The CCC has autonomy in decision-making in regard to determining the Code signatory status of ACFID's members, compliance assessments and complaints handling. Only the CCC has authority to grant, suspend and revoke Code signatory status which is a pre-requisite for ACFID membership.

The Quality Assurance Framework is owned by the CCC . Any changes to the framework must be approved by the CCC following appropriate consultation with members and with advice and support from the Development Practice Committee and ACFID secretariat. Any changes to the Quality Assurance Framework approved by the CCC are tabled at the ACFID Board with the Board retaining a right of veto. Changes become operative upon approval by the Board.

The Code Secretariat, located within the ACFID Secretariat, supports the CCC and undertakes administration and management of the Code.

Compliance with the Code

The Code is self-regulatory in that it was developed by and for not-for-profit agencies working in the development and humanitarian action sector. This means that the responsibility for compliance with the Code rests primarily with ACFID's members who self-assess against a set of verifiable Compliance Indicators. The governing body of each ACFID member has primary responsibility for verifying compliance with all Compliance Indicators. ACFID undertakes relatively limited external verification in line with this principle of self-regulation and in recognition of its limited resources.

The Code applies to ACFID's members and their international development and humanitarian programs. As signatories to the Code, ACFID's members certify that all parts of their organisation that are associated with international development and humanitarian initiatives operate in a manner that is compliant with the Code. It should be noted, however, that Code commitments relating to financial reporting apply to the entire legal entity of the ACFID member.

Satisfaction of all Compliance Indicators is necessary to achieve compliance with the Code. To be compliant with the Code, ACFID's members will have the required policies, processes, guidelines and documentation in place appropriate to the size and nature of the organisation and its work. They will also ensure that their policies, processes and guidelines are implemented and subject to regular review.

Members are expected to use all reasonable efforts to support their implementing partners to operate in a manner consistent with the Code of Conduct when delivering aspects of a member-supported initiative. There are some requirements which members must extend to partners through MOUs or similar including those relating to child safeguarding, separation of development and non-development activity, financial wrongdoing and complaints handling. These requirements are clearly articulated in the relevant Compliance Indicators and Verifiers.

COMPLIANCE MECHANISMS

Compliance with the Code is assured through a suite of mechanisms by which ACFID's members are bound. These compliance mechanisms are as follows:

1. **Application for ACFID membership** – Applicants are required to submit a self-assessment of compliance against the Code and a range of key documents that are reviewed by ACFID.

2. **Public commitment by ACFID's members** – Members are required to publicly promote their commitment to the Code and the Code complaints handling process on their website and via their annual report.

3. **Continuous compliance** – Members are required to be compliant with the Code at all times. Members' governing bodies monitor their organisation's compliance with the Code and submit a declaration of compliance with the Code when they submit their triennial self-assessment to ACFID (see below). Member's governing bodies also submit their annual and financial reports to ACFID each year, together with a statement which notes any exceptions to compliance which occurred during the previous year and actions undertaken to ensure that compliance is met.

4. **Triennial assessment** – Every three years, members complete and submit a self-assessment against both the Compliance Indicators and the Good Practice Indicators, their most recent annual report and financial report to ACFID, and documents that verify their compliance with a small number of selected Compliance Indicators. ACFID reviews members' self-assessment and supporting documentation and members are required to comply with any requested remedial actions.

5. **Spot checks** – ACFID's ongoing assessment of risk identifies any areas of potential non-compliance that may be detrimental to the interests of ACFID, its membership or the Code. ACFID undertakes spot checks of compliance in these areas as needed, including Emergency Appeal Website Compliance Checks.

6. **Complaints Process** – The CCC provides an independent mechanism to address a complaint made against a specific Code signatory organisation which is believed to have breached the Code. Members agree to be bound by the independent, accessible, fair and confidential ACFID Code complaints handling process by:

- complying with CCC requests for information within all reasonable time limits set

- where a breach of the Code is identified, complying with the corrective or disciplinary action agreed to with the CCC.

  ACFID's members are required, as part of their compliance with the Code, to have a public complaints mechanism on their website.

NON-COMPLIANCE

If ACFID needs to verify compliance as a result of a complaint or a spot check, members will need to demonstrate that they have the necessary Verifiers in place and that they have been implemented in a manner appropriate to the size and nature of their organisation and work.

In the event of non-compliance, the member will be required to submit a plan that outlines how they will become compliant within a time frame of up to twelve months, or sooner if the area of non-compliance is considered higher risk, and that they will re-submit any required documentation at the end of that period. The onus is on the member to submit supporting documentation and ensure compliance within that period. If a member does not achieve compliance within that period, a set of sanctions may be implemented which extends to the suspension and revocation of Code signatory status.

Members will notify ACFID if they become aware of major transgressions against the Code in their own organisation or make a complaint to the CCC of major transgressions by other members.

ACFID will publicise any suspension or revocation of signatory status.

Quality Principles and Commitments

The Quality Principles and associated Commitments shown in Table 2 below form the core of the ACFID Code.

TABLE 2: QUALITY PRINCIPLES AND COMMITMENTS

QUALITY PRINCIPLES	COMMITMENTS
1.RIGHTS, PROTECTION & INCLUSION Development and humanitarian responses respect and protect human rights and advance inclusion.	1. We respect and protect human rights. 2. We respect and respond to the needs, rights and inclusion of those who are vulnerable and those who are affected by marginalisation and exclusion. 3. We support people affected by crisis. 4. We advance the safeguarding of children. 5. We advance the safeguarding of those who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse
2.PARTICIPATION, EMPOWERMENT & LOCAL OWNERSHIP Development and humanitarian responses enable sustainable change through the empowerment of local actors and systems.	1. We promote the participation of primary stakeholders. 2. We promote the empowerment of primary stakeholders. 3. We promote gender equality and equity. 4. We promote the empowerment of people with disabilities. 5. We promote the participation of children.
3.SUSTAINABLE CHANGE Development and humanitarian responses contribute to the realisation of sustainable development.	1. We seek durable and lasting improvements in the circumstances and capacities of primary stakeholders. 2. We contribute to systemic change. 3. We promote environmental stewardship and sustainability.
4. QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS Development and humanitarian organisations and responses are informed by evidence, planning, assessment and learning.	1. We articulate clear strategic goals for our work. 2. We analyse and understand the contexts in which we work. 3. We invest in quality assessment of our work. 4. We reflect on, share and apply results and lessons with stakeholders.
5.COLLABORATION Development and humanitarian responses are optimised through effective coordination, collaboration and partnership .	1. We respect and understand those with whom we collaborate. 2. We have a shared understanding of respective contributions, expectations, responsibilities and accountabilities of all parties. 3. We invest in the effectiveness of our collaborations and partnerships.
6. COMMUNICATION Development and humanitarian organisations communicate truthfully and ethically.	1. We are truthful in our communications. 2. We collect and use information ethically.
7. GOVERNANCE Development and humanitarian organisations are governed in an accountable, transparent and responsible way.	1. We are not-for-profit and formed for a defined public benefit. 2. We meet our legal and compliance obligations. 3. We are accountable to our stakeholders. 4. We have responsible and independent governance mechanisms.
8. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT Development and humanitarian organisations acquire, manage and report on resources ethically and responsibly.	1. We source our resources ethically. 2. We ensure that funds and resources entrusted to us are properly controlled and managed. 3. We report on the acquisition and use of our resources.
9. PEOPLE AND CULTURE Development and humanitarian organisations manage and support their people fairly and effectively.	1. We have the human resource capacity and capability to deliver our work. 2. We protect, value and support our people. 3. We manage our people effectively and fairly. 4. We enable our people to conduct themselves professionally and according to our stated values.

Cover photo: The Girls Education
Initiative, Kampong Cham Province,
Cambodia.
Injustice exists when young people
are unable to access opportunities to
thrive. The Girls Education Initiative
builds the capacity of young girls
living in rural Cambodia, where girls
are particularly vulnerable to child
labour and unsafe migration.
The Girls Education Initiative
supports vulnerable youth to
receive secondary level education
and opportunities for tertiary level
education. The Girls Education
Initiative aims to build the capacity
of young girls, empowering them to
break out of the poverty cycle.
of the poverty cycle.
Photo: Mike Worsman/Oaktree.