

Community Feedback System: Complaints Cards

**Developed By: Joshua Pepall
Humanitarian Accountability Team
World Vision LTRT Sri Lanka**



In recent times the humanitarian sector has received much criticism for its lack of humanitarian accountability to beneficiaries. A recent report by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International notes that while most international NGOs (INGOs) accept that accountability to beneficiaries was crucial to their legitimacy (Lloyd, 2005), they lack the tools to develop specific accountability strategies relevant to the multiple stakeholders. The Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC) also highlighted that beneficiary communities were not adequately consulted, and large information gaps exist

between agencies and communities.

All communities have the basic right to register a protest regarding unfair treatment, report cases of wrongdoing and seek that their rights are fulfilled. Such a system is a challenge to implement in the initial response but a system should be established in the first 90 days.

Receiving complaints and responding to them is central to accountability, impact and learning. It is also a formal recognition of the power imbalance between beneficiaries and World Vision. Social justice begins to be addressed when these power imbalances are addressed.

A good community complaints mechanism will serve several ends. First, it assists with transparency by creating a channel for people to register concerns. Second, it provides a mechanism for people to report corruption and the abuse of power by the organization or staff, for example the exploitation of vulnerable groups such as children or unaccompanied women. Third, it provides unique and invaluable sources of information to be used for better project management and outcomes.

1.1 Introduction: ECB2 The Good Enough Guide

When it comes to setting up a community complaints system it's worthwhile remembering that there is no one size fits all approach. The system needs to take into consideration language, literacy, numeracy and the needs, and be responsive to, women, children and people with disabilities. Community members need to be consulted and involved in its development. Beneficiaries may not use 'relief jargon' but indigenous accountability systems are there. These cards are designed to help you identify and include them in the complaints system.



Picture cards are engaging and can make complex ideas digestible and easy to work with. They can be used as prompts for staff unfamiliar with the topic. Field staffs initially reluctant about a complaints system were won over to the idea because the cards helped them structure the community meeting. They felt confident and as a result the community better engaged with the process.

The Emergency Capacity Building project is an interagency initiative set up to identify gaps in international emergency response. The *Good Enough Guide: Impact and Accountability in Emergencies* provides a range of tools for busy field workers on accountability. Free copies of the guide can be down loaded and printed from:

www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/resources/downloads/Good_Enough_Guide.pdf

The cards can be used with **Tool 12 How to set up a complaints and response mechanism** and are a grassroots accountability action-learning tool that focus participant's attention, facilitate their input and assist in the:

- a. Identification of existing indigenous complaints system
- b. The rights of beneficiaries and others to file a complaint
- c. The purpose, parameters and limitations of the complaints system
- d. The procedure for submitting complaints
- e. Steps taken in processing the complaints and the complaints that you can and can't handle.
- f. Confidentiality and non-retaliation policy for complainants
- g. A referral system for those complaints that the agency is not equipped to handle. Response. That is the right of the beneficiary to receive a response that is the outcome of the complaint.

Poorer and illiterate people who are often excluded can be included by the use of the tool and group process to facilitate greater participation. Consulting and involving stakeholders in the development of the complaints mechanism helps also to generate a sense of ownership- people are more likely to use a system that they have been involved in developing.

1.2 Principals of Accountability

Accountability is based on the principles of justice, respect and responsible care. The confidentiality of the community must be respected at all times. The process must be responsible to the special needs of community members such as the disabled and children, as well as display integrity and honesty. When planning on how to use the tool it is important to reflect on the following principals:

LTRT Sri Lanka Accountability Principals

Access: all community members have a right to be consulted and participate throughout a project regardless of race, gender, religion, culture, ethnicity and linguistic backgrounds.

Information Provision: communities have the right to be informed of projects, programs, activities, services and decision making mechanisms in a manner that is accessible to all.

Influence: the output of a community engagement process should have genuine impact on the project or program.

Trust: community engagement activities should at all times encourage actions that build trust and credibility in the process and build up the community capacity and strengths.

Accountability: information should not be used to harm community members or discriminate against particular groups in any way.

Commitments: made to a community are genuine and capable of implementation.

Respect: all community engagement strategies will treat participants in a respectful manner and avoid strategies that may polarize community interests or divide communities.

1.3 Complaints Cards

All the items you need to use the cards are included. The kit has been put together to make it as easy and manageable for field staff as possible. A field kit should include

- 11 Picture cards
- 10 arrows
- Paper & pens

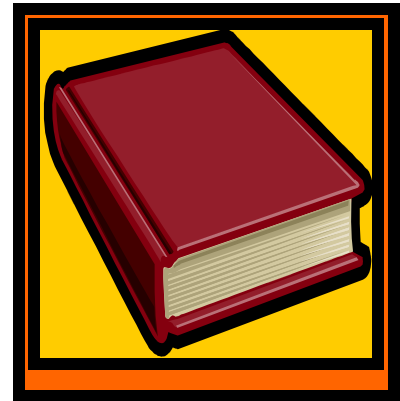
A PDF template of the cards is attached. It is high resolution and can be increased or decreased to meet your needs. The symbols are clip art images. Adapt them as you need but always check with local staff to make sure they won't be misunderstood. Print the cards and arrows in color, laminate them and cut them out.



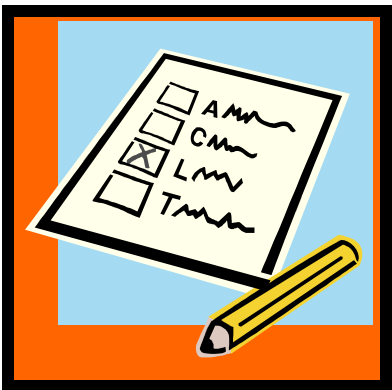
Letter



Community Notice Board



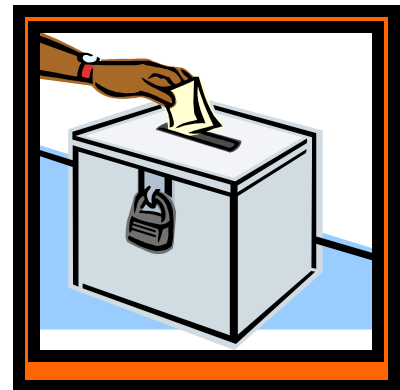
Community Log Book



Complaints Form



Questions



Questions Box



Phone



World Vision/ Agency



Children



Disabilities



Women

Women, children and people with disabilities can be left out of discussions because of stigma. Use the women, children and disabilities card and raise the issue of their accessibility in the small groups and with these people. For example a wheelchair user may not be able to access a community notice board if it's on a hill or at the top of steps. Or uses the complaint's box because of its height or location.

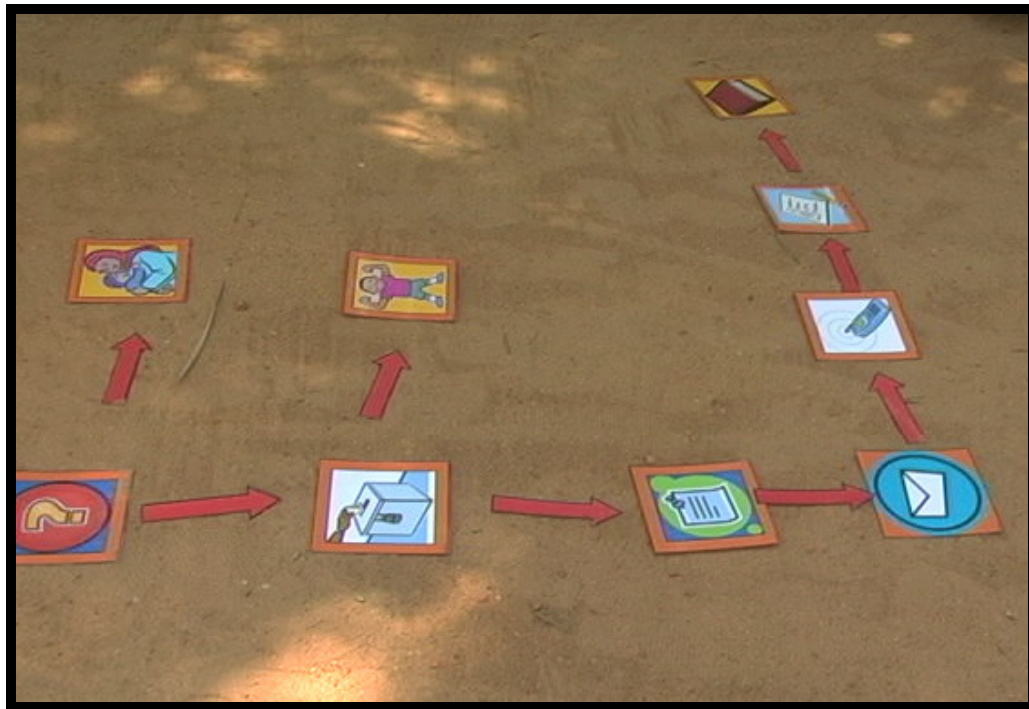
1.4 How to Use The Cards

1. The cards work best in small groups. If you're using them in a community meeting split people into groups of up to 10 people. Run separate workshops for men, women and children if required.
2. Quickly review the aim and purpose of the meeting- to provide information on community complaints mechanisms, answer questions and discuss how stakeholders can be involved in its development. Emphasize that you're coming to learn from people and come up with a system



relevant to their needs. Answer any questions about the process before you move on. If people have specific complaints ask them to wait to the end of the workshop and allow some time to answer their questions. This time is an investment in the future of your complaints systems so don't rush off. Try to find a solution as soon as possible and refer them to other agencies if needed. People will be watching to see if you take these initial complaints seriously.

3. If it's after a response people may not know whom you and your organization is. Explain your organizations mandate, areas of work and other relevant information. World Vision is included in the kit but put your agency in.
4. Work through the cards explaining what each mean. Pass them around the group.
5. When you have finished lay the cards out on the ground or table. Work you way through the following points:
 - ➔ Brainstorm the existing complaints system in place and how local people use them. Make a list. Ask what's good about each and what isn't.
 - ➔ Place the World Vision card at the center of the floor. Explain why World Vision wants to set up a complaints system.
 - ➔ Ask group members to choose a card that is the easiest for them to make a complaint or ask a question about our program. Use an arrow to indicate how each complaint card leads to the next. For instance if people want to make a complaint through a phone call to the office use the arrow to point to the community notice board where the number of staff can be placed. This would lead to a discussion of where the community notice board should be situated and using the children, women and disability card a discussion about accessibility; you could raise the cost of making a call and/ or if the poorest people in the community has access to a phone. One card will flow to the next. Here is an example of what your diagram might look like:



→ Draw the map for later reference. A copy will need to be distributed to the community and can be displayed on the community notice board.

→ When people are satisfied with the map discuss the following points:

- ❑ Confidentiality and non-retaliation policy for complainants
- ❑ World Vision's child protection policy
- ❑ Those complaints that you can and can't handle
- ❑ A referral system for those complaints that you can't handle
- ❑ A complaints forms
- ❑ Monitoring systems to ensure the system is working.

6. Be adaptable and creative. If you need to add another picture card not included ask a participant to select a stone, rock, twig or something readably available and use that.

7. At the end of the session, thank people for their participation, provide your office contact details, answer outstanding participant questions and address any misconceptions.

8. Using the PDF Files Fill out the transition community complaints map template and provide and provide feedback to the relevant sector coordinators and district managers.

Questions & Comments

As always, I would like to thank my fellow members of the Humanitarian Accountability Team LTRT Sri Lanka that take these “wacky accountability ideas”, give honest feedback and turn them into tools to help tsunami affected communities rebuild their lives. It’s a pleasure learning with you all. Special thanks to Viraj Wahalantantri and Haig Bailan for their feedback and trial of the tool.

This tool is one of a suite of community accountability tools. If you have any questions regarding this tool or would like others, or suggestions as to how it could be improved I would appreciate your feedback.

Regards,

Joshua Pepall
Stakeholder Capacity Building Advisor
Humanitarian Accountability Team
Lanka Tsunami Response Team [LTRT]
Mobile +94 077 3207 749 | Joshua.Pepall@wvi.org

I.5 Card Symbols





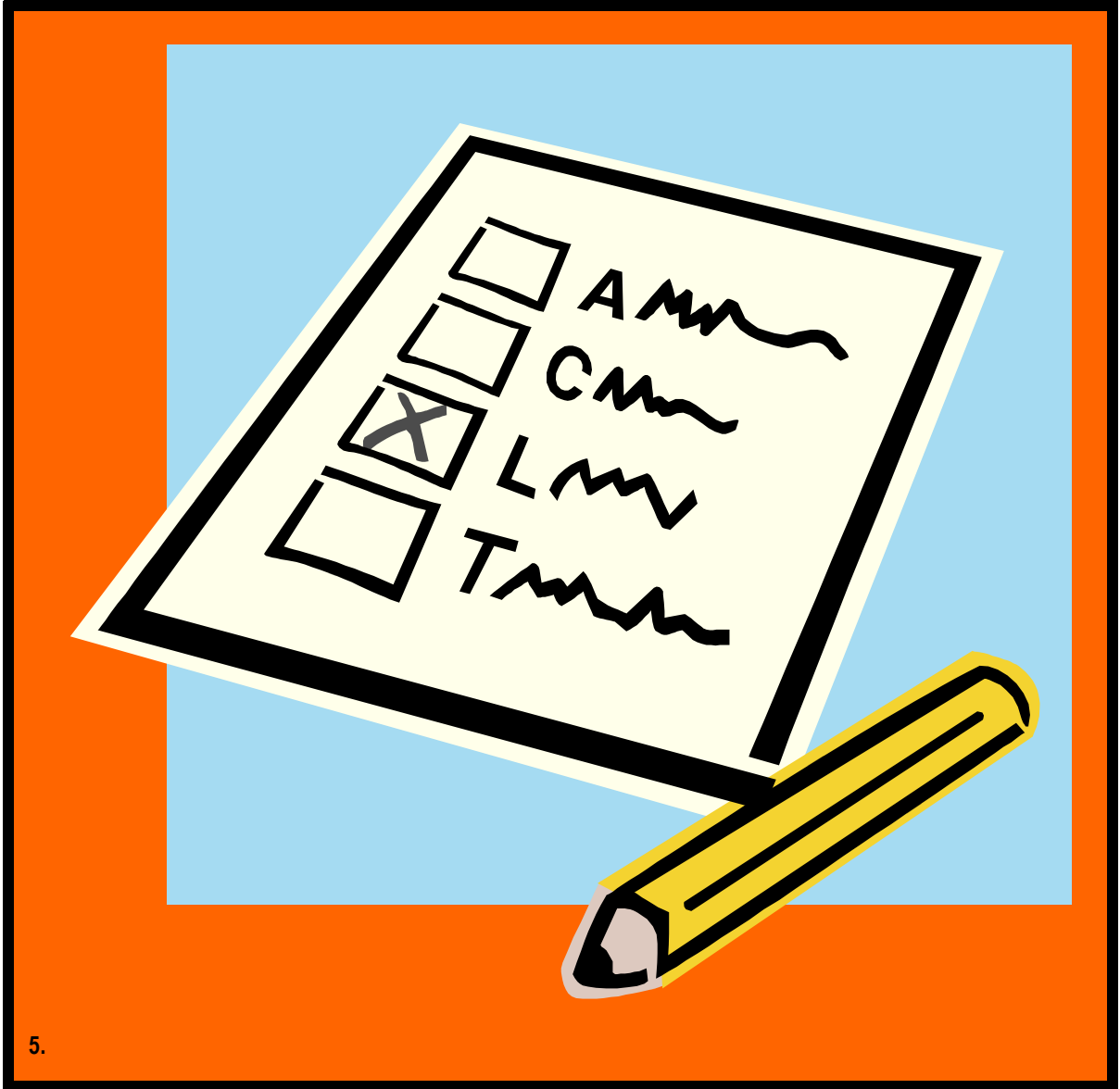
2.



3.



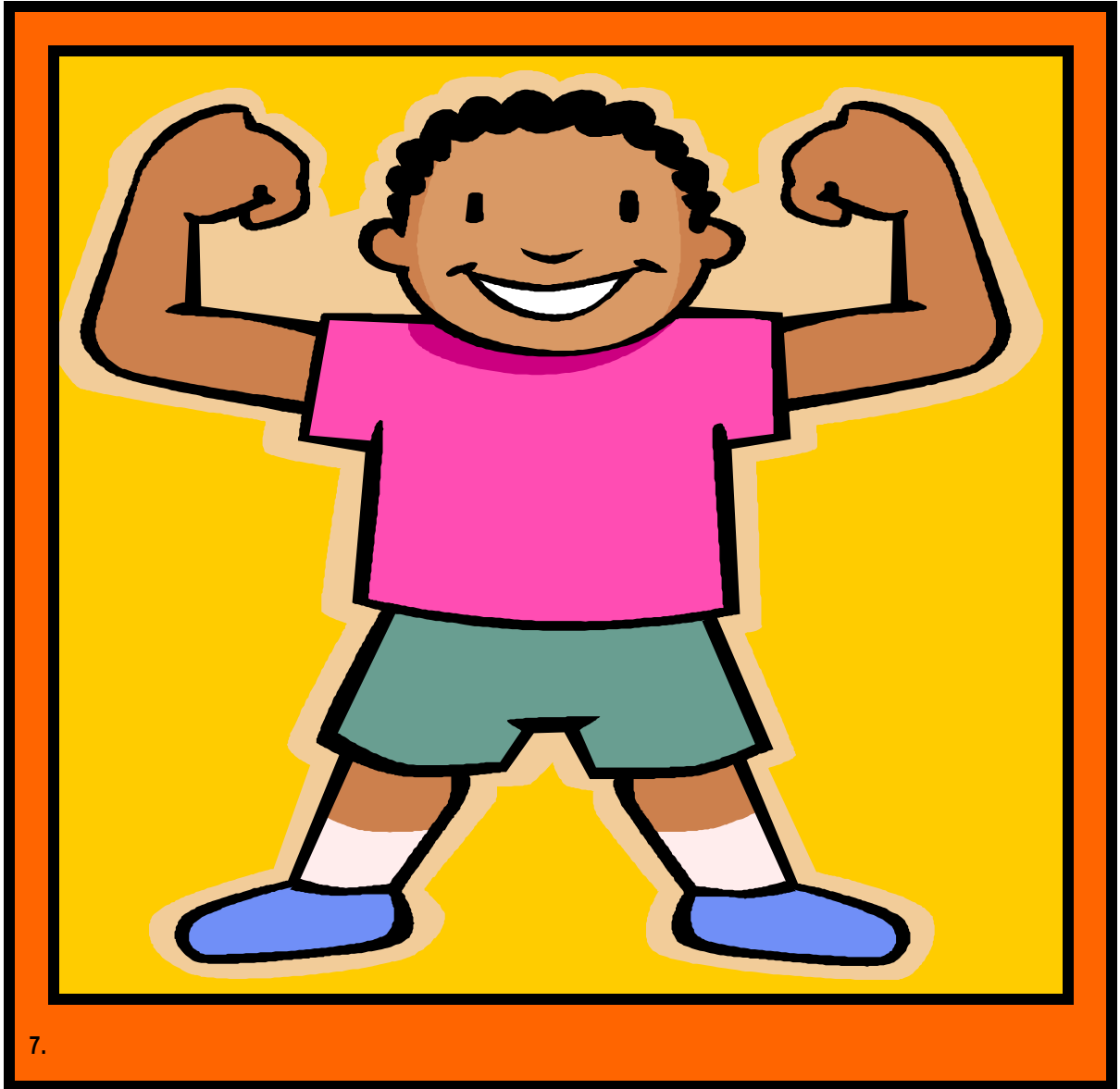
4.



5.

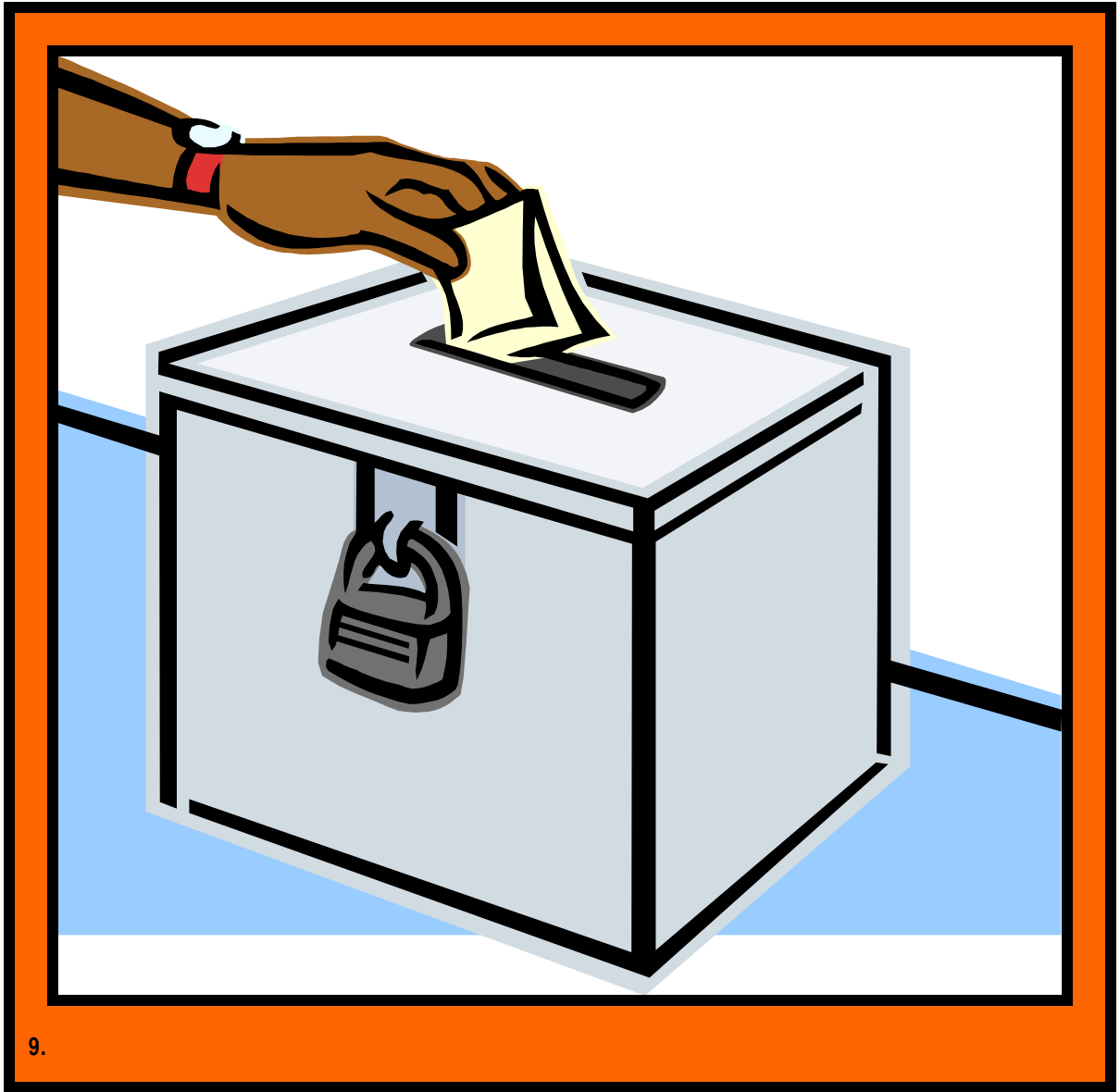


6.

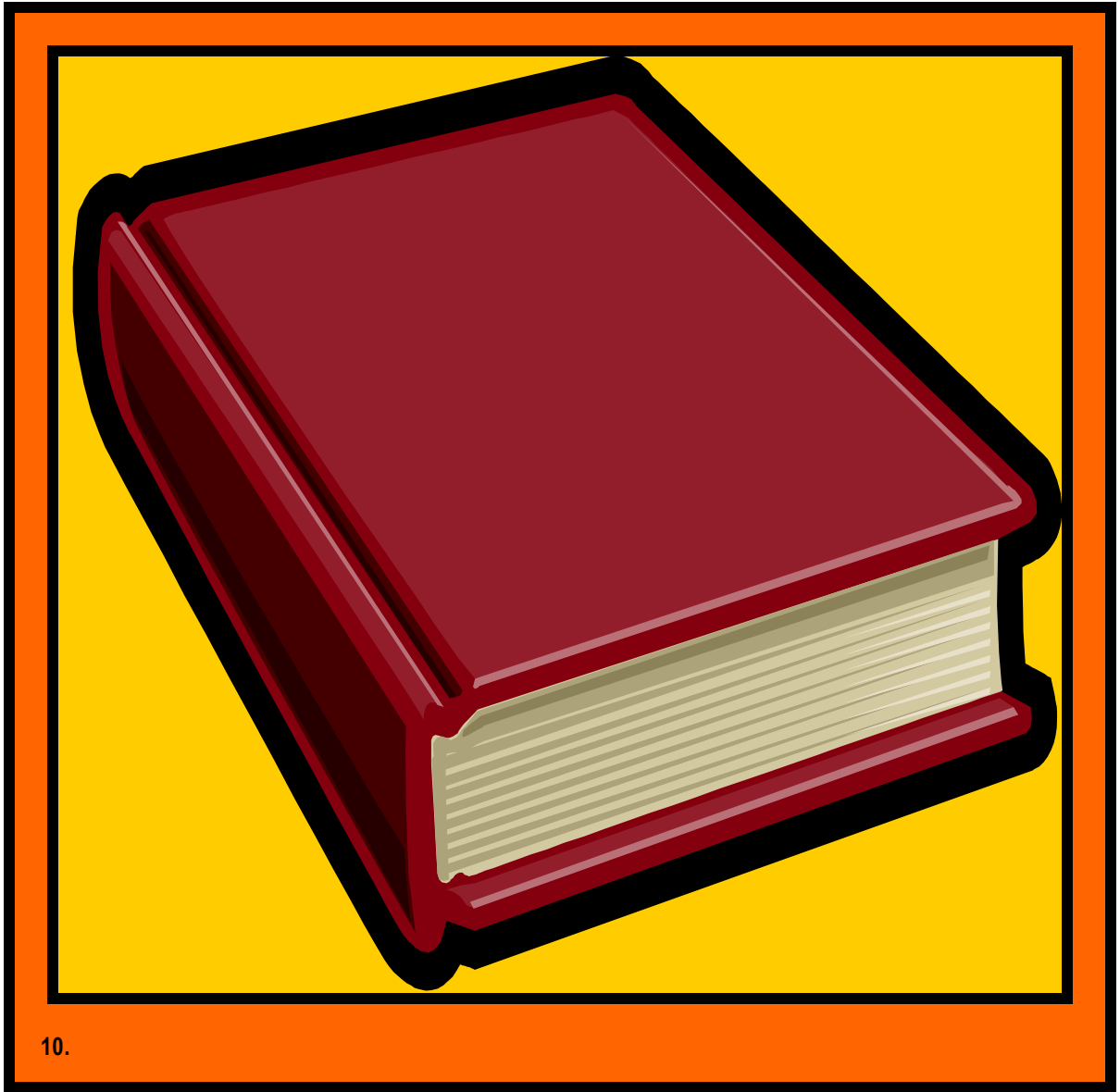




8.

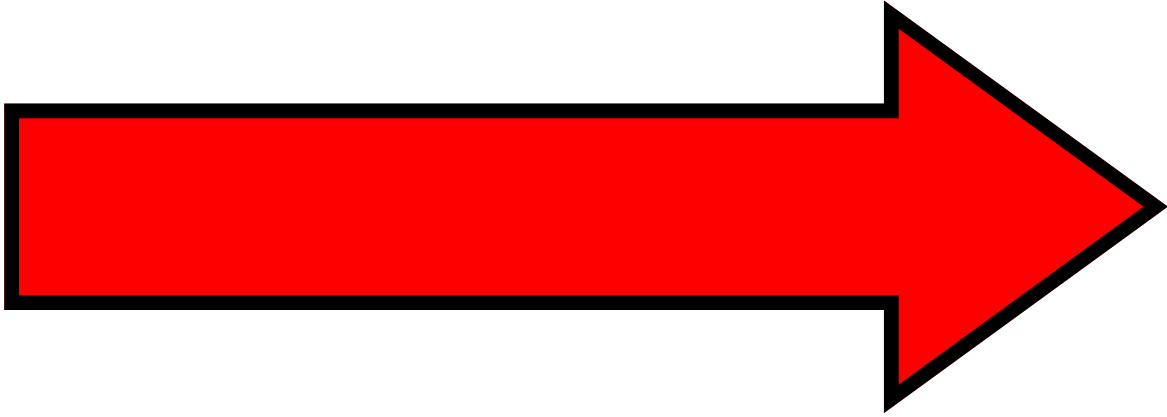
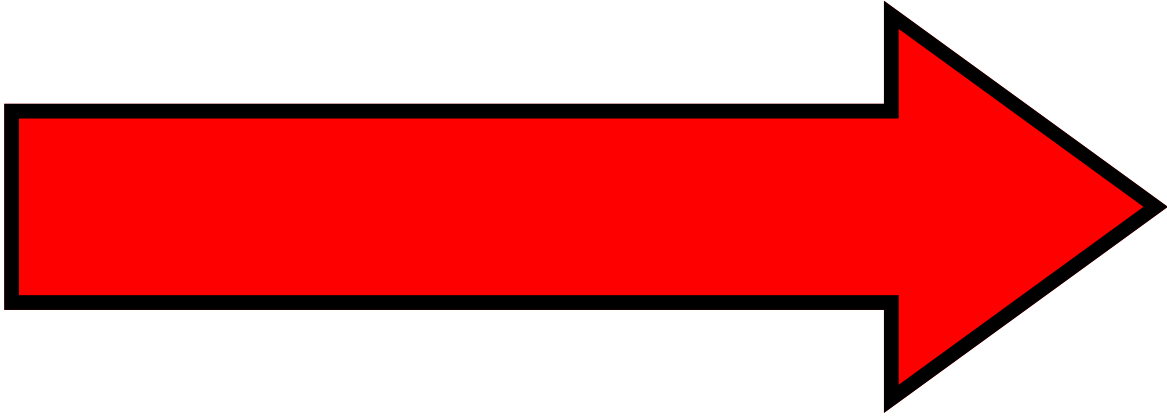
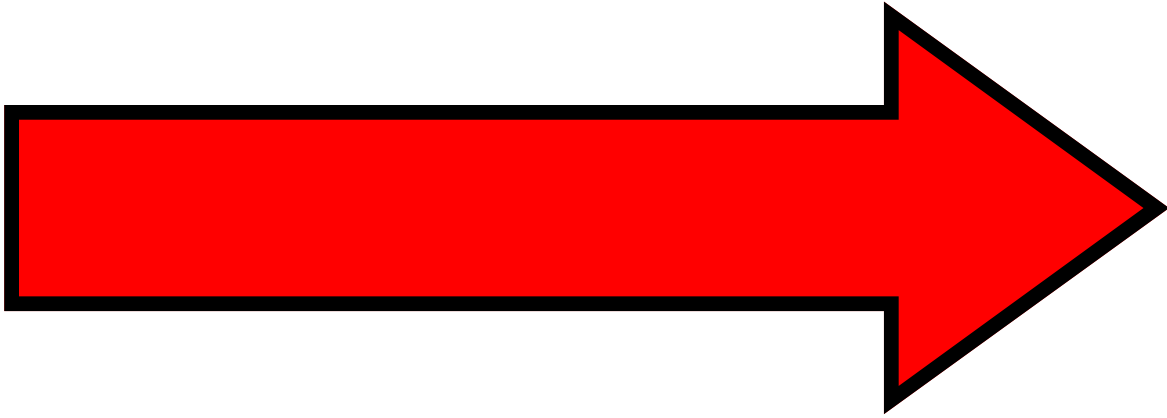
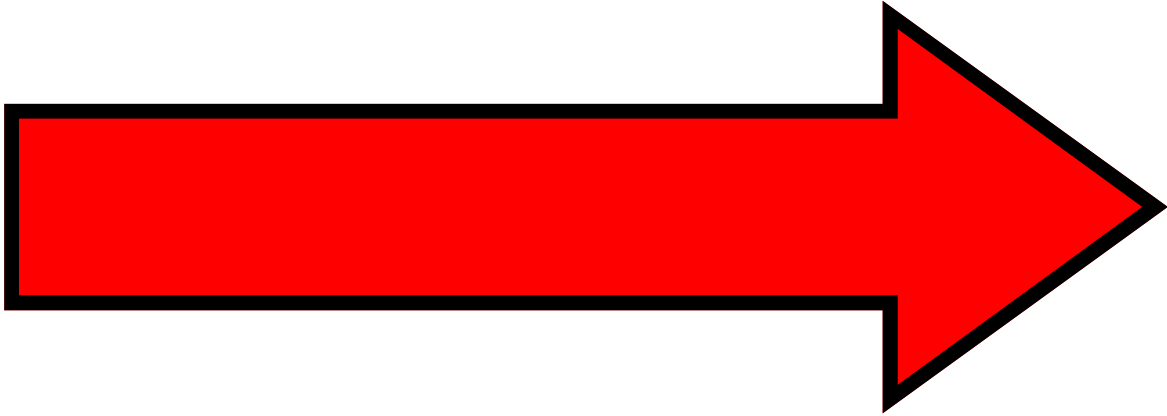


9.



10.





Community Complaints Mapping Sheet

