



A Guide for Client Responsive Staff Management

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Acknowledgements

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Section 1: Adopting a Client Responsive Competency Approach

The aim of this section is to introduce key ideas on the client responsive competency and its importance.

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Client responsive competency is in line with international accountability standards.
2. Client responsive behaviour and culture will facilitate Client Responsive Programming.

1.1 What is Client Responsive Behaviour, and Why is it Important?

Being Client Responsive means that staff members of humanitarian agencies, such as the IRC, undertake their work in a way that takes into account the views of our intended and direct clients.¹

Demonstrating a client responsive competency implies that staff systematically, deliberately and regularly listen to and collect the diverse perspectives of their clients and analyse and use their feedback to inform the ways in which they conduct themselves and undertake their work. It also entails them communicating and explaining to their clients how their feedback has (or has not) informed our their decisions and actions.

Evidence suggests that adopting a client-responsive competency is not only ‘the right thing to do’ for ethical reasons, but it also improves the effectiveness of our programmes. Like any behaviour, client responsive knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours need to be deliberately nurtured. It is thus important to invest in the quality of our staff and to strengthen their capacity to facilitate client responsive decisions.

Our efforts to instil client responsive behaviour will depend on decisions about staff hiring, management, training, and performance evaluation. In short, we should aim to develop client responsive behaviour as a core competency among our staff.

1.2 Purpose of the Guide

The purpose of *A Guide for Client Responsive Staff Management* (“the Guide”) is to provide guidance and resources to staff of humanitarian agencies on the competencies required to develop a client responsive orientation. Specifically, the Guide aims to:

- ▶ provide guidance and resources for senior management and staff on client responsive recruitment, learning and development, and performance management.
- ▶ guide staff to embrace the knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours that will institutionalise client responsive Client Responsive Programming.
- ▶ guide managers to systematically nurture and model the knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours that promote a client responsive orientation in themselves and their team.

1.3 Who is the Guide for?

This Guide is particularly targeted at:

Senior Leaders: Whose role is to inspire, guide and hold accountable the managers and team leaders for Client Responsive Programming.

Managers and Team Leaders: Who play a role in coaching and incentivising their team members on developing a client responsive competency and incentivising client responsive behaviours.

Human Resource (HR) Practitioners: Who integrate a client responsive competency into aspects of recruitment, selection, performance management, staff care, employer relations and learning and development.

Staff Who Interact With Clients: Who are directly or indirectly involved in receiving, collating and acting on feedback from clients.

Donors: Who can promote accountability driven by client responsiveness in their partners, or who wish to ensure their own staff is demonstrating client responsive behaviour.

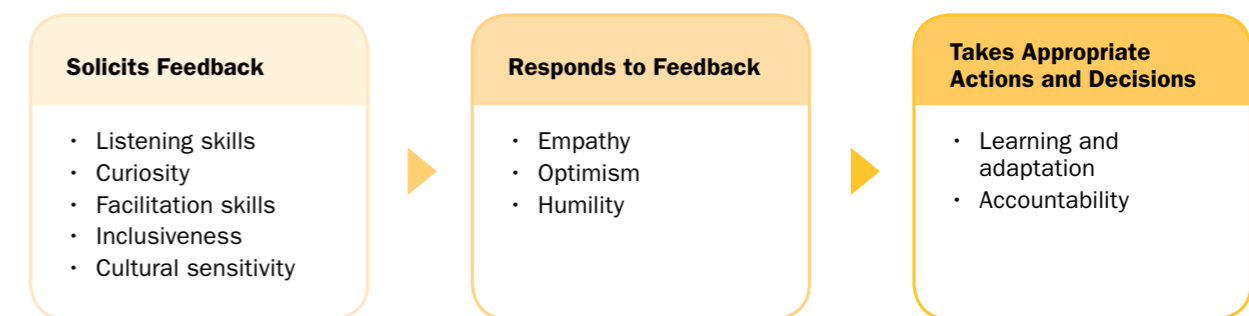
1.4 What is the Client Responsive Core Competency?

Client Responsive Core Competency for the purpose of this Guide is defined as key knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours to listen, act and respond to client feedback that staff must have or acquire in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of a programme. Strengthening a client responsive competency in staff and fostering an accountable culture within the organisation directly supports client responsive programming.

Clients may be defined as people or stakeholders for whom a staff provides or intends to provide assistance. In this regard, clients could be external (affected population) as well as internal (colleagues from departments or units within the organisation). It is important to note that client responsive behaviours originate within the organisation when interacting with colleagues at all levels.

Being Client Responsive (or Client Responsive Behaviour) means that the staff member proactively and routinely solicits and listens to client feedback and perspectives; analyses the client feedback with maturity and sensitivity; takes appropriate decisions; and makes changes to their behaviour or actions in response to the client feedback.

The specific behaviours, attitudes, skills and knowledge on the client responsive competencies have been identified as followed: (See [Annex 1: Client Responsive Competencies](#)).



1.5 Relationship with Existing Initiatives

Developing a client responsive approach is not new in the humanitarian sector. Existing international standards and frameworks, including the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), the Core Humanitarian Competency Framework (CHCF), and The Grand Bargain², all contain a fundamental requirement that humanitarian organisations commit to act with greater accountability to the affected population. This commitment entails being client responsive in key aspects of humanitarian assistance.

This Guide is a competency development tool that can be used by humanitarian organisations in line with their own organisational strategy, context, needs, vision, mission and goals. Organisations may integrate all or some of the elements from the Guide into their own HR practices and processes as they see fit. The Guide should be viewed as a *complement to existing initiatives and practices*.

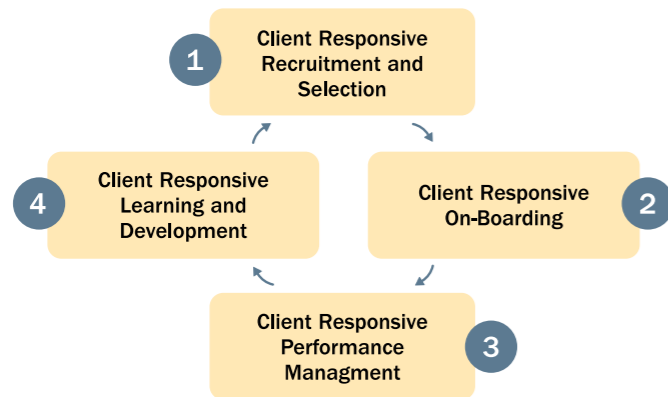
Efforts to sharpen client responsive competency development need to be viewed as part of the wider change process of mainstreaming client responsive knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours into an organisation’s culture and improving its programme performance (See [Annex 2: Relationship with Existing Policies at the IRC](#)).

Section 2: Applying the Client Responsive Competency

This section offers HR practitioners and managers practical guidance and resources on how to integrate the client responsive competency in key HR practice areas (See *diagram below*).

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Client responsive competency-based HR practices help change staff behaviour towards colleagues and clients.
2. Client responsiveness is about our attitudes and behaviour change; it can be achieved by everyone and does not require substantial investment or high-tech tools.
3. Client responsive culture within the team promotes greater incentive to listen and respond to our clients.



2.1 Client Responsive Recruitment and Selection

To fulfil the organisation’s mission to provide effective and timely assistance to the affected population, it is critical to identify and recruit people with an orientation towards client responsive behaviour.

An important part of this is the Human Resource department’s commitment to equitable recruitment and retention practices across the organisation. All teams should strive for gender balance across field sites and roles and responsibilities. This not only promotes broader diversity and inclusion as an organisation, but it also improves program quality. In most contexts, it is important for female staff to conduct targeted outreach, program implementation, data collection, and feedback processes with female clients. Look for ♀ where gender considerations are required.

2.1.1 Client Responsive Competency: Job Description

Each job description should demonstrate a mix of key competencies that are required for successful execution of the job responsibilities, including a client responsive competency.

Managers could, with the support of HR business advisors, identify and including a client the competency requirements into “essential” (must have) or “desirable” (preferred) categories.

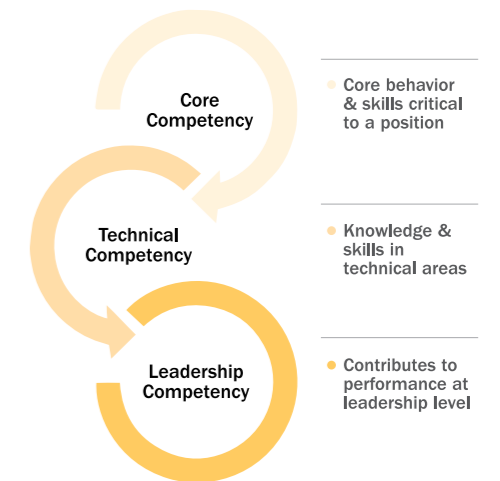
Depending on the position, a client responsive competency may be an “essential” or “desirable” component of the job description.

Typically, the primary responsibility for demonstrating a client responsive competency lies with the programme and field teams who have direct contact with clients. Nonetheless, senior management and support positions such as HR or Finance have an equally important role to play in supporting the programme and field teams to deliver Client Responsive Programming (See [Annex 3: Client Responsive Roles and Responsibilities at the IRC](#)).

To ensure the same level of client responsive awareness and commitments for existing and new staff, job descriptions for new staff should include the client responsive competency. Similarly, as job descriptions in the organisation are revised and updated for existing staff, attempts should be made to incorporate a client responsive competency.

Job advertisements should list the client responsive competency required for the position. This allows a potential candidate to understand the organisation’s expectations of its staff, particularly the importance of placing clients’ perspectives at the centre of decision making.

Competency mix for Job Description



Example: Mix of Competencies for a Programme Manager’s Position

Client Responsive Roles and Responsibilities	Helps programme staff think about how to deliver Client Responsive Programming in their particular sector and share examples of best practices. Supports policies that facilitate client responsiveness through resource allocation, advocacy, and project design. Creates a culture of client responsiveness by requesting and using client feedback data to make decisions.
Client Responsive Competency	Actively listens to others’ ideas and viewpoints. Seeks to and is capable of change and improvement based on feedback and learning. Demonstrates inclusiveness when making programmatic decisions and working with clients, partners and colleagues from diverse backgrounds.
Leadership Competencies	Obtains results by managing performance of directly supervised staff. Obtains results by creating a collaborative environment with staff.
Technical Competencies	Demonstrable knowledge and experience in results-based project management or program management and team management; Experience in the development and execution of projects or programs related to DRR and resilience; Ability to engage in a dialogue and to bring together local actors and work with them.

♀ Revise a vacancy announcement and Job Description (JD) with the Hiring Manager to ensure the following:

- ▶ The use of the he and she pronouns.
- ▶ Use of language that is not gender biased or exclusionary.

Inclusion of the following paragraph at the end of the vacancy announcement and JD:

- ▶ Equal Opportunity Employer: Our organisation is an Equal Opportunity Employer. We consider all candidates on the basis of merit without regard to race, sex, colour, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, age, marital status, veteran status, disability or any other characteristic protected by applicable law.
- ▶ Narrowing the Gender Gap (Describe the specific benefits the office provides to women): Our organisation is committed to narrowing the gender gap in leadership positions. We offer benefits that provide an enabling environment for women to participate in our workforce including a flexible hours (when required), maternity leave, and gender-sensitive security protocols.

2.1.2 Client Responsive Competency: Job Interview

The suggested interview questions (See [Annex 4: Client Responsive Competency Based Interview Questions](#)) gauge an applicant's orientation towards client responsive behaviours for programmatic responsibilities and while engaging with other staff members.

How to integrate the Client Responsive Competency in an existing interview selection process:

- ▶ Understand the client responsive competency and associated effective and limiting behaviours; review sample interview questions and assessment criteria.
- ▶ Review the organisation's existing Recruitment and Selection procedures and align them with the organisational Gender Equality Policy.
- ▶ Determine if a client responsive competency must be required for recruitment, or if it can be developed at a later stage.
- ▶ Determine whether to interview each candidate across all competencies, or to select a subset of competencies most relevant to the position.
- ▶ Incorporate selected interview questions from the Client Responsive Competency.
- 🌐 Diversify your Primary Shortlist
 - ▶ When identifying a primary shortlist of candidates, try to include a diverse group with at least 40% women.
 - ▶ Ensure diversity amongst interview panel members.

Tips for Interviewers

- Select at least 3 questions from the client responsive interview question bank to assess relevant behaviours, attitudes, skills and knowledge during the interview(s).
- In assessing the candidates, look for examples of positive indicators of the effective behaviours; if there is evidence of negative indicators of limiting behaviours, the candidate does not meet the criteria for the client responsive competency.
- Use different tools, such as a presentation or written tests, to determine if candidates demonstrate a client responsive competency.

2.1.3 Client Responsive Competency: Questions for Candidate's Referee

When checking with a referee of a potential candidate, choose relevant questions that will probe into the behaviours, attitudes, skills and knowledge listed under the client responsive competency required for the position. It is advised to pick at least three relevant questions. See sample questions below:

Suggested Questions for Referees on Listening Skills and Accountability for Managers

Please answer Yes or No and provide an example of evidence of the behaviour.

- Was the candidate able to create trust and engagement with relevant stakeholders? How effective was his/her approach?
- Was the candidate able to ensure that feedback from the partners/affected population was incorporated into the organisation's future work? What difference did this make?
- Did the candidate promote accountability in the programme/unit? What was the outcome?
- Has this person ever been disciplined for an ethical violation?
- Would you rehire this person?

2.2 Client Responsive On-Boarding

Information gained at the selection process about the candidate should be carried forward into their on-boarding process.

2.2.1 On-Boarding Checklist

All newly hired staff that need to demonstrate a client responsive competency should be orientated by HR, the client responsiveness team and the respective managers (See [Annex 5: On-boarding Checklists for Client Responsiveness](#)).

2.2.2 Personal Orientation Plan

Information gained from the recruitment and selection process can be used to design a personal orientation plan that can begin to address any identified client responsive competency gaps.

The 90-Day Action Plan template (See [Annex 6: IRC 90 Day Action Plan](#)) may be used to outline the capacity building process for client responsiveness.

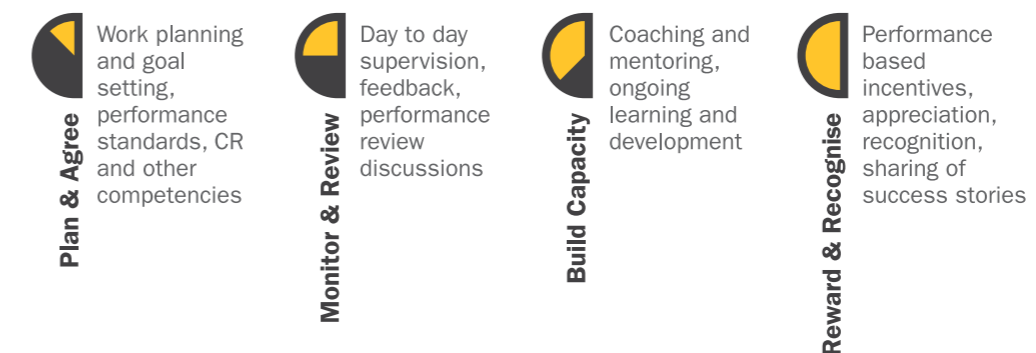
2.3 Client Responsive Competency: Performance Development

The performance development process sets out the expectations and performance expected of new and existing staff. It allows managers and staff to identify client responsive competency gaps together, along with any other performance gaps.

"Not many staff are inducted on client responsiveness. A lot of programme people get it but not necessarily support services. If you miss all that out in HR practices – people won't get it..."

- Samantha Wakefield, CHS Alliance

The following Performance Development Model illustrates the process of managing and developing staff performance and client responsive competency development.



2.3.1 List of Effective and Limiting Behaviour Indicators

To help managers and staff self-reflect, interpret, describe and identify relevant behaviours, this Guide offers a list of effective and limiting behaviours³ (See [Annex 7: Effective and Limiting Behaviours](#)).

🌐 Example of Effective and Limiting Behaviour Indicators for "Empathy"

Effective Behaviour	Limiting Behaviour
1. Possess a willingness to relate to perspectives of others and is non-defensive when receiving criticism or in hearing grievances.	1. Out of touch with people that are suffering or are less fortunate.
2. Can entertain thoughts such as "if I were in this person's shoes, I would think or do this."	2. Opinionated and believes in the rightness of his/her own ideas and beliefs, and judges anyone who does not share similar views as wrong, ignorant or stupid.

2.3.2 Objectives and Goal Setting to Support Client Responsive Competency Development

Set tailor-made client responsive goals: Using a Goal Setting Form (See [Annex 8: IRC Goal Setting Form](#)) ensure that one goal is related to developing a Client Responsive Competency.

Have regular dialogues: Share examples of how staff have demonstrated client responsive behaviours in their decisions and actions.

Share your client responsive goals: Share your goals with a colleague or in a team (whichever works best under the circumstances).

See an example of Client Responsive Goals below:

Function	Goal
HR Manager	Incorporate the client responsive competency in all HR tools and practices, specifically recruitment, selection, on-boarding, performance development, and learning and development by MM/YYYY.
Health Lead	Apply Client Responsive Programming approach in at least N health projects in LOCATION by MM/YYYY.
Leadership	Promote Client Responsive Programming approach across different functions and levels by educating and training staff on client responsive tools within the next one year.

What is useful for goal setting process:

1. Competency-based job description
2. Work plan
3. Competency-based assessment results
4. Feedback from others

2.3.3 Assessing Client Responsive Competency Strengths and Gaps

Formal Option: Managers and staff who prefer a formal way of assessing client responsive strengths and areas of improvement can use a self-assessment form or a 360-degree feedback process.

Informal Option: For those who prefer a more informal option, the assessment can be a guided conversations around the required client responsive competency. The idea is to create a culture where client responsive competency is openly discussed and peer support is actively encouraged, thereby promoting a culture of continuous improvement. When done informally, it is the responsibility of both the manager and staff to keep a record of the outcome of the conversations.

Both options require the manager and staff to be familiar with the performance review and competency processes.

Client Responsive Competency: Self-Assessment

The purpose of the self-assessment exercise is to provide a “channel” for staff to provide feedback about themselves in a systematic and structured way. This process does have subjective elements as some staff may ‘overrate’ or ‘under-rate’ their actual competency. To minimise the degree of subjectivity, staff should be asked to rate themselves against the relevant behaviours in the client responsive competency, to provide corresponding evidence and examples of when they demonstrated the competency and to identify what if anything hinders their ability to demonstrate the competency (See *Format 1*).

Asking Client Responsive Competency Based Feedback: Format 1

Using the descriptors in the competency framework and the limiting behaviours, rate the achievement of the following behaviours and provide evidence for the rating such as:

- ▶ Competencies not required for current role or for future career development
- ▶ Not met/partially met - area for further development
- ▶ Met/proficient and able to demonstrate in practice
- ▶ Exceeds/advanced proficiency and can coach or train others

Client Responsive Competency (Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Behaviours)

	1	2	3	4
Listening Skills - Actively listens to others' ideas and viewpoints. 🗣️ <i>Evidence:</i>				
Curiosity - Stays interested in and seek out others' ideas and value others' perspectives. 🗣️ <i>Evidence:</i>				
Facilitation Skills - Guides discussion, and encourages others to share their opinions and gain clarity in their ideas. 🗣️ <i>Evidence:</i>				
Inclusiveness - Works with colleagues, partners and clients from diverse backgrounds. 🗣️ <i>Evidence:</i>				
Cultural Sensitivity - Adjusts ways of communicating and interacting according to the context. 🗣️ <i>Evidence:</i>				
Empathy - Possesses a willingness to relate to others' perspectives and is open-minded when receiving criticism or listening to others' frustrations. 🗣️ <i>Evidence:</i>				
Optimism - Stays positive in the face of criticism and what may be unreasonable or unrealistic demands. <i>Evidence:</i>				
Humility - Reflects on personal behaviour, capacity and practice. <i>Evidence:</i>				
Learning and Adaptation - Seeks to be capable of and works towards change and improvement based on feedback and learning. <i>Evidence:</i>				
Accountability - Holds themselves and others accountable for their decisions and actions. <i>Evidence:</i>				

Client Responsive Competency: 360-Degree Feedback

360-degree feedback is a process through which not only a superior but also peers, direct reports and clients can assess the performance of staff. A staff member conducts a self-evaluation and receives feedback from others on how they perceive his or her performance.

360-degree feedback on client responsive behaviour ensures that the manager does not just rely on his/her own observations when rating team performance. Competency based feedback focuses on provision of evidence where the competency has been effectively demonstrated. It is linked to the staff's client responsive goals and development plan.

Format 1 (above) and Format 2 (below) may be used to design the 360-degree feedback on client responsiveness. The three key questions suggested below may also be in the informal client responsive related assessment conversation between manager and staff and other clients.

Asking Client Responsive Competency Based Feedback: Format 2

Client Responsive Behaviour Indicator: Select the specific behaviour in the client responsive competency on which you would like to obtain feedback.

Example: Empathy - Possesses a willingness to relate to other's perspectives and is open-minded when receiving criticism or listening to others' frustrations.

Based on evidence, describe:

- ▶ What did the staff do well to demonstrate this behaviour?
- ▶ What could the staff do better?
- ▶ What further areas would you identify for future development?

2.3.4 Incentives for Demonstrating Client Responsive Competency

Although client responsive behaviour is central to providing effective assistance to affected populations, many staff working in the humanitarian sector remain unclear or unaware of what client responsive competency means. They may also be unsure of how the competency can be demonstrated in the workplace.

Organisations need to enhance incentives and recognition for client responsive behaviours. Efforts to incentivise client responsive behaviours should not be bound by financial considerations. There are many methods, including cost-effective and creative non-monetary ways, to recognise positive staff performance driven by client responsive behaviours. These positive recognitions depend on the work environment of the organisation.

Ways to Recognise Staff Who Demonstrate Client Responsive Competency

- ▶ **Client Responsive Wall of Fame:** Reward individuals or teams for establishing and accomplishing client responsive goals. Set a measurable client responsive goal for your team, and celebrate when the goal is achieved. Post the achievements on the 'Wall of Fame' which can be kept active for an agreed period of time.
- ▶ **Biggest and bravest mistake award:** Give a funny award on a monthly or quarterly basis to a staff member who admits to the biggest mistake he or she has made. Often in organisations, staff are afraid to admit shortcomings in their performance. The intent of this activity is to provide a safe space for staff to admit their mistakes or oversights, and to demonstrate a client responsive competency, specifically behaviours such as humility.
- ▶ **Share success stories:** Share client responsive success stories regionally or internationally on the organisation's website or newsletter.
- ▶ **Promote monthly client responsive behaviours:** Each month, select a competency behaviour, such as curiosity, and ask staff (voluntarily) to share how someone from another team has demonstrated curiosity in their work and what it means to them. This promotes a culture of mutual interest in others' work.
- ▶ **Listening sessions:** Carry out regular staff listening sessions for managers to listen to staff concerns and respond appropriately. Appreciate staff openness and willingness to come forward with concerns or constructive feedback.

2.4 Client Responsive Competency: Learning and Development

Learning interventions that enable a client responsive competency may be based on the 70/20/10 Development Framework as illustrated below:

Learning on the job (70%)	Learning from others (20%)	Formal learning (10%)
Where learning of client responsive competency takes place within the work place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopting a Client Responsive Programming approach • Setting up feedback mechanism • Handling feedback from clients 	Where learning is gained from others (peers, managers, coaches etc.): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from Client Responsive Team • Attend learning events related to client responsive implementation 	Where learning is facilitated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training on feedback mechanism • Free accountability related online courses by Humanitarian Leadership Academy on their KAYACONNECT platform • Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) and Core Humanitarian Competency Framework related courses run by CHS Alliance

Client responsive learning and development must be based on areas of improvement identified in a personal development plan and must be linked to the goal setting process. The client responsive competency should be included in the annual training need survey for all staff. The training need analysis/survey in a client responsive competency could include the following: interpersonal communication training, facilitation or ToT course, multi-cultural management training, etc.

Staff should be expected to attend a minimum number of learning initiatives or trainings to ensure client responsive programming and competency is understood and developed. Some of these trainings are freely available online.⁴

Evaluate the measure of success after a training through various means such as a pre-test, post-test, manager's observation and performance review discussion.

2.4.1 Competency-Based Coaching Tips

To develop staff's client responsive competency, the following coaching approach may be used.

Coaching

Managers could be trained on basic coaching skills, or external coaches could be hired to support staff capacity building specifically in client responsive competency development. Managers who are interested in coaching should employ key client responsive competency skills and attitudes such as listening skills and curiosity. Through coaching, managers could model some of the client responsive competency elements for their own staff to observe and learn.

🗣️ *Ensure that you have both male and female coaches.*

Sample Dialogue on Coaching

Coach: I know you mentioned that humility is one of the most challenging attitudes to develop. I am curious. What exactly is challenging for you?

Staff: Humility, I think, is a natural trait and not something that can be nurtured. I am not sure if it is possible for me to develop the ability to be humble. Besides, I don't think I really need this behaviour for my current position.

Coach: What does being humble look like and feel like for you?

Staff: Being humble for me is the ability to admit mistakes and not feel bad about it. However, in my culture and context being humble may be perceived as being 'weak'.

Coach: How important is being humble is for you?

Some simple but powerful questions for a coach to ask:

1. What does (being empathic, or being curious, or being accountable) look or feel like?
2. What about this behaviour is important for you?
3. What else?
4. What did you learn?
5. What will you do and when will you do it?
6. What do you want to know today that you don't know?

2.4.2 Giving Competency-Based Feedback

Managers should provide feedback to facilitate learning and growth in the staff's knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours. See below for Tips for Giving Feedback:

What to do	Examples
1. Feedback provided must be relevant, practical and specific to the needs of the individual.	1. I have a few ideas that might help...
2. Align your feedback with the staff goals and needs.	2. What works for me is ...
3. Provide feedback on a specific behaviour related to client responsive behaviours that staff can do something about.	3. Tell me about the impact of the behaviour...
4. Use a tone of respect.	4. How might your colleague or your partner organisation see that behaviour?
5. Be aware of your own learning and communication styles and how they affect the staff style.	5. I am curious about...
6. Consider timing of feedback.	6. Have you ever considered
	7. I appreciate you giving me another perspective of things...
	8. I react positively to ...

Section 3: Promoting and Sustaining Client Responsive Competency and Culture – Tips for Leaders

This section provides tips for leaders and senior managers who wish to promote and sustain client responsive competency and culture in an organisation.

“If we say client responsiveness is a key organisational competency, individuals at high level must demonstrate this competency. If a leader is not inclusive, he can't expect others to be inclusive. The leadership must subscribe to client responsive behaviour they would want to be demonstrated at all levels. Creative ways are needed to change the mindset. People should feel safe and comfortable...”

- IRC Field Staff

HIGHLIGHTS

1. Leaders should model client responsive behaviour in order to promote and sustain such behaviour.
2. Leaders should ensure client responsive behaviour is practiced both internally amongst colleagues as well as with external stakeholders.
3. Donors also have a responsibility to demonstrate client responsive behaviour while expecting implementing partners to demonstrate such behaviour.

3.1 Client Responsive Goals for Leaders and Managers

Senior leaders and management have a critical role to play in cultivating an institutional client responsive culture where client feedback is valued and acted upon. Leaders should include client responsive goals both in their individual development plans as well as organisational plans.

Sample goal statements could be as follows:

- ▶ Promote client responsive programming across different functions and levels by making client responsive tools and technical expertise available and accessible for all staff in the office within the next year.
- ▶ Create a safe space in the office for all staff to raise concerns and issues on client responsive practices.
- ▶ Build capacity of N staff in client responsiveness by end of 20XX.

3.2 Strategic Action Plan

In every country programme, include high level goals on client responsive behaviours and competency development that are linked to the country strategic plan.

Sample statements:

- ▶ Set policies and standards, allocate resources, and create a culture conducive to client-responsive orientation and culture, with special attention to engagement with women and girls, and other vulnerable groups.
- ▶ Identify priority outcome areas and programme objectives that are strengthened by the incorporation of the perspectives of clients, partners, staff, and other stakeholders.

3.3 Ways to Promote Client Responsive Behaviours in the Office

Successful leaders cultivate responsive staff behaviours. It is equally important for leaders to model client responsive behaviours.

Some of the ways leaders could promote client responsive behaviours and mainstream them into the organisational culture are suggested below:

Articulate a commitment towards client responsive behaviours and culture: Leaders should clearly articulate their commitment to client responsive behaviours and share their expectations of staff. Leaders could also seek a commitment from team leaders on their commitment to client responsiveness in their behaviours and actions

Make client responsive tools available: Leaders should be familiar with client responsive tools that are available in the organisation. Leaders should ensure staff have access to client responsive practices and tools. For example, HR staff should be familiar with client responsive competency-based HR practices.

Establish and maintain initiatives that allow staff feedback and needs to be heard: Ensure that a staff survey is carried out periodically and results are communicated to all relevant staff. Leaders should provide a response on the actions that will be taken or not be taken and the rationale for doing so.

Include client responsive behaviours and competency development as a standing topic in staff meetings: Discuss client responsive commitments, challenges and progress in the office regularly. Identify and list the support that will be provided to accelerate the institutionalisation and incentivising of client responsive processes.

Proactively seek feedback from staff: Leaders asking for feedback from staff is just as important as providing feedback and it is an integral aspect of promoting a client responsive culture. This should be done at various levels to gain trust and confidence of the staff.

Reward and recognise staff: Where possible, reward and recognise staff demonstrating outstanding client responsive behaviour that can be modelled by others. Be aware that singling out a staff for recognition may be perceived as unfair. Be sure to spread recognition around, making sure everyone gets a fair share.

Follow up faithfully: Leaders should faithfully follow up any commitments made towards client responsive behaviours and actions. Leaders should ensure concerns and issues raised are addressed in a timely and consistent manner.

Influence donors: Leaders could influence donors to allocate more resources for Client Responsive Programming by sharing the difference that client responsive approach has made in programme quality.

Sample Questions for Asking Feedback:

1. Was my feedback helpful in improving your client responsive behaviour?
2. What else might I have done to make that feedback even more useful?
3. What specific support do you need from me right now?
4. What can I do more?

Endnotes

- 1 In this document, the term “intended client” is used to refer to a person who is targeted by planned or existing IRC aid / services (e.g. eligible people living in a program catchment area). The term “direct client” refers to a person who is receiving the IRC aid and / or services (e.g. patients in an IRC clinic)
- 2 The Grand Bargain Explained, An ICVA Briefing Paper, March 2017
- 3 The list of effective and limiting behaviours should assist managers and staff to recognise client responsive behaviours. It relies on behaviour indicators that are validated either through research or existing documents such as *Dan Kealey's A Profile of the Interculturally Effective Person, Core Humanitarian Competencies Framework, other research papers.*
- 4 Example: Online self-study course on accountability to affected populations: <https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=611>
Check for regular updates on upcoming events at <https://www.chsalliance.org/our-events/events>

Annex 1: Client Responsive Competencies: Skills, Knowledge, Behaviour and Attitude 🗣️

I. Solicit and listen to feedback and others' perspectives:

Listening skills: Actively listens to others' ideas and viewpoints.

Curiosity: Stays interested in and seeks out others' ideas and values others' perspectives. Learns from the clients.

Facilitation skills: Guides discussions, and encourages others to share their opinions and gain clarity in their ideas. Giving feedback is not easy.

Inclusiveness: Works with colleagues, partners and clients from diverse backgrounds and levels of seniority. Gives equitable treatment to different people's viewpoints.

Culturally sensitive: Adjusts ways of communicating and interacting according to the context and literacy level; is aware of existing power structures in the community and acts in an appropriate manner that does not reinforce them.

II. Respond to feedback with maturity and sensitivity:

Empathy: Possesses a willingness to relate to others' perspectives; is open-minded when receiving criticism or listening to others' frustrations.

Optimism: Stays positive in the face of criticism and what may be unreasonable or unrealistic demands.

Humility: Reflects on personal behaviour, capacity and practice.

III. Take appropriate decisions and make changes to behaviour or actions in response to feedback:

Learning and adaptation: Seeks to be capable of and works towards change and improvement based on feedback and learning.

Accountability: Holds themselves and others accountable for their decisions and actions.

Annex 2: Relationship with Existing Policies at the IRC

In line with its Strategy 2020, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is committed to becoming more responsive to its clients. Strategic objective on client responsiveness is implemented together with the cross-cutting commitment to achieve gender equality in our programming and our organisation.

Developing competencies for client responsiveness should not be an isolated initiative. There are existing IRC policies with similar outcomes of increased accountability and performance such as the IRC Way, IRCS Success Model and the Leadership Standards. Client responsiveness acts as catalyst to achieve the goals set in these policies at IRC.



See below to learn which IRC behaviour standards directly correspond to competencies for client responsiveness, marked with the client responsiveness logo: 🗣️

“We want to serve our clients in ways that are appropriate and useful in their eyes.”

- IRC 2020 Strategy



How are we all expected to conduct ourselves at the IRC?

- » Integrity
- » Service
- » Accountability 🗣️



The IRC Way

INTEGRITY | ACCOUNTABILITY | SERVICE
Colleagues | Clients | Donors | Suppliers
Partners | Organization | Society

How do we all achieve success at the IRC?

By being...

- » Receptive 🗣️
- » Resourceful
- » Resilient 🗣️
- » Results-Oriented



IRC Success Model

What do we expect from our leaders at the IRC?

FOR ALL PEOPLE MANAGERS:

Get results through others by...

- » Managing Performance
- » Developing Direct Reports
- » Sharing Time & Credit
- » Creating A Collaborative Environment 🗣️

FOR SENIOR LEADERS:

Lead strategically by...

- » Impacting Critical Decisions
- » Unifying Functions
- » Promoting Accountability 🗣️
- » Sponsoring High Performers



Want to learn more? Contact learning@rescue.org

Annex 3: Client Responsive Roles and Responsibility at the IRC

Function	Client Responsive Roles and Responsibilities
Senior Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support resource allocation, advocacy and policy setting that facilitate the development of competencies for client responsiveness. Create a culture of client responsiveness by requesting for and using client feedback data to make decisions. ☞ Model client responsive behaviours by being responsive to staff and stakeholders. Integrate clients' perspectives into major programming decisions and Country Strategy Action Plans. ☞
Monitoring & Evaluation Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support project teams to set up the mechanisms to collect, compile and understand clients' perspectives. ☞
Grants and Compliance Teams Awards Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that proposals include an adequate budget for personnel, technology, and activities needed to collect and analyse client perspectives. Structure grants in a way that allows for flexibility during implementation. Support project teams to ensure that donor commitments to client responsive programming are fully met.
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support project teams' search for and identification of potential staff that have the qualities needed to be client responsive. ☞ Assist supervisors to design capacity-building initiatives and monitor performance.
Logistics & Procurement Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take clients' feedback into account when making decisions about what, from whom, and how goods and services are purchased. ☞ Ensure that the Field Teams can adapt quickly based on client feedback.
Security Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain security protocols while allowing project teams the space, time, and flexibility to build relationships.
Measurement Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide standards and tools for the Regional Measurement Action Coordinators (RMACs) / Regional MEAL Coordinators to provide technical support to M&E staff so they feel prepared to support programme teams in capturing, managing, and understanding client perspectives. ☞
Technical Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help programme staff to think about how to apply the client responsive competency in their particular sector, share examples of best practices, and provide advice on technical tasks.

Annex 4: Client Responsiveness Competency-Based Interview Questions

Questions for Staff	Questions for Managers
Listening Skills - Actively listens to others' ideas and viewpoints.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell us about a time you communicated effectively under difficult circumstances. How do you demonstrate to others that you are actively listening? Tell us about a time at work when you objectively considered others' ideas even when they conflicted with your own. Tell us about a time when you had trouble remaining focused on your audience. How did you handle this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How would you ensure that feedback from communities and partners is incorporated into your programme and organisation's work? Give an example when you used your listening skills to solve a problem in your team. Give an example where your listening skills proved crucial to an outcome.
Curiosity – Stays interested in and seeks out others' ideas and values others' perspectives.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think of a situation where you had to seek out information or learn about new issues or trends in order to resolve a problem. What steps did you take to gain a greater understanding of the problem or issue? Tell us something new you have taught yourself in the last six months. How did you go about teaching yourself this new skill or idea, and what was the result? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe a time when you have shown genuine interest in the work of another department or unit in your office. What was the outcome of this? Think of a situation you encountered in your work life where you sought out information or learned about new issues from one of your stakeholders. What kinds of questions did you ask to gain greater clarity about how to address or resolve the issues or problems? How did you know you had enough information to take action? Describe an experience in which the goal was to facilitate someone else's learning.
Facilitation Skills - Guides discussions, and encourages others to share their opinions and gain clarity in their ideas.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give an example where you promoted a friendly and cooperative climate that proved crucial to the outcome of the discussion. Recall an incident of a dominant person(s) in any setting (meeting, event, etc.). What actions did you take to reduce the impact of these dominant person(s)? Share an experience when you worked with a difficult person and how you handled the situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do you ensure that every member of the team participates? What makes you most uncomfortable when facilitating? What's your approach for creating trust and engagement with your clients?
Inclusiveness - Works with colleagues, partners and clients from diverse backgrounds and levels of seniority.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What have you done in your work to ensure that diverse needs are catered to and included in your planning process? What do you see as the most beneficial aspect of inclusiveness in the work that you do? What do you see as the most challenging aspect of working in a diverse environment? What steps have you taken to address this challenge? Describe the most effective techniques you have used to encourage full participation from every member of a team you were part of. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell us about a time when you had to adapt your work and plans to ensure that what was delivered was of use to or inclusive of all members of the community? Give specific examples of how your programme/unit is committed to gender, diversity and inclusivity dimensions. What were the challenges in doing this? Describe a challenging experience about working with people from diverse backgrounds. What would you do differently? Share some of the challenges you have experienced leading a diverse team. What would you do differently?

<p>Cultural Sensitivity - Adjusts ways of communicating and interacting according to the context and literacy level; is aware of existing power structures in the community and acts in an appropriate manner that does not reinforce them.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give an example of a situation or project where a positive outcome depended on the work of people with a wide range of backgrounds and ideas. Give an example of when you had to communicate an important message or piece of information. How did you prepare to deliver the message based on your context? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell us about a time when you included someone in your team or a project because you felt they would bring something different to the team. Recall an incident where you demonstrated cultural flexibility in a cultural context that was different to yours. How did the affected people respond to this?
<p>Empathy - Possesses a willingness to relate to others' perspectives; is open-minded when receiving criticism or listening to others' frustrations.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recall an incident where an aid worker behaved disrespectfully with the affected population. What was the implication of this behaviour? How do you think managers can demonstrate greater empathy to staff? What role does empathy play in your work? Give an example where you needed to show empathy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recall an incident at work when you had to put yourself in the other person's shoes. What changed? How do you think aid workers can demonstrate greater empathy to crisis-affected people?
<p>Optimism - Stays positive in the face of criticism and what may be unreasonable or unrealistic demands.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was the last stressful situation you were in? What did you do to handle the pressure? Tell us about a project where you achieved success despite the odds being stacked against you. How did you overcome those challenges? Tell us about your biggest failure. How did you recover and what have you learned from that incident? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give us an example of a situation where you knew that a project or task would place you under great pressure. How did you plan your approach and remain optimistic? Give us an example of a situation where you worked under pressure. Give an example when you have observed one of your team members was not coping well with stress. What did you do and what was the outcome?
<p>Humility - Reflects on personal behaviour, capacity and practice.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can you recall a time when you received potentially discouraging feedback from a manager or colleague? Did you feel it was valid and how did you respond? What would you do if a colleague criticised your management of a situation unfairly? Tell us about a time when a mistake you made affected others and how you dealt with this. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you had a situation where you had to admit that you had made a mistake to others and how did you handle it? Share an example of when your team member/s pointed out a mistake you made. How did you react? How did you react when you were asked to do something beyond your capability?
<p>Learning and Adaptation - Seeks to be capable of and works towards change and improvement based on feedback and learning.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give an example of when you had to change your work plan quite significantly and suddenly. How did you feel about it and what was the outcome? Tell us about the biggest change that you have had to deal with. How did you cope with it? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How have you ensured that feedback from your client (partners/affected population/colleagues/government officials) is incorporated into the organisation's future work? Provide an example of when you set expectations and monitored the performance of staff. What guidance and direction did you find most effective?
<p>Accountability - Holds themselves and others accountable for their decisions and actions.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What has been your experience of promoting accountability in your programme or unit? What was successful and why? Tell us about a time when you were accountable for the completion of a major task. What was the outcome? What would you do differently? What would you do if your supervisor asked you to do something against the humanitarian principles or standards? Tell us about a time when you have come under pressure to sacrifice quality in order to get work done on time. What did you do? What would you do differently? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisations have a tendency to raise expectations of crisis-affected people. How can organisations collect, analyse, and disseminate information without raising expectations? Give an example when you were asked to do something against the humanitarian principles or standards. What did you do? What was the implication of your action? Share an example of when you demonstrated accountability to other stakeholders. Why is being accountable to the affected people important? How do we ensure the right level of accountability?

Annex 5: Onboarding Check List for Client Responsiveness

Following are some suggested onboarding activities for a new staff member that can be carried out by the different groups in the organisation.

Onboarding Activity Related to Client Responsiveness for Human Resources

- ▶ Introduce client responsive behaviour, skills, knowledge and attitudes (See *Annex 1: Client Responsive Competencies*) together with organisational Gender Equality Policy.
- ▶ Describe the organisational culture based on client responsiveness and the role of staff in developing this culture.
- ▶ Share the client responsive effective and limiting behaviours (See *Annex 7: Effective and Limiting Behaviours*).
- ▶ Conduct cultural orientation and link it to the relevant client responsive behaviour, skills, knowledge and attitudes.
- ▶ Guide the new staff to complete the client responsive competency self-assessment form.
- ▶ Identify the gaps and priorities to include in the Goal Setting Form (see *Annex 8: IRC Goal Setting Form*).

Onboarding Activity Related to Client Responsiveness for Managers

- ▶ Clarify the client responsive behaviour, skills, knowledge and attitudes that are pertinent to the job. Share your expectations in this regard.
- ▶ Discuss the client responsive competency assessment outcome. Identify strengths and areas of improvement.
- ▶ Identify priorities to develop the client responsive competency for the Goal Setting Form (see *Annex 8: IRC Goal Setting Form*).
- ▶ Introduce the complaint channels in the organisation.
- ▶ Have regular check-ins throughout the onboarding period to discuss progress and to provide for developing a client responsive competency.

Onboarding Activity Related to Client Responsiveness for Client Responsive Focal Person

- ▶ Introduce the Client Responsive Programming approach and the minimum level of knowledge expected of all staff.
- ▶ Introduce the feedback cycle (feedback and response mechanisms).
- ▶ Introduce the client responsiveness measurement framework or indicators integrated in other outcome measurement frameworks.

Annex 6: IRC 90 Day Action Plan

Refer to the guidance to managers preparing the plan.

Refer to the guidance for new employees.



Employee Name

Key Objectives for the first 90 days	Accomplishments	Date Completed
1.		
2.		
3.		
Key Learning Priorities for the first 90 days	Learning Method and Timeframe	Date Completed
1.		
2.		
3.		
Priority Meetings with Key Partners/Counterparts within and outside the IRC	Date Scheduled	Date Completed
1.		
2.		
3.		
Field/Site Visits and/or Staff Exchanges	Date Scheduled	Date Completed
1.		
2.		
3.		

Annex 7: Client Responsive Core Competency: Effective and Limiting Behaviours

Effective Behaviour	Limiting Behaviour
Listening Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively listens to others' ideas and viewpoints. Restates (or reformulates) what others have said individually or in a group. Incorporates feedback from clients into programmes or service design, delivery and learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lacks respect towards speaker and being focused on one's own reaction or contribution rather than listening and understanding what the other person says. Easily distracted with or consumed by devices such as mobile phone, laptop, etc. Displays offensive attitudes towards clients.
Curiosity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Displays genuine interest in the work of others and new approaches. Asks questions designed to get to the root of a situation, a problem or a potential opportunity beyond the surface issues presented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows indifference and lack of interest to learn from clients on how to do things better. Focuses on quick "prepared" solutions even when timeline allows for deeper analysis and learning from the field.
Facilitation Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guides discussions, and supports others to express their views and gain clarity in their ideas. Is supportive and respectful of clients and offers both constructive challenges and support. Finds ways to ensure that more introverted or reticent individuals do not miss out in discussions and decision-making. Takes tactful actions to reduce the impact of more dominant members who might hinder the learning of quieter members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dominates discussions and adopts top-down approaches instead of facilitating participation. Interrupts unnecessarily and undermines partners' contributions to the group. Communicates in languages, formats or media that are difficult to understand, disrespectful or inappropriate. Responds to clients in a generic way, irrespective of varying needs.
Inclusiveness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works closely to take on perspectives of colleagues, partners and clients from diverse backgrounds. Sees cultural diversity as an opportunity to create an environment where diverse people can thrive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insensitive to gender, cultural diversity and inclusiveness. Does not acknowledge expertise or knowledge of others, and ignores or dismisses information that contradicts own point of view. Is disrespectful and does not relate well to people from varied backgrounds.
Cultural Sensitivity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjusts ways of communicating and interacting according to the cultural and political context, and literacy level but does not reinforce existing power structures in the community. Can maintain harmonious relations even when disagreeing with others. Applies understanding of the cultural context in the operating environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently fails to acknowledge cultural or political contexts in discussions. Culturally inept and places own needs above that of others. Insensitive to the needs of individuals with different perspectives.



Empathy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possesses a willingness to relate to perspectives of others. • Is non-defensive when receiving criticism or in hearing grievances. • Can entertain thoughts such as 'if I were in this person's shoes, I would think or do this.' • Accurately describes the rationale of others for doing and proposing things, not necessarily agreeing with them but understands and respects their views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick to criticise others without putting oneself in other people's shoes. • Out of touch with people that are suffering or are less fortunate. • Opinionated and believes in the rightness of his/her own ideas and beliefs, and judges anyone who does not share similar views as wrong, ignorant or stupid.
Optimism	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stays positive in the face of criticisms and what may be unreasonable or unrealistic demands. • Persistent in seeking goals despite obstacles and setbacks. • Operates from hope of success rather than fear of failure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sees obstacles in every opportunity or crisis. • Tends to give up easily when faced with challenges. • Tends to dwell on problems, hold grudges and refuse to let things go.
Humility	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflects on personal behaviour, capacity and practice. • Does not give the impression of self importance and superiority even if power and respect does accompany his/her position in the organisation. • Willing to periodically question his/her own way of doing things. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not accept criticism from others. • Refuses to admit own failings and blames others instead. • Unaware of the impact of change on self and others.
Learning and Adaptation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks to and is capable of change and improvement based on feedback and learning. • Provides regular and ongoing informal and formal feedback. • Demonstrates initiative and suggests creative improvements and better ways of working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remains stuck in old ways of doing things and is reluctant to move out of existing comfort zone. • Displays unhelpful or negative behaviour when facing challenges. • Resists adapting behaviours and actions to changing situations and contexts.
Accountability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds oneself and others accountable for the decisions and actions taken. • Promotes and ensures compliance with humanitarian standards and principles that govern staff behaviours. • Ensures efficient and transparent use of resources in accordance with internal control mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is preoccupied solely by donor requirements, rather than client or organisational priorities. • Tolerates behaviours which negatively impact the development, performance and morale of clients. • Uses influence in a way that compromises professional and personal integrity.

Annex 8: IRC Goal Setting Form

PeopleMatter.

The 3-2-1 Goal Setting Form

Review Period: From _____ To _____

EMPLOYEE

Employee Name: _____ Title: _____ Date: _____

Work with your manager to discuss and agree on at least 3 goals for your work over the next 3-6 months.

Try to write at least 2-3 performance goals, focused on your key areas of responsibility. Then, write 1 goal about an area of growth/development. For the development goal, consider an existing strength you would like to advance, or a challenging area you wish to improve in.

Your goals should be SMART (specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, timebound). For tips on creating SMART goals, [click here](#). For an e-learning module on how to write a good goal, [click here](#).

GOAL 1

GOAL 2

GOAL 3

GOAL 4 (Optional)

GOAL 5 (Optional)

Employee Signature:

Manager Signature:

Date: _____

Date: _____



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RESCUE
COMMITTEE

International Rescue Committee (IRC) responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people to survive and rebuild their lives. Founded in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein, the IRC offers life-saving care and life-changing assistance to refugees forced to flee from war, persecution or natural disaster. At work today in over 40 countries and 29 cities in the United States, we restore safety, dignity and hope to millions who are uprooted and struggling to endure. The IRC leads the way from harm to home.

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