

Ethical Hotline for Reports in Mexico

The Ethical Reporting Line (*Línea Ética de Denuncia-LED*) is a service through which the Mexican Supreme Audit Institution, the *Auditoría Superior de la Federación (ASF)*, gathers citizens' denunciations and comments in order to consider them as inputs for the Annual Audit Program. Set in place in November 2010, LED operates through a hotline (01 800 911-7373), where calls may be anonymous, and a website hosted in the ASF's portal, where any person who sees an inadequate use of public resources may file a report.

LED is a mechanism through which the ASF seeks to reach out to citizens in order to obtain information that helps the ASF improve their work, while at the same time establishing a communication channel with the ASF for concerned citizens, thus strengthening transparency and participation in the ASF's work.

Background

The ASF was created in 1999, following a series of constitutional amendments. It was granted with technical and management autonomy over its internal organization and functioning, decisions, and budget. It is granted authority to audit all public institutions that manage federal resources, including those at the state and municipal levels. Ever since its creation, a series of legal reforms have strengthened the ASF in order to improve the quality and broaden the scope of its work.

In tune with the international and regional trends concerning SAIs, as stated in various international agreements such as those of the OLACEFS, INTOSAI, and ISSAI, as of 2010, the ASF established as one of its institutional objectives to reach out to citizens and to increase the impact of their audit reports on government-society relations. In particular, the ASF seeks to transform the institution's audit report into a key reference document for those citizens interested in the accountability agenda. In the end, this institutional objective provides a social meaning to the control process. The objective that lies under the introduction of this mechanism is to achieve a greater impact on the public opinion.

Before LED was established, reports were received through an e-mail address that was set for this purpose. Reports received through this e-mail were rather general and were related mainly with unduly behavior by public employees. The only similar experience in the Mexican federal public administration is a report line at the Public Administration Ministry. However, this line is aimed at registering corruption reports of specific employees so that the internal control agencies may audit them directly, and if proved responsible penalize them. The ASF used this experience as a reference in its process to establish LED.

To design this practice, the ASF considered the following international references: *Fraudnet* at the US's Government Accountability Office, and practices at the SAIs of Denmark, Paraguay and Venezuela.

Implementation

LED was approved by the ASF's Board of Directors in September 2010. It was first implemented as a pilot project, from November 2010 to March 2011. For this purpose, a private company was hired to establish a call center and to create a website, through which reports were received. The company prepared weekly reports for the ASF. For this stage, a budget of around USD15,000 was allocated.

Following this trial period, the ASF decided to design and implement its own platform, with ASF's resources and personnel, and started operating it in May 2011. The tools used were flow diagrams (to define the processes that needed to be followed to run the LED and manage reports), the website, and the telephone line.

From the beginning, an average of two reports per day was received. LED is designed to receive reports during the whole year, which may be integrated into the Annual Audit Plan. LED operates all throughout the country; however the ASF is mandated to audit only federal resources. When reports are related to state resources or to other entities, they are channeled to the corresponding control agency or body, and the person who reported is informed about such process.

People who use LED have very different objectives and expectations with their reports. Many of them cannot be handled by the ASF, so they are channeled to the relevant entities. The Outreach Office is in

charge of receiving the reports and summarizing the information in a report to be delivered to the Office of Planning and Strategic Issues, which reviews the reports and selects those that can be audited by the ASF. Subsequently, this office analyzes the relevance, pertinence, and feasibility of the reports, in order to suggest a new audit is started or changing the focus of an ongoing audit. Communication among the ASF's units is registered in a micro site within the ASF's portal.

Critical issues and achievements

Among the critical factors in this experience, two can be highlighted. First is the commitment on the part of the ASF's top authorities in order to make the project work. Second, it was central to have an adequate planning (ever since the ASF's Board of Directors decided to implement the LED to the drafting of the terms of reference and contracting of the service, until when LED was incorporated as part of the agency's institutional activities).

Some legislators showed interest in LED, as a useful instrument to reinforce certain cases of misuse of public resources in, for example, the provision of medical attention and treatments. These legislators considered it important to publicize LED among citizens and use their official time in radio for such purpose.

However, the generalized lack of knowledge about the ASF's specific tasks on the part of citizens and its limited dissemination are the main limitations of this practice. Thus, it is crucial to clearly communicate what LED offers and to be explicit with the person filing the report, in order to prevent unmet expectations about the issues that may be resolved. Often times, citizens confuse the mandate of the ASF with that of other institutions, which in practice translates in reports about situations that are other agency's responsibility. In effect, there is a communication problem. While the ASF sees LED's reports as inputs for its work, citizens might see LED as a line through which corruption or bribery can be directly resolved. In order to avoid such expectations, the ASF has been training the staff in charge of receiving reports to clearly communicate that the ASF's task is to control and audit, as well as the time implications of the work of the ASF. They try to make it very clear what is it that the ASF can do and what not.

Implementing partners

Several units of the ASF intervene in the implementation:

- The Head of the ASF took the initiative.
- The Board of Directors approved the initiative.
- The Liaison Unit administers the calls and the website.
- The Office of Planning and Strategic Issues produces the reports and reflects its contents in the ASF's work.

Website

<http://www.asf.gob.mx:8086/>

Additional resources

Iniciativa TPA, "México. Ethical Hotline for Citizen Denounces in the Auditoría Superior de la Federación".

<http://iniciativatpa.org/2012/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Informe-M%C3%A9xico.pdf>