

Giving Feedback to Volunteers

The purpose of this quick guide is to provide information and tips on giving feedback to volunteers, feedback can be about a job well done or about ways a volunteer can grow and improve.

Giving feedback

Feedback can be given to volunteers both formally and informally. On a day-to-day basis, informal feedback can be part of supervision of activities. Formal feedback is usually given as part of a formal check in or review process. Formal feedback should be guided by your organisation's policies and procedures.

If feedback is provided effectively, it can both motivate and inspire a volunteer to do better. However, when feedback is handled poorly, it can result in lack of motivation, frustration, and possible damage to the relationship. Effective feedback is more likely to ensure that a volunteer will continue in their role. In the case of any formal feedback, document the feedback to finalise the process and provide records for any future needs as per your organisation's policies and procedures.

Some tips for giving effective feedback include:

1. Be immediate

The time to give any form of feedback is as soon as possible during or after an event or activity. The immediate acknowledgement of a job well done is an important and effective way of recognising the efforts of a volunteer. Constructive feedback should be raised as near to the situation as possible. This makes it easier for you and the volunteer to address the situation and move forward. It is important feedback is given in an appropriate setting, ensuring confidentiality and the volunteer is given time to process the feedback as well as make comment or respond.

Giving feedback tips (continued)

2. Be prepared

Prior to scheduling a time to provide feedback make sure that you are prepared and considered the approach to the conversation. This is particularly important when approaching a situation which is likely to involve a volunteer's performance. If necessary, consider an alternative time and place to provide feedback. It may be helpful to confidentially discuss with a supervisor or manager, before giving any constructive feedback.

In order to demonstrate to a volunteer that they have had a positive impact, be conscious of their preferred form of recognition and the most appropriate setting to give feedback. Some people prefer feedback privately rather than public recognition or others enjoy hearing their successes shared with the team.

3. Be an active listener

Providing a volunteer with feedback is an opportunity to encourage effective communication on an ongoing basis. Take the opportunity to listen to how they view their volunteering experiences. This can enable both your organisation and the volunteer to share ideas and make relevant decisions for the future.

In responding to a situation which may have a negative impact on the organisation, effective feedback and solutions can come from the volunteer themselves. Prior to giving the volunteer your perspective about a situation, ask the volunteer how they see things. This is as an opportunity to solve the situation at hand, with the volunteer taking a lead on reflecting and coming up with possible solutions.

4. Be relevant

Ensure feedback is meaningful and to the point. Discuss what you or other people have witnessed or reported to you that is relevant to the matter or identified issue.

5. Be objective

The method in which feedback is provided will directly impact on the way in which the volunteer will interpret their need to make changes or respond differently in the future. Give them the opportunity to discuss without interruption. Then, in your own words, you can repeat back to the volunteer what you have heard them say. If emotions take over, it may be necessary to schedule another time to continue the discussion and possible resolution of the issue.

6. Be positive

Discussing the situation and focussing on actions and an agreed plan will help to lead towards positive outcomes.

Acknowledgement

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