



7. TIP SHEET 5: RECEIVING AND USING FEEDBACK FROM VOLUNTEERS

USING COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES TO ENCOURAGE FEEDBACK FROM VOLUNTEERS

Using communication techniques such as open-ended questions, active listening, and appropriate non-verbal signals, will make your volunteers feel comfortable providing feedback to you.

Here is how you can do this.

OPEN QUESTIONS

Open questions don't have a straight 'yes' or 'no' answer. Using open questions is an effective way of encouraging someone to open up and provide more information.

Here are some examples:

CLOSED QUESTION	OPEN QUESTION
Did you enjoy that training exercise?	What did you enjoy about that training exercise?
Are you able to handle that task?	What support or help do you need to get that task done?
Didn't you understand the instructions?	Which part of the instruction was unclear?

ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening means showing the person you are talking to that you understand what they are trying to communicate. According to best practice, there are five rules for active listening:

RULE	DESCRIPTION
Listen to the content of the message	What are they trying to say?
Listen for feelings	How do they feel about what they are saying?
Respond to feelings	Let them know you understand how they feel about the issue
Note all of the cues	Look for non-verbal signals. Do these conflict with what the person is saying?
Restate and rephrase what they have said	Summarise what you think the message content was





USING NON-VERBAL SIGNALS

Keep the following body language in mind when seeking or receiving upward feedback from volunteers:

HAND MOVEMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep your hands open and relaxed, and keep arm movements calm and slow.• Avoid closed fists or hiding your hands, and abrupt movements with your arms.
FACIAL EXPRESSIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turn your head towards the volunteer and match your facial expressions to what your volunteer is saying - this is a good way to show empathy.• Nodding and smiling can also help the volunteer feel heard and that it is safe for them to speak up.
EYE CONTACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain a good amount of eye contact. Not so much that you make the volunteers feel uncomfortable, but enough to let them know that you are interested in what they have to say.
USE OF INTERPERSONAL SPACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lean your body slightly towards the volunteer, rather than away from them.• Keep your arms and legs uncrossed.• At the same time, keep an appropriate amount of interpersonal space between you and the volunteer - enough that they feel like they have your attention, but not close enough that they feel uncomfortable.

All of these will have an effect on how comfortable a volunteer feels coming to you with any issues or ideas. Thus, it is important to remember to keep your body language open (e.g., relaxed posture, uncrossed arms, maintained eye contact), as opposed to closed (e.g., tense posture, crossed arms, little eye contact), to signal your willingness to get elaborate and honest feedback from your volunteers.

