



3. TIP SHEET 2: SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION

DECIDING WHAT INFORMATION TO SHARE WITH YOUR VOLUNTEERS

Questions to ask your volunteers

Open up a discussion with your volunteers as a group, using the following questions as a starting point:

How do you feel about the amount and type of information I have been sharing with you?

What type of information do you want more of?

What information are you not interested in receiving or do you want less of?

How often should I give you information?

What is the best way to share information with you (e.g., email, in person, notice board)?

What not to share with everyone

There is some information that is not suitable for sharing with all volunteers at your group. For example:

- Operationally sensitive information
- Confidential information
- Personal issues or discipline issues
- Information that is not ready to be shared yet, for example:
 - Potential new equipment or training that has not yet been confirmed
 - Proposed upcoming changes to policies and procedures that have not been confirmed by your agency or emergency service organisation

In terms of information that is not ready to be shared, this is important for managing volunteer expectations. For example, volunteers may become disappointed or disenchanted if they are constantly hearing about exciting new equipment that never materialises.





PROMOTING KNOWLEDGE SHARING AMONG VOLUNTEERS: HOW TO USE EACH OF THE STRATEGIES

Have experienced volunteers train newer volunteers

Setting up a mentoring or buddy system is a great way of encouraging communication and knowledge sharing between newer and more experienced volunteers. This does not need to be a formal system – even informally partnering volunteers up for training or tasks around the group can facilitate sharing and collaboration.

Run training exercises that involve communication and collaboration

Work with your Training Officer to plan training activities and drills that require volunteers to communicate well and work together as a team to achieve a goal. In the debrief afterwards, focus on communication between volunteers during the exercise:

- What went well?
 - Provide examples of good communication that were observed
 - Discuss how this good communication helped performance
- Where did communication break down and why?
 - Work through specific examples as a group
- Identify areas needing improvement
- What do they need to do to make that improvement and what are you going to do to support them?

Create opportunities for volunteers to share their knowledge and skills

A “psychologically safe” climate describes a group atmosphere that allows and encourages open, supportive communication, and it allows individuals to speak up if and when issues arise.

To create a group environment that encourages knowledge-sharing behaviours, you need to create opportunities where your volunteers feel *comfortable*, *safe*, and *heard* to share their knowledge and skills. Ask your volunteers if they have any knowledge or skills (e.g., from other volunteering roles they have been in, skills they have developed from their jobs or workplace, or hobbies) that they could contribute to the group. You can create opportunities for volunteers to share any suggestions or ideas they have on the types of knowledge and skills they could contribute to the group:

At the start of a training exercise

When you are seeking input from the group around a decision

When partnering up volunteers for training or mentoring

If you suspect someone is keeping knowledge or information to themselves

Allowing your volunteers to share and provide their input can lead to innovation and creativity. Be open to listening to their suggestions and ideas. However, before implementing them, make sure that you check against your policies and procedures, as well as with your emergency service organisation, that it is safe and permissible for you to make these changes.





Acknowledge and reward collaborative and sharing behaviours

When you observe or hear about good knowledge-sharing between volunteers, make sure they know that you appreciate it. Thank them for sharing information and tell them how it is benefiting everyone. If a job or training exercise went well, point out how good communication and sharing helped this to happen.

If you have an end-of-year awards night, you could also include an award for the volunteer who has shown the best teamwork or collaboration throughout the year.

Act as a role model

One of the easiest ways to encourage your volunteers to share their knowledge is by sharing knowledge yourself. For example:

- If anyone asks for your advice or input, give it freely and fully
- If you see someone struggling, offer guidance
- When you are telling volunteers about a job, event, or training activity that is coming up, give them all necessary information about it. Explain why it is happening, how people have been chosen to participate, and what to expect

