



Volunteers Giving Volunteers Feedback Questions for Panelists

1) Overall, what are ILTA's strengths and what are its weaknesses in giving feedback to volunteers?

Chris Boyd, ILTA Board Member (CB): Volunteer service is critical to ILTA. It's essential for ILTA to provide value to its members. And it's a phenomenal professional and career development opportunity for individual members.

To get full value from that experience, volunteers should be prepared to both give and receive feedback. They should be recognized and celebrated for strong performance. Noting that strong performance can also pave the way for the volunteer to take on other volunteer leadership positions in the organization.

Volunteers should be prepared to receive constructive feedback. While it's true that no volunteer gets paid for the work, each volunteer is performing important responsibilities for the organization, and needs to perform in order for the organization to deliver value to members.

Strengths as an organization: On the front end of the volunteer selection process, ILTA does a great job of carefully selecting excellent volunteers, e.g. the people in this room. They're smart, competent, dedicated, hard-working and loyal professionals, so overall both likely to get significant positive feedback, and when they get constructive feedback, they're strong and confident enough to receive and act on constructive feedback.

Weaknesses as an organization: The volunteer selection discipline probably hasn't yet flowed through to the downstream feedback. ILTA likely doesn't yet have a systematic enough process for how to give feedback and for ensuring that feedback takes place. That might include a standard process, along with a standard feedback form, and training or tips on how to use them and generally on how to give feedback, combined with ILTA staff help with reminders, logistics, and administration.

2) In your ILTA role, what do you find challenging about providing feedback to volunteers?

CB: Challenging: It's always difficult to deliver constructive feedback to someone who is donating personal time to help the association. Hardest in when someone is repeatedly underperforming and delivering subpar value in a role when someone else could be doing a great job for members; need to move them out of the role at that point.

Rewarding: It's always fun to note when people are performing well and the positive impact their work is having. And while giving constructive feedback can be tough, it's a good learning experience, and a necessary part of continuing to develop as a manager. The process is also a useful opportunity to re-set expectations about the expectations of a volunteer in the role.



3) How about receiving feedback?

CB: It's great to get praise, especially when have worked hard and it's earned. It's also frustrating not to get recognition when you've done that, which is yet another reason why ILTA should have a systematic process for both positive and constructive feedback. Receiving constructive feedback is harder, but when done well, and acted upon, it's even more useful.

4) How does the staff fit into the feedback process?

CB: Provide critical data about individual volunteer contributions and historical comparisons about present vs past performance.

You can provide useful nudges to give feedback, either at defined times in the volunteer group's lifecycle, or just in general. Slack has an app called Donut that connects employees to each other and reminds them to meet for coffee; Lazlo Bock, former Google head of HR, founded a company called Humu whose app, among other things, nudges managers to give employees feedback. Both are effective, and the ILTA staff could play a valuable role by giving similar nudges.

5.) How well does ILTA do in assessing the work of ILTA's volunteer groups? How can and should ILTA relate feedback on the efforts of individual volunteers to their work in these groups?

CB: Currently, it's relatively ad hoc. We developed a feedback process with the Board and staff leaders back in 2013; recommend consulting that and developing a new systematic process. Feedback should be upwards as well.

Jim McKenna, ILTA Board Member (JM): Our collective experience with this is uneven. We do a decent job on giving groups within ILTA feedback, less so to individual members. My suggestion is to agree in advance of an event/presentation/activity what would be the objective success goals. The idea being the people directly involved would be able to say "if we accomplish X, Y, and Z, we'll know it was a success." After the event, everyone openly discusses "did we accomplish X, Y, and Z, what did we learn, and what improvements will we make next time?"

Questions for Hedda Rublin, Consultant

1) Hedda, you have worked with non-for-profits your entire career. Why is it important to provide feedback to volunteers?

Response: It's human nature – we all want feedback on how we have performed. Volunteers are often the lifeblood of nonprofits – when they succeed, the organization succeeds. Feedback provides more genuine opportunities for the volunteer to learn and grow. And, it is more satisfying for the volunteer, sends the message that they are valued enough that they are getting feedback

Genuine culture of learning is embraced, and volunteering ultimately is more satisfying – volunteers feel that someone is paying attention to what they are doing and that they care.



Volunteers deserve feedback and the chance to grow, not doing the role justice if you don't give them that feedback

2) What mechanisms have you seen organizations employ for “institutionalizing” the feedback process?

Response: Develop volunteer job descriptions, recruit and screen folks who are a good match, and use both formal and informal feedback – in both spoken and written form. Feedback should be Regularly scheduled, In real time – give positive and negative feedback.

Assuming volunteers stay for more than one year, have a written record of issues. Then, volunteer committees can self evaluate their work, can put individual reviews into this larger context.

Individual self evaluations also helpful. It requires time and thought – make sure to allocate both and don't wing it. This is a tall order for volunteers but it is vitally important.

3) What appears to work well? What appears to be problematic?

Response:

Works well:

- Let someone know that you are giving them feedback – upfront and in the moment
- Provide plenty of positive as well as negative feedback, otherwise, it is only criticism and folks are more likely to get defensive
- Focus on what versus why – with both positive and negative feedback – give specific examples rather than theorizing about why someone behaves as they do
- Describe the impact (both positive and negative) of what someone is doing on the organization – it helps to depersonalize concerns
- Provide Individual one on one feedback– not in front of others when providing constructive criticism, positive feedback can be given publicly
- View it as a problem solving conversation – try to be helpful without being overly directive
- Ask questions that can help volunteers come to their own conclusions
- Be direct, honest and fully present
- In real-time, but sometimes need to be mindful of other realities
- In challenging situations, can be helpful to prepare a script – don't be afraid to be direct
- All feedback should be framed around what is best for the organization –it's not personal

What is problematic:

- Not providing feedback because volunteers are providing their services for free, Devalues their work
- Avoiding difficult conversation – issues fester
- Can volunteers be fired, answer is yes when necessary

4.) What are the risks to an organization that is poor at volunteer feedback?

Response: Quality control – quality of work of volunteer may not be up to the organization's



standards, and it may have negative impact on brand. If a volunteer has a frustrating experience, and doesn't learn, they may walk away. It may also discourage, alienate or lose other volunteers - things don't get done well.

Effective volunteers may get discouraged that issues with ineffective volunteers are not addressed and/or when group processes are less successful.

5.) Are there any traits, skills, etc. on which we should focus in giving volunteers feedback?

Response: Tie it to the job descriptions and knowledge skills and attributes tied to those roles
Situation specific overall, might also tie it to ILTA's values.

Questions To All:

1.) How do "ineffective" volunteers impact an organization?

Hedda Rublin (HR): Negative impact on brand and on ability to recruit others. Negative impact on getting the job done.

CB: They hamper its ability to deliver value to members. They take up a volunteer role that a stronger performer could occupy and set a bad example for other volunteers and for potential volunteers

2.) What are the benefits to the giver in a feedback situation?

CB: There are outcome benefits and process benefits. **Outcomes:** with positive feedback, recognize strong performers, which they always appreciate, and are thus more likely to retain them in critical volunteer roles. With constructive feedback, address and potentially fix areas that have been hampering the group's ability to perform to full potential and deliver value to members. And if the person is truly a poor fit for the role, either because they're too busy with day jobs or other responsibilities, or sometimes because of innate shortcomings, then you can help that person realize that perhaps the role is not for them. **Process:** Can learn a lot from delivering ILTA volunteer feedback that can apply to your paid jobs. Can also strengthen relationships with volunteer colleagues.

HR: Learning how to give constructive feedback, and realizing that you are helping someone who truly cares about the organization to better leverage their talents. You do not have to feel that you have to sit on your concerns. You are playing an important role in a volunteer driven organization. Feedback is a formal helpful vehicle for channeling concerns so that issue is addressed and there is resolution.

3) What advice would you give our volunteer leaders and staff for giving feedback within ILTA? Receiving feedback?

CB: Do it. In addition to noting each volunteer's specific contributions, consider assessing their



performance in (a) participation, (b) communication, (c) teamwork, and (d) ILTA ambassadorship.

HR: Embrace a culture that seeks and values feedback as a tool for self-improvement and learning. Recognize that it requires thought and time, allocate both, don't wing it. When receiving feedback, strive not to become defensive, look at it as an opportunity for personal growth and learning, recognize that it is about helping ILTA to be as strong as it can be.

JM: Stress that the conversation is about a topic and not the people. For example, we all want ILTA to continuously improve ILTA. Questions such as "what we can we do to improve ILTA" are very powerful and constructive as compared to "here's what you did wrong". My advice is to focus the feedback on the thing being discussed and partner with the person(s) to identify ways we can work together to make the improvements.

4.) What are the most important takeaways from this discussion?

Peter Qumsiyeh, ILTA Volunteer: It's always easy (and a pleasure actually) to give positive feedback. Providing negative feedback can be difficult, especially to non-paid volunteers. You can make it easier by focusing on the positive then suggesting a way to improve next time. For example: "I really liked your presentation, your analysis was clear and concise. If I can make one suggestion, perhaps next time you can try including an example or two, that might really get people's attention."

On a similar note, it's easier to give feedback to employees that are getting paid. It's also easier to "fire" an employee. How do you "fire" a volunteer? This should always be the last resort. The first step should be helping the volunteer by providing constructive feedback (see #1 above). If that fails, try reassigning the volunteer to a different job/role utilizing his/her strength. If that fails too, then they likely will not be selected for a future volunteer opportunity. On the flip side to this, excellent volunteers who go above and beyond will likely be involved in leadership-type roles, even if they are not in leadership-type roles at their companies/firms.

ILTA has the best volunteers in the world. Other organizations should learn from ILTA how to recruit amazing volunteers like the ones we have, who are willing to dedicate their time and effort to keep this great volunteer-led organization moving forward. We are truly lucky to have this community of volunteers we have today. Keep up the good work!

Finally, a shout-out to the ILTA staff. There are so few of them, and so many different volunteer groups, but yet they keep up with all current work-streams and development of content. They do an amazing job keeping the volunteers engaged and ensuring the projects and initiatives continue to move forward. Thank an ILTA volunteer when you get the chance!