Volunteer Accountability
Providing Performance Feedback for Volunteers

Accountability is important, whether or not someone is getting paid to do work. Additionally, leaders have the responsibility to provide positive and negative feedback to those they supervise to ensure the further development of the individual volunteer as well as the organization as a whole. As a Volunteer Leader for AFA, one of your roles is to train, supervise, and develop volunteers so they have an experience that is beneficial to them personally and professionally (skill development, new experiences, increased professional network) as well as beneficial to the Association.

Providing negative feedback or addressing volunteer performance issues (e.g., follow through, output quality, communication styles, etc.) is often the toughest task AFA Volunteer Leaders face. When confronted with a situation where volunteer performance needs to be addressed, begin by reflecting on the following tips and questions.

Tips for Performance Conversations:

- Have the conversation privately over the phone. Email feedback is great for small day-to-day items, but performance feedback is best given in person. In most cases AFA's volunteers work together at a distance, so over the phone is often the best option.
- Address the problem, not the person. Keep the conversation non-personal.
- Listen to the volunteer's perspective and genuinely address concerns.
- Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements. Using the word "you" can automatically make the person feel defensive. It also makes it difficult for the person to separate the behavior from the person, which may cause a negative reaction to the feedback.
- Use the word "and" instead of "but". Using the word "but" can automatically negate everything you said before the "but", no matter how positive it was.
    - Wrong way: Mike, you're always willing to volunteer to help the group, which is beneficial, but you frequently need to be reminded about deadlines. What can you do to improve the situation?
    - Right way: Mike, I feel that you're always willing to volunteer to help the group, which is beneficial, and I frequently need to remind you about deadlines. What can I do to help?

Step 1 - Determining Importance

How important is this issue? Some performance problems have a huge impact on the rest of the committee/workgroup/ editorial board, the supervisor, and/or the Association. Others are not as serious. The level of importance needs to be determined before one can properly assess the problem and move toward taking action. Here are some important questions to consider:
- Is the performance problem important? Why or why not?
- Whom does the performance problem impact?
- How does the performance problem impact specific people or the Association?
- What would happen if I did nothing?
- Would it be beneficial to the volunteer personally or professionally to address the issue?

Step 2 - Assessing the Problem

1. Are the expectations clear?

Yes

Reassert expectations and obtain a recommitment.

No

Take the time to review expectations in detail and dually commit to them.

2. Is the problem a skill deficiency?
Does the person know what to do?
Could they do it if their life depended on it?

Yes

What (re)training is needed?
Execute training and return to 1.

No

Where is the gap?
What is the difference between what is supposed to be happening and what is currently happening?

3. Are there negative effects on the current performance?
Are there consequences for nonperformance?

Yes

What are the negative effects?
What impact do they have on the volunteer and on the organization?
Assess and return to 2.

No

Volunteer supervisor should reflect on their own ability to give feedback.
Assess and return to 1.

4. Does performing well matter to this person?

Yes

What types of rewards and feedback mean the most to this person?
What motivates them?
Return to 1.

No

Assess the person's commitment and give them the opportunity to leave on their own accord.

5. Are there obstacles to performing well?
Are there demands on the person's time?
Is there access to the necessary resources?
Is interference or micromanaging an issue?

Yes

What are the obstacles? If they need to be eliminated, who is responsible for doing so?
Return to 2.

No

Reassess commitment.
Return to 4.

*Model is loosely based on Mager and Pipe's Performance Analysis and Needs Assessment