

Giving and receiving

FEEDBACK

Feedback is an essential part of ACSW's Competence Program. It helps us gain insight into our strengths, identify areas for further development, and remain accountable to the standards of our profession.

By inviting and reflecting on feedback, we become more intentional in our practice and better equipped to set meaningful professional development goals that support continuous growth.



Feedback is also one source of evidence that social workers can include in their portfolios to demonstrate completion of a professional development activity. Documenting feedback shows engagement in ongoing learning and also reflects our commitment to reflective practice and professional accountability. Giving and receiving feedback can occur through formal and informal methods. The approach often depends on the context: work, education or specifically for competence requirements.

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Formal Methods

- ◆ Performance reviews: Scheduled evaluations by managers or peers, often tied to goals and competencies.
- ◆ 360-degree feedback: Collecting input from multiple sources—managers, peers, direct reports and sometimes clients.

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Informal Feedback

- ◆ One-on-one conversations: Spontaneous discussions with colleagues or supervisors.
- ◆ Peer-to-peer feedback: Quick comments during collaboration or after meetings.
- ◆ Mentorship and coaching: Guidance from experienced professionals in a less structured setting.

3

Real-time Feedback

- ◆ During presentations or meetings: Immediate reactions or suggestions.
- ◆ Performance dashboards: Metrics and analytics that provide instant insights.

Discussing Feedback Expectations

Clarify the following when setting expectations:

Type of Feedback

What kind of feedback will be most helpful for your development? For example, do you need detailed comments on policy drafts, strategic input on program design, or high-level guidance on priorities?

Preferred method of communication

How will feedback be shared? Through one-on-one meetings, team discussions, comments on documents, or email?

Timelines for feedback and implementation

Agree on reasonable timeframes. How soon after requesting feedback can you expect a response? Once feedback is provided, when are you expected to incorporate changes (like revising a draft or updating a plan)?

RECEIVING FEEDBACK EFFECTIVELY

Listen Fully

Give the speaker your full attention without interrupting. Focus on understanding their message rather than preparing a defense. When you listen with curiosity instead of assumption, you gain more insight.

Watch your reactions

Nonverbal cues—like posture, facial expressions and tone—can speak louder than words. Avoid appearing defensive or disengaged. Attentiveness signals respect and helps create a positive exchange.

Stay open-minded

Be willing to consider new ideas and perspectives. There's often more than one way to approach a situation, and different viewpoints can lead to valuable learning.

Clarify and confirm

Make sure you truly understand the feedback before responding. Ask questions if needed and summarize key points to confirm your interpretation. If possible, set expectations in advance about the type of feedback you're seeking.

Reflect before acting

Evaluate the feedback's relevance and potential impact. Decide what changes, if any, you'll make. If you disagree, consider seeking another perspective.

Follow up

Implement suggestions where appropriate or schedule a follow-up discussion. In some cases, resubmitting revised work or checking in later shows commitment to improvement.

GIVING FEEDBACK EFFECTIVELY

Focus on priorities

Limit feedback to the most important points. Too much at once can overwhelm the recipient. Ask yourself, "Would I find this actionable?"

Address behaviour, not character

Use "I" statements and describe specific actions rather than making assumptions. For example: "I noticed that the draft policy doesn't include a section on stakeholder engagement. I'm concerned this might affect buy-in during implementation. Could we work together to add that?" Instead of: "You don't care about stakeholder input!"

Balance strengths and growth areas

Highlight what's working well alongside areas for improvement. Reinforcing strengths encourages continued positive behaviour, while actionable suggestions support growth.

Be specific and practical

Avoid vague comments. Provide examples and, when possible, offer alternatives rather than just advice.

Keep it realistic

Focus on what can be changed. Avoid absolutes like "always" or "never," as behaviour is rarely that consistent.

Own your perspective

Frame feedback as your viewpoint, using "I" statements, not as universal truth. This keeps the conversation constructive.

Be timely

Share feedback promptly. Delays reduce its impact and can create unnecessary tension.