

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION PRACTICES

One key to encouraging volunteers to stay engaged and perform at a high level is to provide regular recognition and appreciation. The most effective volunteer recognition occurs on a day-to-day basis when the staff expresses sincere appreciation and thanks for the work being done by the volunteer.

Day-to-day recognition may include:

- Saying “thank you”
- Involving volunteers in decisions that affect them
- Asking about the volunteers’ families and showing an interest in their “outside” life
- Making sure that volunteers are treated the same way as regular staff
- Allowing the volunteer to increase skills by attending training
- Recommending the volunteer for promotion to a more responsible position
- Celebrating the volunteer’s anniversary with the organization

Recognition can begin quite early. A card of welcome sent to a new volunteer, or a small welcome party conveys an immediate sense of appreciation.

Activity Steps

Adapt the list of Volunteer Recognition Practices to match your organization’s volunteers. This will involve deleting some items and creating new ones, as well as revising existing items to fit your volunteers. Keep the activities that are most meaningful and relevant. As the practices on the list are generalized, rewrite them so they are as specific to your organization as possible. You might end up with a much shorter list, but one that will serve your volunteer program well.

Here are some considerations in adapting the list:

- Ask staff members who work with volunteers how they like to recognize and celebrate volunteers, as well as recognition practices they would like to develop in the future. Make sure these ideas are represented on your list.
- Who are your organization’s volunteers? Tailor your list to match the age and background of the volunteers.

List of Volunteer Recognition Practices

Daily means of providing recognition to volunteers:

- Saying “thank you”
- Telling them they did a good job
- Inviting them for coffee
- Asking their opinions
- Greeting them on arrival
- Smiling when you see them
- Bragging about them to your boss (in their presence)

- Giving them brief thank-you notes
- Having a refreshment with them after work
- Saying something positive about their personal qualities

Intermittent means of providing recognition to volunteers:

- Taking them to lunch
- Providing food at volunteer meetings
- Letting them put their names on the products they produce
- Writing them a letter of commendation
- Getting a local radio station or other media to feature them and their work
- Putting them on important task forces or committees
- Giving the best parking space to the “volunteer of the month”
- Posting graphic displays, showing progress toward targets
- Mentioning major contributors by name in your status reports to upper management
- Having them present their results to directors and board members
- Giving permission to go to a seminar, convention, or professional meeting, if possible, at the organization’s expense
- Writing articles about their contributions for newsletters or newspapers
- Having them present a training session to co-workers
- Having your boss write them a letter of thanks
- Celebrating major accomplishments
- Having them represent you at important meetings
- Putting their picture on the bulletin board with news of their accomplishments
- Cutting out articles and cartoons they might be interested in
- Organizing informal chats with organization leadership

Significant means of providing recognition to volunteers:

- Making special caps, shirts, belt buckles or lapel badges honoring the group
- Encouraging them to write an article about some accomplishment at work
- Giving a plaque, certificate, or trophy for being best volunteer, crew, most improved results, etc.
- Offering tuition assistance
- Upgrading their office equipment/tools
- Granting additional responsibilities and a new title
- Purchasing newspaper space to thank them
- Putting up a banner celebrating a major accomplishment
- Honoring them for years of service to the organization
- Giving them a bigger office
- Enlisting them in training staff and other volunteers
- Involving them in the annual planning process

Adapted from McCurley, S., & Lynch, R. (2011). *Volunteer management: Mobilizing all the resources of the community* (3rd ed., Chapter 12, pp. 209–228). Plattsburgh, NY: InterPub Group.