

# Chapter 12

## Recognition of Volunteers



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### Purposes of this chapter:

- \* To explore the difference between tangible and intangible forms of recognition
- \* To learn essential tips for giving meaningful recognition
- \* To expand ideas for recognition techniques
- \* To learn creative, inexpensive ways to say, “I noticed you!”

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## **Thought-Provoking Questions Regarding Recognition of Volunteers**

- 1. In what formal ways do you recognize volunteers?  
What is your sense of volunteer appreciation of these efforts?**
- 2. Does the paid staff generally feel thanked and appreciated in your organization?**
- 3. Are volunteers made to feel welcomed and appreciated in your organization? In what informal ways are volunteers shown appreciation?**
- 4. What is the most creative or novel way a volunteer has been recognized in your organization?**
- 5. Whose responsibility is it to provide recognition for the volunteers in your organization?**
- 6. Do you have any funds to spend on recognition?**
- 7. Are the paid staff members who work with volunteers recognized and thanked for their efforts?**

## Purpose of Recognition

There are 2 key purposes of recognition:

1. Recognition offers the organization an opportunity to reward and motivate volunteers who have made contributions of time.
2. Recognition is a means of highlighting and promoting a successful volunteer program within the community.

## Tangible and Intangible Kinds of Recognition

**Tangible rewards** are generally things (plaques, pins) or events (recognition luncheon) which are the formal ways in which agencies recognize their volunteers.

Tangible recognition includes:

- Teas, luncheons, dinners
- Pins, certificates, plaques
- T-shirts or other items of clothing
- Photo displays
- Birthday cards/get-well cards
- Holiday parties
- Agency benefits (free admission to their museum, etc.)
- Free parking
- Letters of recommendation
- Newspaper articles
- Sponsorship at a workshop or conference

Although these are important ways that agencies thank their volunteers, they must not become so routinized that volunteers do not feel any particular pride in them. Having tangible recognition—sincerely and creatively presented—helps to overcome the inherent difficulties with these forms of recognition and helps to make the volunteer feel that he/she is special.

**Intangible rewards** are those everyday, informal ways you say to volunteers, "We're glad you are here." Examples include:

- Calling volunteers by their name
- Inquiring about volunteers' concerns
- Saying thank you every time they leave the agency
- Involving volunteers in staff meetings
- Asking for volunteers' opinions and ideas
- Giving new responsibilities or new challenges
- Teaching a new skill
- Phoning volunteers when they are sick
- Having a pleasant working environment
- Greeting volunteers each day with a friendly smile
- Spending time and effort in supervision
- Maintaining a personal interest in the volunteer
- Advocating for volunteers or volunteering within the agency
- Keeping volunteers informed about agency activities

The major reason volunteers give of their time is for the inner satisfaction and personal sense of fulfillment they derive from performing voluntary service. But those that serve also need and deserve the continual recognition and the acknowledgement of their worth and importance (such as by words of praise, in addition to annual recognitions or honor awards).

# Volunteer Recognition Preferences

Penny Ream

“A Study of Volunteer Preference for Recognition Techniques  
Used by Agencies and Employers”

Masters Thesis, Univ of Minnesota

May 1982

Table 13: Percentage of Participants who Rated Recognition Techniques “Very”  
or “Somewhat” meaningful

Recognition Techniques	Percentage
1. Discounts on memberships, tickets, or gift items	81.4%
2. Additional training for volunteer work	81.2
3. Personal development training	69.2
4. Luncheon with volunteers	68.9
5. Employee privileges	68.5
6. Volunteer job enhancement	68.0
7. Participation in staff activities	64.0
8. Individual luncheon with agency official	60.4
9. Social event with volunteers	60.2
10. Gift item with agency logo	59.0
11. Community recognition	55.6
12. Personalized gift item	55.1
13. Award pin	52.2
14. Award certificate	49.5
15. Gift item with universal volunteer logo	46.8
16. Participation in organized sports event	22.2

Survey of volunteers in 13 arts and culture agencies in Minneapolis and St Paul, MN.

Source: VM Systems, 1807 Prarie Ave., Downers Grove, IL 60515

## Tips for Giving Recognition

1. The **most important way we recognize a volunteer is to place him/her in the most suitable volunteer job.** The job itself is the greatest motivator, and it gives the volunteer the most satisfaction. Without a good job, most volunteers won't be around for the end of the year recognition.
2. A major trap we fall into in recognition is that frequently we want to give volunteers the kind of recognition that we like. The cardinal rule of recognition is that it **be meaningful to the recipient** (i.e., if a plaque would be meaningful to him/her and you don't happen to care about plaques, you go with what would please the volunteer).
3. Some of the best, most **creative recognition does not need to cost much money** (i.e., giving a banana to the "top banana," staff putting on a humorous skit for its volunteers, etc.).
4. **Formal awards should be given as personally as possible,** preferably by a person the volunteer knows or at least by a person who can pronounce the volunteer's name correctly.
5. The "**different strokes for different folks**" really holds true in volunteer recognition. For people motivated by social interaction, a social party and good food may be the best way to say, "Thank you." For people who are primarily motivated by being able to achieve and accomplish new projects, a new challenge, being sent to a seminar or being given a plaque may be the best form of recognition. For people motivated by the opportunity to use their power and influence to help accomplish some agency goals, very visible, public recognition such as a picture and article about them in the paper or an award named after them may fit the bill.
6. When you must **recognize all volunteers in one event,** make certain that you have elements that will please different types of people.
7. **Recognition should be given as soon after the activity as possible.** If someone chaired your event in the fall and your recognition event is in the spring, make certain that you do something in the way of appreciation before the event in spring.
8. **Using humor and creativity in recognition** demonstrates that you have put time and thought into personal recognition. And time is the greatest gift we give one another.
9. **Make certain that recognition is fair.** If you reward volunteers who are not performing well, you will de-motivate the volunteers who are performing well.
10. **The informal everyday acknowledgement of our volunteers is the most powerful and effective** way of saying, "Thank you!"

Source: Stallings, Betty B., Building Better Skills

## Volunteer Recognition Ideas

- Send volunteers to workshops and conferences representing agency
- Make a video of a person volunteering, show at annual luncheon
- Humorous skit by paid staff on the role of volunteers in the agency
- Personalized gift baskets
- Tickets to something they like (sports, theatre) - get them donated!
- Card sent on the anniversary date of their becoming a volunteer
- Laminated copy of an article about them in the paper
- Recognize the paid and volunteer staff as a team in the recognition event
- Have a box entitled "A penny for your thoughts" for suggestions from volunteers
- Unique plaques with his/her picture as a volunteer on it
- A promotion to a higher-level volunteer position, more responsible job
- Discounts on tickets, gift items, medical services
- Articles about volunteers in local newspaper, their college alumni publication, newsletter at their work or through an organization
- Handwritten holiday notes to volunteers (Thanksgiving, etc.)
- Send 5 cent valentines all year long
- Invite volunteers to agency staff, planning and other significant meetings
- Have a bulletin board dedicated to activities and news of your volunteers
- Have a personalized coffee mug for each volunteer
- Leave candy kisses on volunteers' desks
- Develop creative, humorous awards to give at annual meeting
- Develop an in-house award named after your founding volunteer
- Send notes thanking family members for their support of the volunteer's efforts for your organization
- Involve volunteers in the long-range planning of your agency
- Have a birthday lunch once a month to celebrate all volunteer and paid staff birthdays that occurred during that month
- Nominate a volunteer for community recognition
- Give recognition items such as tote bags (You deserve a break!), rolls (You are on a roll), cupcakes (You Take the Cake), seeds (Thanks for helping us grow).



- Thank-you letter when they leave the organization
- A flower or helium balloon at volunteer's desk - "Just because"
- Volunteer portfolio for career development
- Coupons good for: one day off without an excuse, lunch with the Manager of Volunteers or Executive Director, 15 minute shoulder massage, etc.
- Skills training (i.e., computer, FAX )
- Letter of commendation to volunteer's boss
- Use of facilities for volunteer's service group
- Recognition gifts (see last page of this section for places to send for catalogues of special recognition gifts)


Source: Stallings, Betty B., Building Better Skills

# Creative Ways to Recognize Volunteers


Let your volunteers know that they have your appreciation and support by giving them small gifts with attached notes. Use the following examples or come up with your own individualized ideas.

Original art and design by Jane Vincent


**What a great idea!**  
Bright idea! Note stuck to a Christmas bulb




**A Cracker Jack idea...**  
Box of CrackerJacks




**Your ideas are so exciting I could just pop...**  
A balloon




**Thanks for raisin' the tough questions!**  
Mini-boxes of raisins



**Your great work has me wreathed in smiles!**  
Small grapevine wreath



**I'm lucky to have you to help...**  
A rabbit's foot



**No one holds a candle to you!**  
Scented votive candle or pack of birthday candles



**You are a LIFESAVER!**  
Candy with a note



**You're the apple of my eye!**  
Real or artificial apple - maybe tied with a bow



**What an angel! Here's your halo...**  
Two silver pipe cleaners twisted together



**Your vision is our guiding light!**  
Mini-flashlight



**You have given our project the sweet smell of success!**  
Potpourri or sachet packet



**Your presentation was right to the point...**

Box of tacks or push-pins



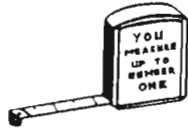
**Thanks! you've energized us!**

Package of batteries



**By any measure, you are a leader!**

Tape measure or ruler



**Sorry - I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.**

A note with a band-aid attached



**"Prescription" pep pills for tough jobs, cheer-up pills, etc....**

M&M's in old medicine bottles



**Thanks for your hard work... I know it has been a headache!**

Small aspirin or tylenol packet



**I'll help you see this project through...**

Goofy joke glasses



**I know you're feeling snowed under right now.**

Inexpensive snow-globes



**Don't worry... it will be fine.**

**OR**

**You're a doll!**

Box of worry dolls



**Many motivated and marvelous volunteers!**

Marvelous and Motivated



**You take the cake!**

Cupcakes for a committee



**Thanks for working your buns off!**

Hot-Cross buns or cinnamon rolls for a committee meeting



### **More "thankful" ideas...**

**A toast to a job well done!**

Plastic wine glass filled with jelly beans

**Let me know when I can come out...**

Construction paper doghouse

**A noteworthy accomplishment!**

Memo or note pads

**Let's celebrate!**

Party whistles

**You are "berry" special!**

Box of fresh berries or berry jam

**Thanks to you, we'll soon have this project wrapped up!**

Pretty wrapping paper and bows

**Hugs and kisses...**

Hershey's chocolate kiss

**I'll stick with you...**

Stick of gum

**Thanks for sharing your creative juices...**

Boxes of juice for committee members

## Where to Purchase Volunteer Recognition Materials

California Assoc. of Hospitals  
Volunteer Division  
P. O. Box 1442  
Sacramento, CA 95807-1422  
(916) 443-7401

The Critter Collection  
P. O. Box 59134  
Potomac, MD 20859-9134  
(301) 424-9249

Energize, Inc.  
5450 Wissahickon Ave.  
Philadelphia, PA 19144  
(215) 438-8342

Harris Promotions, Inc.  
7926 Queen Street  
Wyndmoor, PA 19118  
(215) 233-6101

Lincoln General Hospital  
Junior Volunteer Program  
2300 South 16th Street  
Lincoln, NE 68502  
(402) 473-5117

National Volunteer Center of  
The Points of Light Foundation  
736 Jackson Place  
Washington, DC 20503  
(202) 408-5162

Volunteer Centre of Edmonton  
302, 11456 Jasper Ave.  
Edmonton, Alberta Canada  
T5K 0M1

Volunteer Ontario  
2 Dunbloor Road  
Etobicoke, Ontario  
Canada  
M9A 2E4  
(416) 236-0588

Volunteer Bureau of Bergen Co.  
64 Passaic  
Hackensack, NJ 07601  
(201) 489-9454

Volunteer Center of Memphis  
2600 Poplar Avenue  
Suite 410  
Memphis, TN 38112

The Volunteer Collection  
P. O. Box 600158  
N. Miami Beach, FL 33160  
(305) 944-4327

Thanks-A-Lot, Inc.  
P. O. Box 3055  
Shelby, NC 28151-3055  
(704) 481-1176

TLC Services  
P. O. Box 691  
Mountain Ranch, CA 95246-0691  
(209) 754-4548

Volunteer Centre of Calgary  
900, 640 - 8 Ave. SW  
Calgary, Alberta Canada  
T2P 1G7

For type of items, prices, etc., write to the above mentioned organizations and request their brochure on recognition items.

## Further References

### Recognition of Volunteers

- McCurley, Steve and Rick Lynch, *Essential Volunteer Management* (VM Systems and Heritage Arts Publishing, 1989). Chapter 9, "Retention and Recognition," pp. 107-116.
- Vineyard, Sue, *Beyond Banquets, Plaques and Pins: Creative Ways To Recognize Volunteers* (VM Systems and Heritage Arts Publishing, 1989). Chapter 9, "Retention and Recognition," pp. 107-116.