

## ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS—Part 8

### *Volunteer Recognition and Appreciation*

*Don't let volunteering be a thankless job. The number one method for retaining volunteers is to make sure they know that they are appreciated. Recognition and appreciation should come from different people in different ways.*

There are many ways to thank and recognize your volunteers. In the following pages you will see just a few that we've collected over the years.

You can also put "Volunteer Recognition" into your Internet search engine and find many other ideas.

**Make it a priority.** Recognizing the work of volunteers is crucial for any organization that wants to retain them and attract others. Designate someone in your organization to be responsible for ensuring that ongoing recognition of volunteers takes place.

**Do it often.** Recognition of volunteers should happen on a year-round, frequent and informal basis – begin with saying "Thank you" often!

**Do it in different ways.** Vary your recognition efforts from the informal thank you and spontaneous treats, to more formal events, such as dinners and awards.

**Be sincere.** Make each occasion you use to recognize your volunteers meaningful and an opportunity to truly reflect on his/her value to your organization.

**Recognize the person, not the work.** Phrase recognition to emphasize the contribution of the individual, not the end result. "You did a great job!" as opposed to "This is a great job!"

**Make it appropriate to the achievement.** For example, a paper certificate accompanied by a private thank you may be appropriate for a few months of service but a public dinner and engraved plaque may better suit 10 years of volunteerism.

**Be consistent.** Make sure whatever standards of recognition you establish can be consistently maintained by your organization in years to come. Holding a volunteer recognition dinner one year sets up expectation for future volunteers.

**Be timely.** Try to arrange recognition soon after achievement has been reached – delaying until weeks or months later diminishes the value of your gratitude.

**Make it unique.** Getting to know each of your volunteers and their interests will help you learn how best to recognize each individual and make them feel special.

Sources:

- Making the Most of Volunteer Resources workshop materials, Community Services Council
- Celebrate Volunteers, Volunteer Canada

# **Volunteer Recognition and Retention Practices**

*Compiled by the Seattle Tutoring Coalition, 2001*

When looking for appreciation ideas for your volunteers, always keep in mind ongoing efforts to recognize and support volunteers. For those times when you want to formally recognize volunteer efforts, like the end of the quarter or end of the year, consider what they would like and appreciate, as well as what resources you have available. Local businesses are a good resource for food or gifts. The PTA or your school staff may well be willing to support a party or other recognition effort. You might make a targeted request to the principal or leadership team for specific funds. Sometimes recognizing specific volunteers individually is appropriate and effective.

Here is a list of methods that members of the Seattle Tutoring Coalition have found successful and not-so-successful.

***ONE IMPORTANT NOTE: Volunteers generally do not want you to spend a lot of money to appreciate them.***

## **Successful Methods**

- Hand-made gifts from the kids/students
- Photos of tutor-student pairs with frames made by the students
- Framed kids crafts (can get frames cheap or donated)
- Coffee (bag of beans in a coffee mug) or coupons to local coffee shops
- Bulletin Board in high-traffic area with display of “what gift I would like to give my tutor/mentor” written by the students (may encourage non-material gifts)
- Having a key-note speech at an event delivered by a client/student or a parent (sharing their experience, how the tutoring/mentoring relationship has helped them)
- Hand-written notes of thanks (on a very personal, individual level)
- Tickets (to plays, local events, the lottery)
- A large thank-you banner with all of the volunteers’ names (make your you get them all)
- Certificates (that are personalized and accurate)

## **Not-so-successful Methods**

- Not doing anything!
- Overly expensive gifts
- Certificates (that are impersonal or inaccurate)
- Overuse of volunteer catalogue gifts/not well-matched to the volunteers
- Holding big events with small staff and/or volunteer turn-out
- Not asking people to do more
- Developmentally inappropriate (e.g. bunny rabbit erasers for adults)
- Making ineffective student-volunteer matches to begin with

# Recognition Ideas

## THE LIGHT TOUCH

- Send anonymous, humorous cards during hectic times!
- Leave candy kisses at volunteer stations!
- Dress in costume at Halloween, St. Patrick's Day, etc. and pass out treats!
- "Come as you are" surprise party!
- Silly posters!
- Anonymous notes on the bulletin board!

## GENERAL

- Stop by while volunteers are working to have a word or two with each.
- Smile and call volunteers by name.
- Remember birthdays, anniversaries, and personal times of importance.
- Coffee cups with names on them.
- Labeled areas to place coat, hat, etc.
- Keep track of length of times worked so as to recognize volunteers accurately.
- Suggestion box.
- Internal/ external training opportunities.
- Job descriptions for volunteers that are specific, clear, flexible.
- Occasional surprise treats to say "thank you."
- Holiday parties.
- Kickoff potluck. Invite to school.
- Monthly birthday listing posted for all to see.
- Keeping people up on changes and giving people reasons behind changes.
- Sending "get well" cards.
- Job rotation opportunities.
- Include feature articles on volunteers in the school newspaper.
- Invite volunteers to a special assembly.
- Have students write letters of thanks on the volunteer's birthday, during National Volunteer Week, or other time.
- Send letters to business volunteers' employers, citing achievements.
- Give each volunteer a certificate (available from SFSV), flower or small gift.
- Design a bulletin board in a hall that includes the names of all the volunteers.
- Have each class organize a special event and presentation for their volunteer.
- Chart to show accumulated hours for individuals.
- Volunteer of the month /week/ year awards.

## More Volunteer Recognition Ideas

The following is a list of volunteer recognition ideas from volunteer program managers from around the world.

- ❖ Formal recognition events (dinners, teas, dessert buffets, etc.) held during National Volunteer Recognition Week.
- ❖ Special gifts.
- ❖ Thank you cards
- ❖ Articles on individual volunteers in organizational newsletter, website or even a web page to salute volunteers.
- ❖ Volunteer of the Month.
- ❖ Free coffee and treats for on-site volunteers
- ❖ Name badges
- ❖ Articles about your volunteer(s) in the local newspaper.
- ❖ Pizza for teen volunteers.
- ❖ Gift certificates or coupons to local restaurants or amusements.
- ❖ Know their names, the names of their partners, kids or pets and ask about how they are.
- ❖ Birthday, anniversary and holiday cards.
- ❖ Plaques or banners in public places.
- ❖ Organizational logo t-shirts
- ❖ Pay registration fees (or part of) for continuing education classes or conferences.
- ❖ Send cards to volunteers on special days and for special deeds.
- ❖ Invite volunteers to participate in workshops and involve them as speakers.
- ❖ Open house at different sites per month.
- ❖ Letter to the volunteer's family letting them know how much the person's work is appreciated, and thanking the family for supporting the volunteer in their efforts.
- ❖ Letter to the person's employer/co-workers
- ❖ Letter to person's teachers/academic advisors/school principals
- ❖ Letter to volunteer from (or a visit with) the beneficiary of the volunteers services. Let the volunteer really see, hear and feel the end result of their work.
- ❖ Pay registration fees (or part of) for continuing education classes or conference.
- ❖ A newsletter for your volunteers
- ❖ Print names of all volunteers in weekly/monthly corporate/ agency newsletter.
- ❖ Ads for volunteers' businesses in your newsletter.
- ❖ A special parking spot for a month.
- ❖ Tickets to cultural events.
- ❖ Discounts at local shops.
- ❖ Free Internet access or Internet training for them.
- ❖ Item with your logo on it (mug, tool set, post-its, note cards, book mark, etc.).
- ❖ Photos of volunteers up in a prominent position in your agency.
- ❖ Donate books to a library in the name of volunteers (with a label with the volunteer's name on it).
- ❖ Create a booklet with staff and client's quotes about how much volunteers mean to the organization and share it at an event or mail it.
- ❖ Give volunteers buttons or pins.



*Ideas were collected from a CyberVPM poll.*