



Strengthening Nevada through AmeriCorps and Volunteerism

139 Ways to Say "Thank-You" and Recognize Volunteers

Introduction

Coordinators of volunteer programs and non-profit agencies devote hours, effort, energy, and expense to planning, coordinating, and conducting recognition activities. Organizational volunteer recognition programs usually consist of publicly presenting extrinsic rewards to volunteers, based upon length of service (Culp & Schwartz, in press). Programmatic innovation or impacts, quality of service, or contributions made by youth volunteers to the organization or its programs are often unheralded or unrewarded.

Recognition is defined as formal or informal, favorable attention given to the volunteer, to provide a sense of appreciation, security and belonging (Kwarteng, Smith and Miller, 1988).

Recognition is not so much something you do as it is something you are. Recognition is sensitivity to others as individuals, not a strategy for discharging obligations (Lake, 1995).

Determining which categories of recognition are most significant, as well as the specific types of recognition which are most meaningful to individual volunteers, however, is an open debate. Extrinsic recognition is recommended by Murk and Stephan, (1990), Steele, (1994), and Zeutschel and Hansel, (1989). Conversely, Kwarteng, Smith and Miller (1988) found that informal verbal recognition, praise and encouragement by others involved in the program were the most important factor in volunteer development and administration. Informal methods of recognizing volunteers, the contributions which they make to non-profit programs and the resulting impact upon the program participants are frequently overlooked in place of more formal methods. However, informal volunteer recognition is often found to be more effective (Culp & Schwartz, in press; Holtham, 1989; Vineyard, 1981).

Nearly every volunteer administration model, including the Bridge from Dreams to Realities (Vineyard, 1980), the 4-H Leadership Development Model (Kwarteng, Smith & Miller, 1988), GEMS (Culp, Castillo, Deppe & Wells, 1997), ISOTURE (Boyce, 1971; Dolan, 1969), LO-O-P (Penrod, 1991), the Volunteer Management Cycle (Lawson & Lawson, 1986), and the Volunteer Professional Model for Human Services Agencies and Counselors (Lenihan & Jackson, 1984) includes recognition as a key component. Most often, recognition activities are those which volunteer administrators plan and budget for; largely formal and extrinsic in nature.

Recognition is closely associated with motivation (Safrit, King & Smith, 1992). If volunteers are rewarded in meaningful, significant or relevant ways, then the volunteer administrator should consider the recognition program as successful. But the question remains,

"Is the organization's current recognition model fulfilling the needs of the volunteers and thereby serving as an effective means of recognition?" Or "Is the organization's current recognition model merely an administrative exercise for the volunteer coordinator?"

McClelland (1955, 1962) identified three categories of motives which drive people to action. These include achievement, affiliation and power. All individuals are primarily influenced by one category of motives, although individuals may function differently at home and at work.

Achievement motivated individuals are those who are both goal and task oriented, stay with tasks through completion, need tangible rewards, see problems as challenges, prefer specific parameters to



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evaluate success and see problems as challenges. Affiliation motivated individuals need personal interaction and work best in groups. They enjoy having personal relationships with supervisors and co-workers, work most easily with people whom they know well, seek socialization opportunities, need to be liked and listened to, and enjoy being involved in group projects. Power motivated individuals are those who need to impact and influence others. They can work either alone or with groups, enjoy teaching others, are able to respond to identified needs, are attentive to the goals of the organization, respond to titles which denote authority, will seek and accept positions of authority and responsibility, and are persuasive and self-starting.

Findings of a study conducted by the authors (Culp & Schwartz, in press) of tenured Ohio 4-H volunteers attending a state-wide recognition luncheon demonstrated that most volunteers are motivated to continue serving the organization by an affiliation with the clientele (4-H youth members) or the organization (4-H), rather than by achievement (recognition banquets and extrinsic rewards) or power (teaching, serving in leadership positions) motives. The recognition which most tenured 4-H volunteers in that study preferred was a simple hand-written thank-you note, sent by a 4-H member with whom they interacted.

4-H volunteers preferred intrinsic over extrinsic rewards, informal versus formal recognition, local versus state recognition events, and recognition from program participants rather than parents, program coordinators, dignitaries or officials. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to identify ways to express appreciation and provide recognition to volunteers. Many of these are informal in nature, with most being either inexpensive or no-cost. Following is a listing of possible recognition alternatives.

- Send cards for personal achievements (birthday, anniversary, new arrival, promotion, graduation, etc.)
- Have an "at-home tea party." (Send volunteers a tea bag in a card and ask them to enjoy a cup of tea in the quiet of their own home.)
- Write a news article which is published in the local newspaper, highlighting their contribution or impact upon the program or clientele.
- Write a news article which is published in the organization's newsletter.
- Send a thank-you note.
- Smile.
- Send a holiday greeting card.
- Spontaneously say "thank-you" during a chance or planned meeting or gathering.
- Ask a volunteer for their input about a program or evaluation.
- Utilize a volunteer suggestion box. Carefully consider their suggestions!
- Ask a volunteer to serve in a leadership role.
- Present service stripes, candy sticks or candy canes with the message "You've earned your stripes!"
- Ask a volunteer to conduct an orientation or educational program.
- Have a soft drink party.
- Ask a volunteer to coordinate a program, event, or initiative.
- Shake hands.
- Plan a theme party (toga, costume, western, etc.)



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- Give a pat-on-the-back.
- Invite volunteers to staff meetings. Encourage them to contribute and participate.
- Ask a volunteer to develop a window or table-top display to promote a program.
- Send a volunteer to a conference.
- Ask the volunteer to present a report, lesson, workshop, or seminar on some aspect of the conference which they attended.
- Cultivate volunteer's special interests. Whenever possible, encourage pursuit in their volunteer role.
- Utilize volunteer's unique special talents.
- Be flexible.
- Share the success or impact of one volunteer with others at a meeting or gathering.
- Provide extrinsic rewards (certificates, plaques, pins, etc.)
- Provide "perks" (free admission to paid events, free parking, etc.)
- Take an interest in their personal lives.
- Have a "volunteer of the month" award.
- Host a banquet, luncheon, dessert, tea, or reception in the volunteers' honor.
- Invite a volunteer out to lunch.
- Reimburse travel expenses.
- Establish a Volunteer Honor Roll.
- Provide volunteers with clerical or office support.
- Provide educational resources for the volunteers to utilize (videos, pamphlets, books, curriculum, etc.)
- Motivate and challenge them.
- Ask effective volunteers to each recruit another volunteer who is "just like them."
- Debrief with volunteers following a conference, program, or activity which they participated in or assisted with.
- Always use their first name.
- Provide special interest materials to targeted volunteers.
- Nominate a volunteer to teach a workshop at a conference or symposium.
- When the workshop is accepted, assist the volunteer in preparation.
- Label the office coffee pot in honor of an effective volunteer ("Vicki pours herself out for this organization!" or "Joe keeps things perking!")
- Greet each volunteer with enthusiasm and appreciation.
- Ask an effective volunteer to mentor a new recruit.
- Send Hershey's Kisses to your organization's volunteers.
- Provide useful and effective orientation for each volunteer position.
- Send peppermint candies to your organization's volunteers with the message "You're worth a mint!"
- Develop leadership skills and self-confidence.
- Ask a volunteer for their input or opinion.



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- Recognize and share innovative suggestions or programs.
- Be patient.
- Recognize volunteers and program participants for community service activities.
- Take time to explain.
- Recognize volunteers for financial and philanthropic contributions.
- Build consensus. Build support.
- Recognize tenure.
- Practice the "Platinum Rule." ("Do unto others as they prefer being done unto.")
- Recognize the number of hours contributed to the agency, organization, or program.
- Ask a volunteer to speak on behalf of the program to an outside agency.
- Ask a volunteer to speak to a funder.
- Hold a rap session.
- Ask a volunteer to speak at a volunteer meeting.
- Run a photograph and news story in the local newspaper.
- Ask a volunteer to write a news article or news release.
- Foster personal growth.
- Ask a volunteer to make a television appearance or radio announcement.
- Provide scholarships to educational conferences or workshops.
- Enable a volunteer to move on to expanded or higher level responsibilities.
- Recognize the achievements or accomplishments of those with whom the volunteer works.
- Ask the volunteer to direct a membership recruitment campaign.
- Share the volunteer's personal success story
- Provide volunteers their own work area.
- Have a youth share a success story about the volunteer.
- Be respectful.
- Schedule monthly birthday bashes.
- Have a program participant share a success story about the volunteer.
- Provide transportation to meetings, events, educational workshops, and volunteer activities.
- Write letters of reference to prospective employers.
- Surprise a volunteer with a birthday cake.
- Utilize a volunteer as a consultant.
- Send flowers.
- Nominate volunteers for awards.
- Attend personal celebrations (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.)
- Take note of volunteers' children's accomplishments. Recognize them.
- Make home visits.
- Make sure that each volunteer is a "good fit" with their volunteer role.
- Let each volunteer know they were missed.
- Make telephone calls.
- Encourage program participants to send a thank-you note.



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- Plan an organizational outing (picnic, theater, ball game, family day, pool party, etc.)
- Praise in public; especially in front of family and friends.
- Encourage program participants to send birthday and anniversary cards.
- Send get well cards.
- Have a birthday and anniversary column in your organizational newsletter.
- Send a note of congratulations for personal achievements.
- Send a note of congratulations for professional achievements and promotions.
- Send a thank-you note to the volunteer's spouse to thank him/her for sharing his/her spouse's time and talents with the organization.
- Send a thank-you note to the volunteer's employer, noting the impact and contribution which the volunteer has made. (If the employer does not provide release time to volunteer.)
- Send a thank-you note to the volunteer's employer to thank him/her for sharing the employee's time and talents with the organization. (If the employer provides release time to volunteer.)
- Recognize an employer with the volunteer publicly (if the employer provides release time for the employee, or allows the employee to utilize resources or support staff to serve.)
- Encourage other volunteers to express appreciation.
- Send volunteers an "Encouragemint".
- Ask volunteers to chaperone trips.
- Ask volunteers to judge competitions.
- Provide child care.
- Send hand-written notes.
- Secure complimentary gift certificates from businesses or the Chamber of Commerce.
- Print business cards for volunteers.
- Ask a volunteer to co-present with a salaried professional at a conference, workshop, or staff development.
- Promote effective volunteers to higher areas of volunteerism within your organization
- Stage a potluck dinner in a volunteer's honor.
- Attend volunteers' meetings and activities.
- Bounce new ideas off of a volunteer.
- Involve volunteers in problem solving efforts.
- Organize a card shower.
- Plant a tree or flower bed in a volunteer's name.
- Contribute to a charity in a volunteer's name.
- Send spices, seasonings, or herbs with the note: "You are the spice of life!"
- Print and distribute bumper stickers.
- Provide caps or shirts to promote unity among the organization.
- Provide a golf cart for a volunteer to utilize during a fair, festival, golf outing, etc.
- Organize a holiday open house for your volunteers.
- Feature a volunteer in a slide show.
- Have reserved seating at any event.



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- Provide favors at meetings or events.
- Direct newspaper reporters to worthy volunteers when writing a news story.
- Send balloons.
- Send candy.
- Surprise everyone by bringing donuts or fresh coffee cake.
- Send cookies.
- Encourage volunteers to assume community leadership roles.
- Give a volunteer a light bulb or candle with the message "You light up my life."
- Send valentines.
- Give calendars, notepads, pens, or pencils.
- Be pleasant and appreciative.

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