



*Strengthening Nevada through AmeriCorps and Volunteerism*

## **Tips for volunteer recognition**

### **Goals for Successful Recognition Event**

This isn't a success story but rather a way to look at "success." I think there ought to be SEVERAL goals for a "successful" recognition event, especially since we are busy people and can't afford for our time to be spent on an activity that accomplishes only one thing! So, how about these for a start? A successful recognition event needs to:

1. Say thank you for anything and everything volunteered to the organization during the past year (the organization's obligation).
2. Have everyone volunteering the above feel appreciated (the volunteers' perspective).
3. Recommit (re-enthuse) volunteers to the coming year of work and, potentially, to recruit new volunteers for vacant positions.
4. Educate everyone attending--frontline volunteers, paid staff, executives, and board-level volunteers--about the scope, meaning and value of volunteer services to the organization, and about the diversity and skills of who volunteers.
5. Acknowledge the contributions of (some) paid staff supervisors to the success of volunteers.
6. Report the outcomes of volunteer effort (not just to proclaim the hours spent in effort).
7. Challenge all volunteers through recognition of the special accomplishments of a selected few.
8. Gain publicity for the organization and for the volunteer program.
9. Allow volunteers a chance to have fun and meet one another (something they do otherwise only with people on their shift).
10. Gain respect for the volunteer program and the director of it.

*Submitted by Susan J. Ellis, President, Energize, Inc.*

### **Four Goals**

When I plan my yearly Volunteer Recognition Breakfast I keep four points in mind that must happen:

1. Educate 2. Inspire 3. Recognize 4. Have fun. Each year this event is the most successful!

*Submitted by Dee Martin, Director of Volunteer Services, Bedford, NH*



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### **Potluck**

For the past several years, we have conducted a volunteer potluck supper for our volunteers. The theatre provides beverages and paper utensils and each volunteer contributes a dish. It's a "stand-up" meal so everybody mingles and tries lots of new things. We publish the favorite recipes in the theatre's newsletter.

*Submitted by Jill Rafferty, Education & Volunteer Coordinator, Capital Repertory Theatre*

### **Restaurant Samplings**

For the past two years we have had a very successful dinner called a "Taste of the Town". I contact many local restaurants explaining the wonderful event and who the event is for, and fortunately many have agreed to participate, for free!!! The first year we had as many as 16 restaurants including everything from gourmet lamb chops and seasoned shrimp, to different ethnic foods such as vegetarian lo Mein, to meatball sandwiches, to the most delicious bread pudding.

The restaurants are asked to donate any item from their menu and are welcome to participate and serve in the event. The guests are served a small portion from any restaurant station. There are small plates provided at each station, staff and/or restaurant employees serve the volunteers. Volunteers can return to any station as many times as they want.

As for decorating, we have used red and white checkered tablecloths and asked the staff to wear white aprons with a chef hat. We have also had a French theme with pastel colors and each server wears a scarf with their apron. All in all, everyone leaves very satisfied, including staff and the restaurant employees. After the event I always send a certificate of appreciation to the participating restaurants. The event does take some work, but has been well worth the effort.

Good Luck!

*Submitted by Rose Lynch*

<http://www.energizeinc.com/ideas/banquets.html>

### **Hands-On Thanks**

As an organization which mobilizes volunteers for many other organizations through our Retired & Senior Volunteer Program, we looked for a special way to say thank you to in-house volunteers who provide leadership, training or support to those who serve other groups. At this week's event, we hired (at greatly reduced cost - and the promise of pro bono next time!) a licensed massage therapist to give



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each one a chair-massage. That was our "hands on" thank you and they were surprised and rejuvenated by the gesture. (Please keep in mind -- there are those who do not want a stranger touching them. For those people we had discount coupons for other personal services.)

*Submitted on 2 May 2008 by Joan E. Thompson*

### **Time Sheets with Special Notes of Thanks**

On the first of every month, I collect and replace time sheets for volunteers (we have 3 separate buildings where volunteers work). Each month I attach a note of thanks to their timesheets. The note could be from me, personally, from a member of our staff who has made positive comments about the volunteer, or from a resident with whom the volunteer has been spending time.

*Submitted on 4 March 2008 by Phil DuBois*

### **Gift Ideas**

Here are a few ideas that I've used to thank volunteers who work with the Army's Family Readiness Groups.

- *Candle* - Present a candle with a card saying "You light the way" or "No one can hold a candle to you"
- *Light bulbs* - "You light the way -- thanks for your glowing enthusiasm."
- *Permanent marker* - "You've made a lasting and permanent contribution to your group."
- *Lucky Charm cereal* - "We're so LUCKY to have you!"
- *100 Grand candy bars* - "Volunteers are priceless."
- *Payday candy bar* - "Volunteers don't receive a salary because they're worthless... it's because they're priceless!"
- *Gold chocolate coins* - "Volunteers are worth their weight in gold."
- *Andes mints/ peppermint patties* - "Your service is worth a mint to us!"
- *Ruler/Tape measure* - "It's easy to measure the difference you've made in our group -- you're amazing!"
- *Clock* - "Thanks for the time you've given to our group!"
- *Group's logo Hat* - "Our hats are off to you! Thanks for all you do!"
- *Shirt* - "We know you'd give the shirt off your back... so here's an extra one for the next time you give your all."
- *Toaster* - "A Toast to a super volunteer! Whenever you use this toaster, remember to toast yourself, too!"
- *Plant* - "We grow luckier every day you're with us."

*Submitted on 18 March 2005 by Danielle Hamilton*



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### **Goblets**

I have VERY little budget to do an annual volunteer recognition event. (I like to do a classy event!) This year I did A Night on the Town! I like to give each volunteer a special gift to take home with them. For one whole year I collected crystal goblets. I went to yard sales, thrift stores, called all my friends and had them looking. Most people donated the goblets. I had 136 by the time I was finished. I bought charms at the dollar store six for a dollar. I washed each goblet and put a charm on it. Some of the crystal I had collected was just beautiful.

When I gave my talk at the party, I had a goblet on the podium. I explained that each guest that evening would go home with a special goblet. It wouldn't match anything else they had in the house. It was special. Each goblet was different than the others. Some were elegant and made beautiful music, some were more durable, but still beautiful. Each goblet brings its own uniqueness to the table. We had all sizes and colors of goblets. I told the volunteers, "when you sit and relax with your goblet filled with wine, tea, or special beverage, think of just how important you are to us. You too bring a special uniqueness and beauty to us. And when you look at the charm on your goblet, remember how we feel about the "charm" you have brought to our organization".

I had all the goblets filled with champagne colored punch and there wasn't a single goblet left! They all looked so beautiful filled and they were a huge hit! I've had several comments since the event regarding their special gift...and it cost practically nothing but the time to wash and fill them!

*Submitted on 20 May 2004 by Diane L. Hennessy, Director of Volunteers, South Florida Science Museum, Florida - USA*

### **Seeds of Kindness**

Our theme to recognize our senior volunteers is "Volunteers Plant Seeds of Kindness" and we are giving each volunteer a packet of flower seeds at the recognition banquet....where they are to wear their favorite garden hat.

*Submitted on 15Apr03 by Patty Dreiman, Director, Knox County RSVP, Indiana, USA*

### **Framed Quotes**

We had a very simple but meaningful volunteer recognition gift. Each volunteer received a quote relating to volunteerism that was framed so they can put it on their desk or hang on the wall. Many volunteers have expressed thanks for the gift because every time they look at it they can reflect on the service they have been providing.



*Submitted by Renee Richie, Volunteer Director, Simpson Housing Services*

### **Hand-made Cards**

One of the best ways to give a volunteer recognition is through hand-made cards. Cut a plain piece of colored paper with pinking shears or decorative scissors. With a colored stamp pad and stamps, send a message (i.e., "Keep smiling!" or "Keep up the good work!") Volunteers love the personalized touch and it really means a great deal to them when they know you have spent some time on them!

*Submitted by Cindy Fairs, Consultant, Okanagan Volunteer Management Services*

### **Thanks Booklet**

We asked the patients (& staff) in our mental health facility to write a brief note of thanks to the individual & groups that come in to provide parties/entertainment, etc. for them; then we typed them all up to be put in a booklet with the center fold pages signatures of many patients expressing in their own handwriting, their own thanks. These were placed at the place settings of each volunteer at our recognition luncheon/reception. They all loved them. Entertainment during this was provided by the patient choir.

*Submitted by Judy Gaby, Secretary, Logansport State Hospital*

### **Personal Notes from Recipients**

The best one I ever heard was for an agency that serves the deaf as readers and interpreters. The volunteers didn't usually interact with the clients, since the reading was done over the radio. At the recognition event, each volunteer had a letter at his/her plate that was dictated by a listener of the show for which the volunteer read. The letter spoke about the reader and how his/her tone of voice made the listener feel and how it helped the listener to hear the piece of the newspaper that was read (or whatever). The letters were typed on special paper and framed nicely. The coordination of it was work, of course, but the recognition didn't take any time away from the event, which already had a full agenda. The volunteers reported it was the most impactful recognition they had ever received. They heard directly from their listeners and learned how important they were - personally.

*Submitted by Sarah Elliston, Professional Development Associate, United Way Volunteer Resource Center*



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<http://www.energizeinc.com/ideas/gift.html>

### **Recognition Doesn't Have to Be Expensive**

Over the years, I've tried to come up with no- or low-cost ways to say thank you to the volunteers and staff that made my programs function effectively. Most of these were the day-to-day "thanks for helping"

I believe that recognition is one of the most important parts of working with volunteers. These have included simple yet meaningful things such as writing a brief "thanks for being an angel by helping with XYZ project" on angel-shaped note paper.

Like most administrators, I send birthday and get well cards. But I believe that treating my volunteers as part of the staff is one of the most effective ways to recognize their value. I acknowledge my volunteers by always saying hello and goodbye each day, even if they work in a different part of the building. I let them know if I will be out of the office or need to leave early when they're scheduled to be in.

I also provide each volunteer with his or her own in-box. I distribute copies of appropriate memos, include volunteers in meetings and trainings when I can, and make sure each is informed of new policies, procedures, or activities in the organization.

One low-cost thank you gift that I gave was a small booklet of quotes about volunteering that I did on the computer and ran off on the copier. I received a number of calls and notes thanking me and saying how much the booklet was appreciated. I also gave these to staff at collaborative agencies as a small way to show how much I appreciated how they and their volunteers helped my program.

Recognition doesn't have to be expensive. It does have to be sincere.

*Submitted 20 November 2004 by Sherry Leigh Mitchell, The Greater Kalamazoo Area Holiday Food Drive, Michigan*

### **Volunteers - Wall of Fame!**

When volunteers come into our facility, they enter into our break room where they can put their coats down and get a name tag. The most important thing a group does before they start working, is go to the Wall of Fame to find their picture. If it's a group's first time, they will remind me to make sure they will be added. The wall is completely covered with photos. It's a constant reminder of how we value and appreciate each and every one of our 100 groups represented. Our volunteer groups come from grade school to retirees, but one thing that they have in common, getting their picture taken. Some groups will even plan out where and how they want their group photo. I use a digital camera, and print the photo onto a picture of a box, using the top part of the box to fill in the group's name and date. The box looks



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like one that they use to repack the donated products. The next time the volunteer group is here, they look for their picture! A picture says it all.

*Submitted by Laura Fronko, Volunteer Coordinator, World Vision*

### **Thank You Notes to Volunteers' Workplace**

Many of our volunteers have full time jobs and busy careers. We began sending letters of recognition to their places of work either directly to their superior or through the Human Resources office. These letters often find their way directly into the personnel files and in many cases reflect well on an employee to their employer. What has been really interesting is that our organization has actually received donations from companies whose employees have been our volunteers. A letter from our organization has often prompted an inquiry from a company to the employee about who we are and what we do. This method of recognition has become greatly appreciated by our volunteers.

*Submitted by Christine Cooper, Volunteer Coordinator, Citizens for a Clean Caledon*

### **Free Motivational Messages**

Here's a free service to send motivational messages/cards via e-mail at <http://www.motivationalquotes.com/servicequotes.shtml>. Most of the messages relate to serving others.

*Submitted by Steve McCurley, consultant/trainer*

### **A Personal Note from You**

It's not earth-shattering, but our volunteers really appreciate and respond to the personal notes I send out periodically. On our organization's note-card or a card especially chosen for the individual volunteer, I remind him/her how important his/her efforts are to me and the organization. I usually emphasize a recently accomplished task or project and point out how it affected our operation. When I host a volunteer group, I multiply the number of volunteers by the number of hours they've worked, and then divide it all out to let them know how many (non-stop!) eight hour days it would have taken our tiny staff to complete the same volume of work. It's often quite staggering!

*Submitted by Ms. De Jenkins Lambing, Program Manager, Wheelchair Recycling Project*

<http://www.energizeinc.com/ideas/ongoing.html>

### **Thankfulness Poster**

At Saint Mary's Hospital/Mayo Clinic in Rochester MN we gave a blank piece of poster board to each of the areas where we had staff working directly with volunteers about a month before Thanksgiving. We asked the staff to create a "Thankfulness" poster for the volunteers on their service. We then posted them in the volunteer office during the week before and after Thanksgiving. It was great to see the creativity of the staff and hear the expressions of surprise and gratitude for the thoughtfulness from the volunteers as they looked at them.

*Submitted on November 4, 2008 by Susan Webster Pronk*



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### **"Post-It" Recognition**

One year our church held a volunteer recognition service. After the appropriately themed sermon we played "The Way You Do the Things You Do" while members of the congregation listed volunteer tasks on post-it notes and then posted the notes on the volunteers who had done the tasks. After a few minutes no one was free of post-it notes (except for one lady whose dress material would not hold anything!) and some people were completely plastered with them. The event became fairly raucous and the response was generally favorable. There were numerous comments about this being the only non-boring volunteer Sunday service we'd ever had.

*Submitted April 9, 2007 by Molly Anderson*

<http://www.energizeinc.com/ideas/awards.html>

### **Staff-Made Dinner**

I work for an AIDS Service organization where volunteers give their time in a variety of programs and services. Every year we have an annual holiday party for volunteers which has always been an open house style event. This year I asked the staff to help plan something a bit more ambitious - we cooked and served a full course meal! The menu was a choice of turkey dinner with all the trimmings, or a vegetarian pasta dish. Staff volunteered to cook the various dishes, turkeys, mashed potatoes, stuffing, salads, etc., or contributed buns, cranberry sauce, salad dressing, etc. The staff were all assigned jobs; cooks, plate fillers, servers, etc., and all of the staff wore black pants, white shirts and colorful name tags. We had a Christmas tree with donated gifts underneath and drew names for a chance to pick a gift. We utilized space in our multi-purpose room and set beautiful places using rented cutlery and plates. Everyone contributed decorations and we had plenty of candlelight and twinkle lights strung up. Our physicians offered grace and a toast to the volunteers that reaffirmed their value within our organization. All in all, it was a tremendous gift of caring by the staff, and a wonderful experience in feeling appreciated by the volunteers!

*Submitted by Corrie McGibney, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Village Clinic*

<http://www.energizeinc.com/ideas/holiday.html>

### **Celebrating Volunteer Accomplishments**

Steve McCurley just shared a wonderful example of volunteer recognition via an agency Web site: <http://www.shsw.wisc.edu/press/091599.htm> See how the State Historical Society of Wisconsin celebrates volunteer accomplishments as an integrated part of public information (and recruitment, too).

<http://www.energizeinc.com/backahead.html>



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