

Volunteer Management Tip Sheet #5



www.massvolunteers.org

There are many great resources with creative, low-cost ideas for recognizing volunteers.

One of the best is:

Recognizing Volunteers and Paid Staff: The Art, the Science and a Gazillion Ideas

by Sue Vineyard.
(Darien, IL: Heritage Arts, 2001).

Order a downloadable copy for \$10 from the bookstore at www.energizeinc.com.

Volunteer Recognition: An Integrated Approach

What does it mean to “recognize” volunteers? As Jarene Lee states in *What we learned (the hard way) about Supervising Volunteers*, the term has two meanings: 1) Noticing volunteers as an integral and valued aspect of the organization’s human resources; and 2) Appreciating and thanking volunteers for their time, their service, and the impact they make.¹ Volunteer recognition should not rest solely, or even primarily, with the volunteer coordinator. This tip sheet will help you establish a culture in which **volunteer recognition is everyone’s job**.

Recognizing volunteers is both a discrete phase of the Volunteer Management Cycle and something that should be integrated into all phases of the cycle. Follow the ideas below:

Planning:

Develop meaningful roles for volunteers that represent real organizational impact (not just whatever staff members don’t have time to do); obtain buy-in and support from board and senior managers for the value of engaging volunteers; develop a volunteer recognition plan that includes activities in all phases of the volunteer management cycle, consistent with available time and budget resources.

Recruiting, Screening and Placing:

Create meaningful, descriptive volunteer position titles (e.g. Tutor, Database Wizard, Greeter). Identify and highlight the benefits that volunteers can expect to receive (e.g. participate in training, feel part of a team, learn new skills, socialize with like-minded people). Use an intake process that individualizes people in terms of their motivation, interests and experience, and matches them with a position that is meaningful to them. **(See Tip Sheet #2).**

Orientation and Training:

Provide welcoming space and adequate supplies for volunteers; introduce volunteers to staff, board and other volunteers by name (and position title); offer volunteers training to develop new skills or earn a certification; invite volunteers to participate in staff development; provide certificates of training completion or records of training hours.

Supervision:

When the person that directly supervises the volunteer provides specific, timely feedback appreciating some aspect of their service or their effort, this is often the most meaningful recognition of all. Use sticky-notes (or emails, when appropriate to the audience) for a brief message of praise or encouragement, or to commemorate special occasions like birthdays, holidays, or return from illness; provide regular performance feedback [positive as well as areas for improvement]; offer opportunities for “promotion,” change of role, or leadership within the volunteer program or the organization. **The most meaningful feedback for a volunteer comes from the person that knows them best. Usually this is the site / program manager—not the volunteer coordinator!**

¹Lee, Jarene Frances with Julia M. Catagnus. *What we learned (the hard way) about Supervising Volunteers: An Action Guide for Making Your Job Easier*. Edited by Susan J. Ellis. Energize, Inc. 1999, pp. 11-12 and 60-61.

This tip sheet is based on *Training Busy Staff to Succeed with Volunteers: The 55-minute Training Series*, a curriculum created by Betty Stallings. Copyright 2007 Betty Stallings. Published by Energize, Inc.; for the segment on volunteer motivation, also the Points of Light Institute/HandsOn Network *Excellence in Volunteer Management Training Series*.

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One of the best resources for training and publications on all aspects of volunteer management is Energize, Inc.

Its founder and President, Susan J. Ellis, helps connect volunteer managers around the world through her excellent website:

www.energizeinc.com

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Recognition:

Although recognition should be integrated into each phase of volunteer management cycle, the “recognition” phase comprises the organization’s formal volunteer appreciation system:

Annual event(s) for National Volunteer Week, end of program year, or holidays; awards for outstanding volunteers, certificates or pins for volunteers achieving milestones in service (years or number of hours); articles about volunteers in organization’s newsletter, on its website, or in a local paper. Recognition events do not always need to be expensive or involve the entire organization. A potluck dinner, departmental breakfast, or volunteer-run picnic can work well, if appropriate. However, despite increased cost and planning time, there are benefits to including volunteer recognition in a larger event (e.g. an annual meeting). It gives visibility to volunteers among donors, senior staff, board and the broader community; makes it easier to garner publicity or media coverage for the volunteer program; and strengthens volunteers’ connection to the organization and its mission.

Evaluation:

Ask volunteers for feedback through both formal / written and informal means. This includes not only volunteer satisfaction surveys, but also soliciting their input and ideas for program improvement and informing them in a timely way of any changes planned for the volunteer program. (See Tip Sheet #3).

RECOGNITION TECHNIQUES SHOULD APPEAL TO DIFFERENT VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS:

Design recognition and rewards to appeal to what motivates volunteers. Volunteer management training curricula draw frequently on the work of psychologist David McClelland, who identified three primary types of motivation: **achievement**, **affiliation**, and **power** (influence).

For **achievement**-oriented volunteers, make sure to share positive client outcomes that result from the volunteer’s service. Certificates or letters of commendation should cite not only efforts but results. Offering volunteers training that leads to new skills or certifications is also a meaningful way to recognize these volunteers.

Banquets, holiday celebrations, potluck suppers, and participation in staff or all-volunteer meetings or social activities are meaningful ways to recognize volunteers who are oriented strongly toward **affiliation**. Remembering birthdays, asking after family members, acknowledging illness (and return after illness) and other special occasions is important to them.

Volunteers with a strong orientation toward **influence** will appreciate it when you ask their input about ways to improve the program (and show them how these ideas were used.) Offer them leadership opportunities within the volunteer program or the organization as a whole. Introduce them to board members or community leaders at public events.

Most volunteers are motivated by a combination of the three types, so your recognition plan should include aspects that will appeal to each.