

101 Ways to Recognise Your Volunteers

There are many ways you can recognise your volunteers for their remarkable spirit of giving. Read on for a few ideas...

Celebrate National Volunteer Week

1. Give a certificate to commemorate anniversaries of involvement.
2. Take photos of volunteers 'on the job', imprint a 'Thank you' message and frame them - then give them to each volunteer.
3. Hold special 'thank you' or social functions in honour of volunteers.
4. For long-standing volunteers, collect coins in the amount of hours contributed, place them in a vase tied with a royal blue ribbon and present to them at a special afternoon tea.
5. Have a morning tea with testimonials to the volunteers from recipients of services.
6. Give them a mug with logo or 'thank you' motif.
7. Create bookmarks for the volunteers with an acknowledgement of appreciation for work contributed.
8. Hold a BBQ for your volunteers.
9. Run a Volunteers Breakfast.
10. Give a pat on the back: Trace your hand on plain paper and cut out. Write, 'Here's a pat on the back for _____. Thanks for all your hard work.' Invite staff or anyone else that has contact with the volunteers to make one in recognition of the service of particular volunteers. Hang them all together for visual impact.
11. Create Volunteer buttons and pins
12. Arrange discounts for your volunteers at local shops.
13. Celebrate formal recognition events such as International Volunteer Day and National Volunteer Week with dinners, teas, dessert buffets, etc.

Start off on the right foot

14. Match the volunteer's desires with the organisation's needs.
15. Develop a volunteer policy for your organisation.
16. Accept that an individual volunteer's ability to commit may change over time.
17. Add volunteers to memo and e-mail distribution lists.
18. Ensure volunteers have adequate space and equipment to do their work.
19. Ensure a safe and healthy working environment.
20. Ensure confidentiality for your volunteers. Provide a clear role description for every volunteer.
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22. Make sure new volunteers are welcomed warmly.
23. Give volunteers a proper induction.
24. Provide car or bike parking for volunteers.
25. Devote resources (time and money) to volunteer support.
26. Maintain Occupational Health and Safety standards.
27. Provide the opportunity for volunteers to take leave of absence.
28. Have a vision for volunteer involvement in your organisation.

After you have warmly welcomed your volunteer, it is so easy to show your appreciation everyday without having to spend a huge amount of money.

Easy every day and cost-free ways to acknowledge your volunteers

29. Always be courteous.
30. Always greet your volunteers by name.
31. Say 'thank you' often, and mean it.
32. Recognise that volunteers play a unique role.
33. Be honest at all times.
34. Don't treat volunteers as second-class citizens.
35. Help volunteers feel good about themselves.
36. Create a climate in which volunteers can feel motivated.
37. Do not overwhelm volunteers.
38. Always be appreciative of volunteers' contributions.
39. Give volunteers a real voice within the organisation.
40. Tell volunteers they have done a good job.
41. Suggest sources of help and support for personal problems.
42. Know the volunteers' names, the names of their partners, kids or pets and ask about how they are.

Respecting your volunteers is another important way of showing your appreciation that won't break the bank. It will help you improve your volunteer program and retention rates, and will bring new ideas and viewpoints that may allow you to improve your organisation.

Ways to show you value your volunteers' input ...

43. Ask volunteers for ideas of how the organisation can show it cares.
44. Encourage them to sit on committees and attend meetings.
45. Allow volunteers to take on more challenging responsibilities.
46. Encourage volunteer participation in planning that affects their work.
47. Enable volunteers to 'grow' on the job
48. Send articles about your volunteer(s) to the local newspaper or run them in your newsletter.
49. Include their name on a program they helped organise.
50. Ask volunteers to share their ideas.
51. Share the results of program evaluations with volunteers so they can see their impact on clients and programs.
52. Review the progress of volunteers on a regular basis.
53. Provide constructive appraisal.
54. Allow volunteers to get involved in solving problems.
55. Learn what motivates each volunteer, and make your recognition appropriate to what he or she thinks is important.
56. Give volunteers tasks in which they will be successful.
57. Make sure the volunteers are doing work that is meaningful to them and the community.
58. Promote volunteers to other roles that take better advantage of their talents.
59. Highlight the impact that the volunteers' contribution is having on the organisation.
60. Always have work for your volunteers to do, and never waste their time.
61. Provide meaningful and enjoyable work.
62. Give volunteers an opportunity to debrief, especially if they work in stressful situations.

63. Let volunteers put their names to something they have helped to produce or to make happen.
64. Use surveys as a way of eliciting your volunteers views.
65. Take the time to explain and listen to volunteer's ideas and concerns.
66. Ask volunteers to give presentations or lead meetings.
67. Ask volunteers to train other volunteers, for example, older volunteers to mentor the young.
68. Make sure the volunteer coordinator is easily accessible and has an open door policy.
69. Supervise volunteers work.
70. Set up a volunteer support group.
71. Do not impose new policies and procedures without volunteers input.
72. Include volunteers by providing them with a special mail box in the office so they can retrieve memos or files when they stop by.
73. Ask volunteers opinions when developing new policies and strategies.
74. Maintain regular contact with volunteers, even if they work off-site or at odd hours.
75. Use quotes from volunteers in leaflets and annual reports.
76. Allow volunteers to air legitimate grievances and make sure these are dealt with swiftly.

If your budget allows, spending a little bit of money on your volunteers is a nice gesture to show the organisation values their contribution.

Some tips that may involve a slight cost ...

77. Provide excellent training and coaching.
78. Reimburse out-of-pocket expenses.
79. A personal note to say 'thanks' for a job well done.
80. Thank them in a newsletter.
81. Pay registration fees (or part of) for continuing education classes or conferences.
82. Write letters to the volunteer's family - let them know how much the person's work has contributed, and thank the family for supporting the volunteer in their efforts.
83. Have a letter to the volunteer from (or a visit with) a person who has benefited from the volunteer's services. Let the volunteer really see, hear and feel the end result of their work.
84. Have staff and clients write comments and quotes about the difference volunteers make, and have these printed in a booklet and mailed out or shared at a recognition event.
85. Create a volunteer notice board.
86. Provide free refreshments during coffee and tea breaks.
87. Include volunteers in coffee breaks.
88. Nominate your volunteers for community awards.

There are other forms of recognition that may only be relevant once a year or at the appropriate time, but which are nevertheless worthwhile doing as they show you value your volunteers.

Annual/one-off recognition ideas...

89. Have an annual volunteer award ceremony.
90. Conduct an exit interview when a volunteer leaves.
91. Feature your volunteers at special events throughout the year.
92. Farewell volunteers when they move away from the area or leave the organisation.
93. Provide letters of reference.
94. Recommend volunteers to prospective employers.

95. Help interested volunteers prepare their resumes, emphasising the skills they have developed through their volunteer work.
96. Send birthday cards.
97. Present volunteers with a special memento recognising their service to the organisation.
98. Celebrate the years work together.
99. Present special awards for 1, 3, 5, 10, 15 and more years of service.
100. Nominate a volunteer of the month, put up their picture in your office and send it to the local newspaper.
101. If you work with children, ask them to make thank-you cards for volunteers.