

## Section 8: Volunteer Recognition

One key to encouraging volunteers to stay engaged and perform at a high level is to provide regular recognition and appreciation. The most effective volunteer recognition occurs on a day-to-day basis when the staff expresses sincere appreciation and thanks for the work being done by the volunteer.

### **Day-to-day recognition may include:**

- Saying “thank you”
- Involving volunteers in the decisions that affect them
- Asking about the volunteers’ families and showing an interest in their “outside” life
- Allowing the volunteer to increase skills by attending training
- Recommending the volunteer for promotion to a position with more responsibilities
- Celebrating the volunteers’ anniversary with the organization

### **8.1 Volunteer Recognition on a Budget**

#### **Inexpensive activities to show gratitude:**

- Writing them a letter of commendation
- Enlisting them in training staff and other volunteers
- Involving them in the annual planning process
- Putting them on important task forces or committees
- Giving the best parking space to the “volunteer of the month”
- Writing articles about their contributions for newsletters or newspapers
- Having your boss write them a letter of thanks
- Putting their picture on the bulletin board with news of their accomplishments

Ask yourself: Am I able to pick one activity from above that I can implement at least once a month with my volunteers?

#### **Activities of gratitude that cost money, yet are still feasible:**

- Taking them to lunch
- Providing food at volunteer meetings
- Giving permission to go to a seminar, convention, or professional meeting, at the organization’s expense
- Making special caps, shirts, belt buckles or lapel badges honoring the volunteers
- Purchasing newspaper space to thank them
- Giving a plaque, certificate, or trophy

## 8.2 Understanding How Volunteers Like to be Recognized

**Public recognition is impactful, but not everyone likes it.** Being recognized at a public event, board meeting, or fundraiser can mean a lot to a volunteer, particularly if his or her supervisor or manager is present. However, some people do not like public recognition so it is important to know your volunteers and recognize them in ways that mean the most to them.

**Timing is crucial.** Recognizing a volunteer after they have completed a project or put on a successful event should occur immediately after the project is complete, not months later. Even an immediate “thank you” or “great job” can mean more than a letter or proclamation many months down the road.

**Make it personal.** While group recognition has its time and place, people appreciate being thanked individually. Small, personal indications of appreciation tend to be perceived as more sincere than formal pronouncements or group acknowledgements.

**Recognize recognition.** Thank those who are constantly thanking others and ensuring other people are receiving acknowledgement. Make it everyone’s job to recognize and support excellence all around and develop a culture of gratitude at your organization.

**Matching Recognition to the Volunteer.** To show your appreciation, it may help to customize your recognition to each individual volunteer. Again, understanding what led people to volunteer in the first place can help tailor recognition strategy. The table below takes a few of the aforementioned motivations for volunteering and gives recognition examples to best fit those individuals.

**Tailor recognition to individuals.** This goes along with knowing if people like public recognition or not. You should have several reward options available so your project director or volunteer supervisors have a choice when acknowledging their volunteers’ accomplishments (see below).

### Generations and Recognition

Traditionalist 1928-1945	Baby Boomers 1946-1964	Generation X 1965-1980	Millenials 1981-Present
Leadership	Newsletters	Thank you	Pictures on Facebook
Pins	Happy hour	Newsletters	Card
Thank you	Thank you	Social Gatherings (when they are not busy)	Reference Provider
Hugs			Thank you

### How Generations like to be rewarded

- Traditionalists - Satisfaction of job well done
- Baby Boomers - Status/\$\$/Titles
- Generation X - Freedom: Work in order to play
- Millennials - Meaningfulness

## How Generations like to receive feedback

- Traditionalists - No news is good news
- Baby Boomers - Formal meeting please
- Generation X - Immediate (sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing?)
- Millennials - Instantaneous feedback please

Keep in mind that these items are generalizations. Not all characteristics are exactly like each generation, but it offers some things to think about.