

Cost-conscious ways to recognize volunteers



Organizations are cutting costs to create leaner operating budgets in an attempt to secure longevity. Oftentimes, volunteer programs feel the brunt of budget cuts, threatening volunteer recognition efforts. But volunteers still need to feel appreciated for their contributions. Check out these great low-cost or free ways to recognize volunteers including an Oregon-specific idea! Use this resource to help plan your National Volunteer Week celebration each year!

Nominate a volunteer for an Oregon Governor's Volunteer Award. Find out more by visiting www.oregonvolunteers.org/events/gva

Select an Outstanding Volunteer of the Month and honor them with a newsletter/website feature, lunch outing or primo parking privileges.

Write personalized thank you notes to your volunteers specific to their service to show your appreciation of each of them as individuals.

Offer volunteers unique benefits available to employees, like use of a fitness area, event discounts and staff training and professional development opportunities.

Leave mementos of appreciation where you know your volunteers will find them. Example: a candy bar on their desk with a "you're the sweetest" message of praise.

Include your volunteers in important decision-making processes.

Hold one-on-one coffee (or tea) dates with each volunteer. Praise them and listen to their stories, suggestions and struggles.

Host an Outstanding Volunteer Awards ceremony and give out personalized awards to each volunteer. Categories could include: "Positively punctual", "Beyond the call of duty", or "Heart of gold".

Ask a leader in your organization to write a special Thank You message to your volunteers. Better yet, have them greet volunteers in person and thank them for their service.

Keep a "treasure chest" filled with small gifts to spontaneously reward volunteers for a job well done. These gifts could include valuable coupons, candy, trinkets, or company swag.

Treat volunteers to a bagel breakfast or afternoon sweets break. Save on costs by using programs like Groupon or LivingSocial.

Convey positive remarks. If you get praise for a volunteer, immediately convey those compliments to the volunteer. A verbal "thank you" or a high-five can go a long way.

Capture and print a photo of each volunteer in service. Frame and present it as a special Thank You gift.

Feature your volunteer program in your annual report and include the names of your volunteers with a message of thanks.

Invite your volunteers as guests of honor to company-wide outings such as a summer cookout at the zoo or winter holiday party.

Create a Volunteer Wall of Fame. Post volunteers' names, photos, and a brief bio to highlight their great work to the rest of your organization staff.

Leveraging your web presence to recognize volunteers

website feature

Feature volunteers on your website. Include their photo, a brief description of their work and successes. This not only publicly recognizes your volunteers for their work, but also adds personality and interest to your volunteer program and increases its exposure. If possible, develop a section within your website dedicated to your volunteer program. Elements could include volunteer position descriptions, details on how to become a volunteer, and recognition. If you can't easily update your website, consider linking to an outside blog, such as WordPress, to allow you to add and update content easily and frequently.

newsletter spotlight

Work with the department that creates your organization or business' newsletter to create an ongoing volunteering section. Invite volunteers to write an inspiring story about their service for each edition.

social media connection

Connect with your volunteers via your social media networks including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, and beyond. Remember to announce any recognition on these networks such as volunteer awards, event successes, your Outstanding Volunteer of the Month, etc. Post photos featuring volunteers at work and tag each volunteer in the photos. This is also a great avenue to send a personal message of thanks to your volunteers.

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REMEMBER

Always ask your volunteers for permission to use their name, information, or photo in any promotion, whether in printed materials, public relations materials, or on the web.