

Recognising Volunteers

When volunteers are recruited to your organisation it makes the utmost sense to make every effort to retain them. It is a costly proposition to recruit and train replacement volunteers. Moreover, the time lost in recruiting replacement volunteers can result in lengthy periods where an organisation may not be able to deliver the additional quality of service that a volunteer may bring to the organisation.

One important way of encouraging your volunteers to remain with your organisation is to give them adequate recognition. Recognition to be effective should be consistent and ongoing. Volunteers can quickly lose motivation if they feel that their work is not valued.

Volunteer managers should be aware that the way volunteer efforts are recognised is of importance. This is because one volunteer may regard one type of recognition as valuable whilst another volunteer may feel it has little worth. If a Volunteer Manager is aware of the volunteer's motivation in working for the organisation then this will provide a good indication for the type of recognition that the volunteer is seeking. For example if a volunteer is hoping to obtain paid employment, they will value opportunities to receive training and obtain a certificate of training recognition or they may value a referee for their résumé?

In many cases volunteers that are motivated by helping the community will see their work as reward and will only require support from their volunteer organisation. The support of paid staff and the Volunteer Manager can be shown in many ways. The enthusiasm of paid staff to the aims of the volunteer program is very important because it will naturally engender within the organisation the recognition that volunteers are important.

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Some ways that volunteer organisations may give recognition to their volunteers are:

- Adequately orientate volunteers.
- Volunteer coordinators are readily accessible to volunteers.
- Encourage volunteer participation in team planning.
- Encourage volunteer participation in planning that affects their work.
- Provide training.
- Give additional responsibility.
- Enable volunteers to 'grow' on the job.
- Include volunteers in special events.
- Include volunteers in coffee breaks.
- Recommend volunteers to prospective employers.
- Maintain Occupational Health and Safety standards.
- Take the time to explain and listen to volunteer's ideas and concerns.
- Recognise and accommodate personal needs and problems.
- Celebrate achievements and efforts.
- Keep volunteers informed via newsletter
- Provide letters of reference.
- Send birthday and Christmas cards.
- Allocate notice board space to applaud volunteer achievement.
- Organise awards with certificates or plaques or medals.
- Honour volunteers on International Volunteers Day, December 5th, with a planned activity such as afternoon tea or lunch.
- Celebrate National Volunteer Week.