
Recognising Volunteers

Why Show Appreciation for Volunteers?

People volunteer for a range of reasons, but all donate their time without expecting financial reward; bringing skills, enthusiasm and dedication to our organisations. Many organisations would be unable to run their services without their volunteers. Showing appreciation for all that your volunteers do is very important and helps boost the “feel good” factor that research has identified as being a core reason why volunteers volunteer in the first place. We all feel better when we feel appreciated.....but there are also mutual benefits, because happy volunteers will bring more people into your volunteering team, a win for you both!!

What can we do to show appreciation?

Because we are all different, it's important to show appreciation in different ways so that you meet as many styles as possible. Offering signs of appreciation individually, and to a group, is important. Below is a list of suggestions, which can be tailored to your own organisation. It is not exhaustive, and some ideas will work for you, whilst others may not. You may well find that you are already doing many of these things, in which case a good pat on the back for yourselves as volunteer managers is always good too. Take advantage of opportunities, such as supervision and tea break chats, to find out what sort of recognition the volunteers in your organisation would like best – personalisation to groups and individuals is the key.

Individual Appreciation – some ideas to think about

- Be available: say “*thank you*” at the end of a shift, but also find time to speak to volunteers, listen to their ideas and comments, and move the effective ones forward. Volunteers are giving your organisation their time and attention; recognising that by listening to, and involving them, is a solid foundation stone.
- It will help if staff (including senior managers) across the organisation also make volunteers feel welcome, so that they feel part of the organisational team. When they start, take time to introduce them or send an email to let the team know who is starting
- Give volunteers the opportunity to train and develop. This encourages interest and will help your organisation in the long run (but remember that training should be specific to the volunteer role in question, otherwise there may be HMRC implications)
- Birthday and/or Christmas cards – these are a very nice and personal touch
- Supervision – use the opportunity to recognise commitment and say thank you.
- Additional responsibilities – sharing these with volunteers can be a helpful way of recognising skills and knowledge (for example, could an experienced volunteer be a “buddy” for a new starter?)
- Volunteering certificates - maybe one for each volunteer as part of Volunteers’ Week, in recognition of a certain number of hours volunteered or for long service?
- Specific “thank yous” for jobs well done, or a contribution (maybe helping at an event). These could take many forms, a card or letter, a personal chat etc..
- Show your appreciation for your volunteers and nominate them for awards. Or, you could put on your own internal awards! Remember to always be fair and make sure that all volunteers are supported, valued and recognised.
- Long service – many years of volunteering service can be recognised in different ways and settings. Whatever works for your organisation is good, but it is very important not to let those special dates go by without recognition.

- Feedback (from volunteers to the organisation) - this is a great source of information and a terrific way of ensuring that everything is alright “on the ground”. Informal discussions, invitations to organisational meetings, or chats during supervision. Or maybe anonymous surveys? How do you make sure your volunteers’ voices are heard? A chat while the kettle boils can be a great bonding experience and help you to solve problems early on. However, always make sure that your volunteers know your complaints policy for bigger issues.
- Say goodbye – although we hope that volunteers don’t leave, it is inevitable that they will at some point. Take time to say good bye and thank them for their service, a letter is a lovely way to do this. If they have a good impression of their experience, they’ll continue to recruit new volunteers for you

Group Recognition

- Be sure to let your volunteers know what difference their contribution makes to your organisation or beneficiaries
- Include the contribution that volunteers make to the organisation in your annual report, highlighting the contribution they have made (number of hours donated, case studies, etc.). This is also a great opportunity for the CEO to offer a formal thank you.
- Your organisation’s communications are another good way of showcasing the volunteers who offer their time to you; such as newsletters, Facebook, tweets etc
- Volunteer social events (Christmas parties, cream teas, Volunteers Week – usually the first week in June, etc.)
- It is important to keep volunteers Informed of what is going on in the organisation (particularly planned changes) and seek their input where possible. Information can be shared by various means (email, meetings, letters etc.) but do remember to include people who are taking a break, so they feel included.
- Ask them! A regular volunteer survey is a great way to find out what volunteers think so that you can continue to improve on their experiences

And finally: NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF TEA AND BISCUITS!!