

How to Provide Meaningful Recognition to Volunteers

Recognising a volunteer should always take their preferences and characteristics into consideration. It should be personal and meaningful to them. For example, if a volunteer doesn't like being publically recognised, don't put a picture of their face in the local newspaper with a thank you message. Instead, give them a personal thank you in a private space.

Here are some guidelines on recognising volunteers:

- *Be immediate* – provide recognition shortly after the contribution which the volunteer is being recognised for.
- *Be honest* – make sure any praise you are giving is genuine. Don't praise substandard work as it degrades the value of any recognition you give.
- *Be consistent* – if two volunteers contribute the same amount, they should both be recognised, and the level of recognition they receive should be similar.
- *Be specific* – recognition should be for specific work or achievements. For example thank a volunteer for doing a good job washing dishes, rather than telling them that their shift at the canteen went well.
- *Be appropriate* – the level of recognition a volunteer gets should match their contribution. If the volunteer achieves something great, do something special to recognise that.
- *Be considerate* – take into account your volunteers' characteristics, culture, and values. Try adding a personal touch to recognition.
- *Be enthusiastic* – this helps to promote an energetic and positive environment.
- *Be manageable* – take into consideration the budget of your club or association; recognition doesn't always have to cost money.
- *Recognise frequently* – recognition tends to wear off quickly, so make sure you are recognising volunteers often.
- *Recognise in various ways* – if you consistently recognise volunteers the same way it becomes less effective, so make sure you are trying out different methods.

The following section outlines how you can identify different characteristics of your volunteers, to help inform the type of recognition you choose to use. These generalisations are intended to give you some ideas to start from, but you should always take into consideration the individual characteristics of your volunteers.

Generational Differences

Generation Y (born 1978 – 1994)

- Give them immediate recognition
- Offer to write a letter of recommendation that could be used in their CV
- Ask for their input, giving them the opportunity to be innovative or creative

Generation X (born 1965 – 1977)

- Invite them to social functions or gathering (sundowners, barbecues etc.)
- Recognise their individual contributions



Baby Boomers (born 1946 – 1964)

- Invite them to be part of decisions or meetings affecting the club/association
- Give them significant opportunities, and make use of their experience and skills

Motivational Differences

The volunteer likes the sense of *achievement*:

- Give recognition in relation to a specific accomplishment of the volunteer – this could be as simple as 'Most Sausages Sizzled'
- Use words like 'best' or 'most' in the recognition that you give them
- Provide opportunities such as more challenging roles or additional training

The volunteer identifies and feels *affiliated* with your club/association:

- Give the recognition at an event or social gathering
- Make the recognition special or personalised for that volunteer
- Have somebody who represents the club give the recognition

The volunteer likes a sense of *power* or *authority* in your club:

- Recognition could come in the form of a 'promotion', giving them a new title
- Recognise them in a public space, such as in a newspaper or on social media
- Have someone of authority in the organisation give the recognition

Please note, suggestions of promotions are given in the context of volunteers whose performance you are satisfied with. Promotions should not be used to appease volunteers and should only be given because they are deserved.

Volunteering Duration

Short-term or episodic volunteers – those who may not stay for long

- Give the recognition in the form of something the volunteer can take with them
- Have their immediate supervisor give the recognition
- Give the recognition in their immediate team or working group

Long-term volunteers who aren't leaving in the foreseeable future

- The recognition should be affiliated with your club/association
- Entails further involvement or greater influence within your club/association
- Have a person of authority or importance give the recognition