

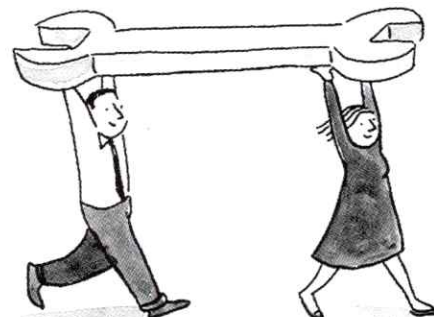
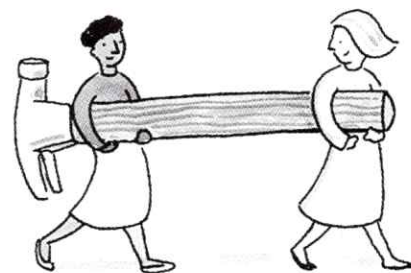
Workshop

Recognition

Give Volunteers the Honor They're Due

Recognition is the fuel that keeps a successful volunteer program running smoothly. It's the most visible way to show that you care and appreciate the hours and efforts of the people who devote their time and talents to an agency or a cause. Workshop's guest editors share their expertise on several aspects of recognition, ranging from how to set up a major awards program to ways of recognizing volunteers year-round. Try these tested ideas and enjoy the results.

Workshop, a standing feature in *Leadership*, offers how-to tips and valuable insights on selected topics. If you'd like to be a guest editor or want to suggest topics for future coverage, write to Leadership Workshop, The Points of Light Foundation, 1737 H Street NW, Washington, DC 20006. ■



Making Recognition a Daily Happening

By Sue Vineyard

As leaders of volunteer programs of any size can attest, the driving force behind their efforts today is change. Change in how they do their work and who the clients and volunteers are. In the midst of all of this, I have found one area that seems to have avoided much change. In fact, I've had program leaders tell me proudly that "even though everything else is topsy-turvy, our volunteer recognition is still the same!"

Too bad. If your volunteer recognition efforts are the same as they were five, 10 or 15 years ago, it may be time to re-think how you say "thank you" to your volunteers and staff. If you find that the recognition banquet at the end of the year along with an article covering it, and a handful of certificates, plaques, pins and wittily inscribed coffee mugs constitute your "recognition program," it definitely is time to challenge yourself and others to find ways to expand the depth and breadth of your reward system. Do not mistake what I am saying. I am not against any of the traditional ways mentioned above in which you might recognize volunteers. What I am saying, however, is as fine as all of these things are, they are not enough.

To begin to redesign your recognition efforts, you must start

with what recognition is and is not. Recognition is not so much "things" as it is an attitude. One that, to be most effective, must start with the CEO of your organization and permeate every level of worker. An attitude that values both volunteers and paid staff and finds multiple ways to express that valuing.

Recognition is not an event as much as it is an on-going process where people are constantly on the alert for meaningful ways to say "good job" and "thank you." This process understands that good recognition is user-oriented, and therefore must be meaningful to the person being thanked, not just easy to do for recognition planners. Recognition is not generic, but personalized and timely. Instead of a May banquet speaker saying "It's great what you all did this year," it's a note or phone call from the CEO saying, "I just wanted to thank you, John, for how you handled the hysterical mother yesterday who ran up to your hospital information booth."

In our world of multiple PIN numbers, two phones and a FAX, and entry codes at our work and homes, people want to know that they have been noticed and are valued as real, live individuals. Personalized recognition, given at the time of the effort, does that. Recognition is more informal than formal—a friendly hello, remembering a volunteer's name or their kids, pets, spouses, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Rewarding them with a special item they collect. Making sure they have a safe, convenient place to park, hang their coat, store their purse, fill out forms, do their assignment.

Recognition is an integral part of volunteer management that

involves volunteers in decisions that affect them, asking for their input during planning, and tailoring jobs to remove barriers to participation. Volunteers also feel known and valued when:

- they are asked to help train new people;
- efforts are evaluated from their perspective;
- opportunities are offered for them to work with friends, family or co-workers.

Recognition should also have a sense of humor:

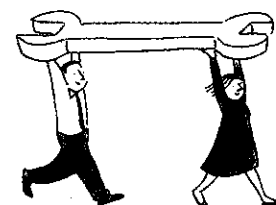
- naming the coffee pot in the lounge for the volunteer who "pours himself or herself into his or her work;"
- wearing costumes to work at Halloween;
- sending anonymous valentines in November;
- decorating the volunteer work areas;
- sharing funny cartoons and encouraging laughter.

Recognition has as many faces as you have volunteers. It changes constantly in order to remain appropriate, targeted, respectful, tailored, timely and frequent. It is genuine, spontaneous, ethical, uplifting, flexible and caring. It is as deep and broad as you can make it, and it is generated by everyone for everyone. It's an attitude that creatively says: "Thank you for being you." It's a never-ending celebration of great people accomplishing great things. ■



Sue Vineyard is an author of 16 how-to books relating to volunteerism. She is founding editor of "GRAPEVINE: Volunteerism's Newsletter." Her book, Beyond

Banquets, Plaques & Pins: Creative Ways to Recognize Volunteers continues to be a best-seller in the field.



Designing an Effective Awards Program

By Richard C. Mock

Volunteer awards programs are done for a number of reasons. Awards recognize individuals for their contribution. They can raise the profile of the sponsoring organization. They can heighten the public awareness of community problems and help encourage more people to get involved in addressing those problems.

Assume that your board has asked you to develop an awards program that's representative of the community. What do you need to do between now and the awards presentation? As you make your basic decisions, remember that there are few right and wrong answers, just different ones.

Decide the scope of the awards—whom they're designed to recognize and for what kinds of activities. Will awards be made in areas of service, such as environmental activities, health-related programs, educational activities? Do you want to stipulate categories of award recipients, such as youth, seniors, families? Or do you want to do both? Whatever you decide, remember that if the awards are to be credible, it's important that the winners reflect the community.

Decide whether you want to present a volunteer-of-the-year type award or a number of awards. There are advantages and disadvantages to both choices. Making only one or two awards adds importance to the award but makes it less reflective of

the community; presenting too many awards dilutes the importance of the individual awards.

A good nomination form is important. You'll need to know basics—the nominee's name and contact information, the nominator's name, reference contact information, the type of activity or the category of nominee.

Describe the criteria—probably no more than half a dozen—on which you'll base your choices. Answer as many questions as possible on the form.

Running a volunteer awards program is more of an art than a science.

Ask for a short statement—no more than a page—describing the nominee's contribution. You may allow nominators to submit supporting materials such as brochures or news clippings.

Develop a judging process that's fair and credible. A process with two or three steps allows volunteers or staff to do the first reading, weeding out those who are ineligible or whose contribution isn't reflective of the award. Narrowing the field of nominees allows you to present the final judges with a more manageable group of final nominees.

Recruit a diverse group of community leaders as your final judges. They may include a local media celebrity, a minister or rabbi, an educator, nonprofit leaders, a young person. Although it's possible to do the judging by mail, it's preferable to

bring the judges together. Ask them to read the nominations and to rank them (within each of the categories) based on their strength before the final judging. Ranking allows the judges to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the nominees relative to each other rather than considering each nominee individually. When the judges assemble, combine their rankings and let them devote their time to reaching consensus on the slate of final winners.

Also to consider: Mailing nomination forms four to six weeks before your deadline; conducting a simple telephone background check on your finalists to determine the accuracy of your information; including a statement on the nomination form that you may not make awards in all categories; sending a card of thanks from your mayor or board chairman to all nominees.

Remember, running a volunteer awards program is more of an art than a science. Unless you're making your awards strictly on the number of hours or length of service, many of your decisions are going to be more qualitative than quantitative. This makes the process more difficult but infinitely more rewarding. Don't forget to evaluate your awards program. At the end of your first year, talk to the final judges, the volunteers, staff. What were the program's strong points; the weak points? How can you improve and refine the process?

If you've developed a solid basic program, you'll be able to make the adjustments that will make it even better—one that not only recognizes your community's outstanding volunteers but reflects well on the organization and encourages more people to be involved in more creative ways. ■



Richard C. Mock, vice president of publications and product development at The Points of Light Foundation, managed the President's Service Awards Program

from its inception in 1982 through 1995.

Ways to Reward Workplace Volunteers

By Joannie Johnson

Recognition is one of the most important keys to volunteer programs whether it be for a corporation, a non-profit agency, or a volunteer center. Recognition comes in all shapes and sizes from a simple "thank-you" to a volunteer awards program.

During our volunteer program's early inception, we did not have a budget for projects or recognition. The program was administered out of our corporate relations area, so once in a while we did receive free tickets to concerts, plays, ball games, etc. We gave the tickets to volunteers as a way to say "thanks for all you do." As our program started to grow, we were given a budget which included funds for recognition. Our recognition program for the next three or four years was a reception during National Volunteer Week, held after work with our CEO in attendance. Anyone who volunteered the year before whether they volunteered for one hour or 100 hours, was invited to the reception. But we decided this really wasn't the way we wanted to recognize our employees' volunteer efforts.

So, in 1987, we implemented our ICT (Involvement Corps Team) Award Recognition Program. Under

this graduated program, employees are given various gifts as they reach certain levels. Not only does this recognize volunteers, it also motivates them. Everyone was given a T-shirt at five hours; they receive another gift at 10, 20, 30, and 40 hours. Most of the gifts are clothing, ranging from socks, shorts and sweaters to sweatshirts and wind-breakers—all imprinted with our volunteer program logo. We've also awarded things like briefcases, beach towels, coolers and travel mugs.

A smile and kind word to your volunteers is the best form of recognition.

These items change each calendar year. The amount of visibility our company receives from a group wearing the items far outweighs the cost of the program. Anyone who volunteers at least 50 hours is invited to a reception and banquet held at a local hotel.

After several years, we realized we had to think of another way to recognize and motivate upper management. They didn't submit their volunteer hours because they weren't really interested in receiving another T-shirt or sweater. So we developed and implemented the ICT Matching Grant Program. Any employee who volunteers 75 or more hours in a calendar year receives a grant to their favorite charity. The amount of the grant is based on the number of hours they volunteer, ranging from a \$150 grant for 75 hours to \$500 for 250 or more hours. This expansion of our ICT

award program has been extremely successful. We started out with a \$20,000 budget for the grant program and last year gave out \$45,950 in grants. This money comes out of our corporate contributions budget.

Publicity is another form of recognition for volunteers. We publish names of employees who have volunteered for our group projects whenever we can in our company's daily newsletter. During National Volunteer Week each year, we take out a full-page ad that includes a list all our volunteers' names. I have talked with some companies who take photos at all of their projects. Then they display them for the whole company to see. After the display is taken down, the volunteers receive the pictures. Nominating one of your volunteers for a community volunteer award is also great publicity and visibility for your volunteer.

Our volunteer program's structure includes a steering committee whose 18 members chair our group projects during the year. They are eligible for all of the ICT awards, but I feel it is important to do a little extra for them in the form of recognition. They are the recipients of any free tickets our department might acquire. I remember each of them on their birthdays and send them a "volunteer" birthday card. Also, each year, two of the steering committee members are invited to attend The Points of Light Foundation's Community Service Conference. Sending your volunteers to conferences, seminars, etc. can also be a form of recognition.

Whether your recognition budget is large or small, remember that a smile and kind word to your volunteers is the best form of recognition. ■



Joannie Johnson, corporate relations associate, manages Aid Association for Lutheran's employee volunteer program. AAL is the nation's largest fraternal

benefit society in terms of assets and offers volunteer opportunities and insurance products to its 1.6 million members nationwide. Johnson also is an advisor for The Points of Light Foundation's Council on Workplace Volunteering.

Creating Community-Wide Recognition Events

By Betsy Aldrich Garland

In today's competitive environment for friends and funds, nonprofit agencies need to be highly visible. At the same time, they have increasingly scarce resources to manage a recognition program on their own. The answer is to combine forces with other nonprofits for a community-wide recognition effort—with more good will and greater impact than any one of them could leverage on their own.

Organizations that are in the business of promoting volunteerism and community service—Volunteer Centers, United Ways, Junior Leagues, State Offices and Commissions, and other community groups—can come together during National Volunteer Week to plan and produce a major celebration for their combined constituencies. Fundraising executives can invite community agencies to recognize one of their own at a joint celebration of National Philanthropy Day. Service providers in like fields can host an event for their volunteers that will foster cross-fertilization of ideas, decrease resistance to collaboration, and build alliances for the future.

However, special care must be taken if such joint ventures are to be successful, including the following:

- Build the case for partnership and secure board and top executive commitment from the participating organizations.

- Begin planning early. Repre-

sentatives from groups that are not used to working together will need time to build working relationships and trust. They also may need to confer with others in their organizations—which can slow the decision-making process.

- Identify a chairperson. Every successful project needs someone to facilitate communication, oversee the work, keep the schedule on track. The Volunteer Center may be a natural for this role. Also, if there is to be an honorary chairperson, clarify expectations and responsibilities for this position.

For greater impact, combine forces with other nonprofit organizations.

- Clarify and agree on the goals and projected outcomes of the effort, with the understanding that different agencies may have different expectations of success. The event must be a win-win situation for everyone.

- Identify the strengths that each organization brings and the contributions that each can make that will enhance the joint venture. One organization might have the needed connections to secure a speaker; others might have a facility, be able to donate the printing, or be able to gather people to address invitations.

- Develop a budget and financial record-keeping plan. If seed money or in-kind contributions are needed, agree on an equitable strategy to undergird the effort. Decide before the event how profits (or deficits) will be shared—or held in reserve for the next event.

- Share the workload. Resentments develop when a few people carry the ball for everyone else. List assignments for individuals and organizations in writing. Design job descriptions for major roles. Appoint sub-committees as needed. Make people accountable for work they have agreed to do.

- Hold effective meetings with agendas, minutes, adequate information to make decisions, and healthy discussion. Allow time to reach consensus. Meet often enough to maintain momentum (at least once a month), but remember, too, that people are busy and this effort may not be their primary concern.

- Be flexible and sensitive to organizational cultures. Plan the program in keeping with the values of participating organizations. Hold the event on neutral "turf" where everyone is comfortable. Serve lemonade instead of wine if a partner substance-abuse or youth-service agency never serves alcoholic beverages.

- Give all organizations equal billing in the program and visibility on the platform, and be generous in thanking key players.

Although it may seem like more work—and it is—to plan a multi-agency event, the likelihood is much greater that the governor will attend, corporations will provide sponsorships, and the media will send a camera crew. Each partner agency also will be exposed to the constituencies of the others when they promote the event through their own channels, so everyone's exposure will be greater, and the event's reach will be broader. Agencies—with a relatively small investment of staff time and other resources—have the potential of reaping great benefits. ■



Betsy Aldrich Garland is the executive director of VIA, the Volunteer Center for Rhode Island. In April, she convened 20 organizations to celebrate leadership in volunteerism.