

Recognition and Appreciation



Best practices for every organisation

While each organization needs to develop its own volunteer recognition standards and practices, the following are some volunteer recognition best practices developed by [Volunteer Canada](#) that you can use as a starting point:

- **Make it a priority.** Recognising the work of volunteers is crucial for any organisation that wants to retain its volunteers and attract new ones. Designate someone in your organisation to be responsible for ensuring that ongoing recognition of volunteers takes place (and if you're reading this, that person is probably you!).
- **Do it often.** Recognition of volunteers should happen on a year-round, frequent basis. Begin by saying "thank you" often with the help of our volunteer [Thank you e-cards](#).
- **Do it in different ways.** Vary your recognition efforts, from the informal thank you and spontaneous treats to more formal events. Take a look at our ideas for formal and informal recognition.
- **Be sincere.** Make each occasion to recognize volunteers meaningful and an opportunity to reflect on the value volunteers bring to your organisation.
- **Recognize the person, not the work.** It's best to phrase recognition to emphasize the contribution of the individual and not the end result. "You did a great job!" as opposed to "This is a great job!"
- **Make it appropriate to the achievement.** For example, a paper certificate accompanied by a private thank you may be appropriate for a few months of service, but a public dinner and engraved plaque may better suit 10 years of volunteerism.
- **Be consistent.** Make sure that whatever standards of recognition you establish can be consistently maintained by your organization for years to come. Holding a volunteer recognition dinner one year sets up expectations for future volunteers.
- **Be timely.** Try to arrange recognition soon after an achievement has been reached. Delaying until weeks or months later diminishes the value of your gratitude.
- **Customize it.** Getting to know each of your volunteers and their interests will help you learn how best to recognize each individual and make them feel special.



Ideas for Informal Appreciation

Here are a few ideas for easy, informal recognition opportunities you can deliver on the fly.

- Check in regularly with your volunteers to make sure they have everything they need and to ask if there's anything you can do to make their experience better.
- Take photos of your volunteers in action, create an online photo album and send them a link to help them relive their volunteer experience.
- Take a break with your volunteers! When it's time for lunch or a quick coffee break, ask if you can sit with volunteers and use the opportunity to say thank you for everything they do.
- Create name badges for your office volunteers to help them feel like part of the team.
- Offer gift cards as a way of saying thank you. This doesn't have to blow your budget: a \$5 gift card to a local coffee shop will help make their day.

And, as always, a simple "thank you" is often all a volunteer needs to hear.

Ideas for Formal Appreciation

Here are a few ideas for building formal volunteer recognition into your regular annual activities.

- Send cards on their birthdays and holidays. Always include your volunteers in your regular holiday card mailings. Use your volunteer management software to keep track of their birthdays so you can acknowledge their special day.
- Incorporate volunteer recognition into your fundraising events.
- Organize regular volunteer appreciation events. It's great to recognize volunteers at the events they're supporting throughout the year, but why not throw them their own party? This doesn't have to cost big bucks. A potluck, a pub gathering or even a COVID-19-friendly virtual get-together will help your volunteers feel appreciated and connected.
- Offer volunteer recognition awards. Your volunteer appreciation event would be a great time to present special recognition awards! Acknowledge and celebrate long-time volunteers with certificates, plaques or other tokens of appreciation.
- Send impact reports. Just like you would for any donor, prepare a special [volunteer impact report](#) (or even just a detailed email!) for your volunteers highlighting how the event or program they supported is making a difference.
- Go the extra mile. Make life a little easier for your volunteers by adding special touches that help them stay engaged and hit the ground running.