

Recognizing Volunteers

By **Jeanne H. Bradner**

Much is said about recognizing volunteers. In a recent survey in Illinois, 44% of those responding said they don't think they do a good job of recognizing their volunteers. This response made me wonder if people think 'recognition' is the end-of-the-year dinner. Many agencies don't have the resources to do this kind of event and feel bad about not doing it.

However, I believe good leaders recognize their volunteers from the minute they join a program by treating them as individuals with talents and interests who need to be matched to the right task. Leaders also understand the value of praising effective work at the time it takes place and treating volunteers as important members of the team. This kind of recognition is more important than any social event that might be held.

I have found over the years that while some volunteers love the big yearly event, others don't care at all and find their satisfaction in the work they do and the feedback from those they work with. This could be recognition in the organization's newsletter, a note from a pleased staff member or client, or a 'promotion' to a more responsible volunteer assignment.

Volunteer recognition can be public or private and should be appropriate to the person and his/her contribution. Most of all, it should be honest and demonstrate some particular insight into what that person has done.

The following are some everyday ways to recognize volunteers:

- Learn what motivates each volunteer and make your recognition appropriate to what he or she thinks is important.
- Give volunteers tasks in which they will be successful.
- Give volunteers whatever training is necessary to perform well.
- Thank volunteers genuinely and appropriately.
- Give volunteers feedback.
- Invite volunteers to participate in decision making.
- Promote volunteers to other roles that take better advantage of their talents.
- Ask volunteers for their feedback.
- Ask volunteers to recruit others.
- Make sure the volunteers are doing work that is meaningful to them and the community.
- Let the volunteers know about the outcomes from the program.
- Never forget the power of a simple thank you, oral or written."

Excerpted from *Leading Volunteers for Results: Building Communities Today*.

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