Knowledge Gateway

Practice Guidance and Information

Recognising and valuing your volunteers

What do we mean by recognising and valuing volunteers?

Acknowledging the contribution made by volunteers shows that your organisation or group appreciates and values volunteers' input, skills, time, and commitment. Doing this can help volunteers feel valued and supported.

If volunteers, feel appreciated they are more likely to continue volunteering.

How do I recognise my volunteers and make them feel valued?

It doesn't have to be big awards, a simple thank you is sometimes all volunteers look for. If possible, make it specific to the volunteer, knowing what motivates them, rather than the same for everyone across your organisation. Some volunteers don't want public thanks, where others might do.

Think about the delivery; volunteers might be based at home and unable to get to an event or location for a number of reasons. They might also find the thought of an event a bit overwhelming. Also think about the impact, some volunteers appreciate an award for long service, but you also need to value the contribution of volunteers who can only volunteer for a short time.

You don't have to include all the suggestions below, but it is a good idea to think about some of the following areas to make sure that the contribution of volunteers is recognised.

Be prepared for volunteers arriving	First impressions count. When you advertise for new volunteers make sure you return their calls promptly and keep to the recruitment timescales that you have set. It makes a difference to a volunteer if you listen to what they want from the volunteering experience and match them to a role that is suited.
Letting volunteers know that their work makes a difference can be motivating and rewarding	Think about how you could measure the impact of your volunteers. This type of feedback enables volunteers to understand the impact that they have contributed to. Sharing this impact can show how you value your volunteers and motivate volunteers.
Trusting volunteers	Giving volunteers a new task with a different role, or more responsibility, demonstrates trust. Trusting volunteers is an important way to show volunteers that you value and recognise their contribution.
Saying thank you	Sometimes a simple thank you is all the recognition that a volunteer wants. This can be informally in person, by telephone, by email, in a Christmas card or formally at meetings, events or at your AGM. You may also highlight a volunteer/s in an article on social media, your website, newsletters and newspapers. However, if you decide to do this, it should be consistent and fair. All VIOs should celebrate Volunteer's Week.
Keeping volunteers informed	Volunteers can feel valued if they are kept up to date about what is happening with the organisation. Some organisations do this via meetings, emails, newsletters, media blogs, or have dedicated pages for volunteers on their website.
Creating an identity	There are lots of different ways that you can do this. Being given clothing to wear and relevant equipment while doing their role helps volunteers feel part of the team. For example, some heritage volunteers said that having a 'volunteer' identity badge often helps the public appreciate that they are volunteers, and as such this gains respect and understanding.
Volunteer events	Providing time for volunteers to get together socially is a good way to acknowledge their contribution and keep them inspired. Meeting new people gives volunteers a chance to share their experience, hear about what others do, feel part of the larger team of volunteers and maybe think about doing more roles in the organisation.

Access to training	A volunteer may value being able to attend training for development purposes (this has to be relevant to the delivery of the role so it's not considered a perk in lieu of payment). This is especially important for volunteers who are looking to develop their CV or boost their employability skills. This can be done face to face or online. Volunteers might value being invited to attend a seminar, convention, or meeting at the organisation's representative, as it demonstrates to Them that they are trusted volunteers.
Feedback	Sometimes volunteering is positive and sometimes not always positive, organisations/groups should ask for volunteers input and feedback, let volunteers have a voice and discuss their suggestions, value your volunteers by allowing them to have an input on how to improve, this can be done informally or formally; meetings, AGM, development days and annual surveys.
Volunteer awards	Some organisations nominate volunteers for their in house awards ceremonies. This could be for team effort, length of time in service, recognition as an inspiring volunteer or even a lifetime commitment award. You could nominate volunteers for external awards through their local volunteer centre, or if a young person in Scotland perhaps through the Saltire or Young Scot Awards. However, it is important if you chose to have awards that you find ways to recognise those who do not get nominated. You should also consider how to recognise volunteers who are not able to attend an awards ceremony.
Accommodating needs	Show empathy and try to adapt roles or activities to suit your volunteers. This is most effective when you ask how you can help, instead of implementing change without taking into consideration a volunteer's views, preference, needs and opinions.
Saying goodbye	Although it is important to keep volunteers once you have supported them into their role it is also important to remember that most volunteers will eventually leave. Thank them for their time and let them go with gratitude.
Providing a reference	Sometimes you may be requested to provide a reference for a volunteer if they are moving into paid work, education, or another volunteering role.

What next?

If you are unsure whether your volunteers feel appreciated, ask them! Some organisations carry out an annual survey with volunteers to find out if The support and recognition they are providing is appropriate.You might also find it helpful to create a recognition policy or standard operating procedure so you're clear about how you recognise and value volunteers. It is important to make sure staff and committee members understand that investing in recognising and valuing volunteers benefits the organisation. A valued volunteer can become a great ambassador for your organisation and can help to attract new volunteers.

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The Knowledge Gateway is created and led by **Volunteer Scotland**

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This is a regularly reviewed resource. If you have any suggested updates, please email Volunteer Scotland at **hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk**