

# Volunteer Tips and Strategies

## Topic 5: Retaining Volunteers: Feedback, Valuing, and Appreciating



### Retaining Volunteers

Retention begins when you have accurately described the volunteer position and assessed whether the potential volunteer is right for the position. Hence, **retention begins in the interview and screening process.** Tune in to the volunteer's main reason for volunteering and honor this throughout his/her time with you.

Retention refers to the volunteer's adherence to the initial **contract agreement.** If a volunteer is asked to commit 4 hours a week for a six month period, and the volunteer leaves after 6 months, it can be said that the retention was successful.

There are several key components in a volunteer program that enhance retention. These are: placement, orientation, training, supervision, evaluation, and recognition.

### Valuing and Recognizing Volunteers

Only 35% of nonprofits recognize the contributions of volunteers as a regular practice.

Recognition is not just an annual event to which volunteers are invited. 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.

### Tips for VOLUNTEER RETENTION

- 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 and staff meetings.
- 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 – cards are great for birthdays, thank you's for a specific contribution or just to say "we're grateful for you"!
- Never mail an award, never put it in their mailbox, and never give it to somebody else to give it to them. If they are going to miss the event where you were planning to present them an award always find another public venue to make the presentation. Make the award presentation a celebration the volunteer will treasure.

### Ideas for Recognizing Volunteers Year Round

*Be creative! There are many low cost or free ways to recognize your volunteers!*

#### January

Similar to an "Employee of the Month" award, develop a "Tip Your Hat to a Top Volunteer" recognition award. Create a flier and post it in a public place (such as the grocery store, or local café) or on your Web site. Rather than requiring a selection committee to review qualifications, you could draw a name from the list of all volunteers in the program. Talk to several people who work with that individual to list five reasons everyone should tip their hat to this top-notch volunteer.



### February

Send a valentine to every volunteer who has had an impact on the organization.

Send volunteers a package of hot cocoa mix to "warm them up" during the coldest month of the year.

### March

Take a jar of jellybeans to a meeting. Let participants guess how many jellybeans are in the jar. (Plan the number of jellybeans to equal the number of volunteers in your program last year.) After the guessing concludes, talk about the significance and value of that number of volunteers serving in the program.

Have a drawing that includes all the volunteers who have attended training sessions this month (or during the past three months). Present a mug, gift certificate, or pen.

### April

Deliver a packet of vegetable or flower seeds to a volunteer who has "helped us grow."

During National Volunteer Week, write a press release thanking volunteers for their service to your organization; if possible, list the names of all volunteers.

### May

Send a virtual (no cost) greeting card and bouquet of flowers via the Internet.

### June

Sponsor a potluck picnic for volunteers.

Print *lots* of volunteer accomplishments in the monthly newsletter.

### July

As you plan a parade float, include a sign thanking one volunteer or all volunteers in a group.

### August

Set up a poster or display at a local event. (e.g. county fair).

Send volunteers a "back-to-school" or "new year" goal setting worksheet. Invite them to attend a meeting or training session where there will be time to share their ideas for annual organizational or program goals.

### September

Help volunteers get organized for the new program year by sending them a calendar or yearly planner.

### October

Deliver a bag of peanuts to each volunteer, with a label: "We would be NUTS without you!"

### November

Say "thanks" by having a reception for volunteer for specific events or subject matter.

### December

For northern climates, make a winter survival kit for your volunteers. (Include candles, matches, a metal cup, snacks, and hot packs.)

## Useful Websites:

### Kansas Volunteer Commission

<http://kanserve.org>

### Hands On Network

<http://www.handsonnetwork.org/nonprofitgov/toptools>

### National Service Resource Center

<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/>

### Volunteer Match

<http://www.volunteermatch.org/nonprofits/resources/>

## Best Practices/Notes