

10 THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE STARTING A VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION PROGRAM

An effective recognition program with the right mix of formal and informal recognition systems and that truly functions as an integral component of a volunteer program can honor and motivate volunteers for their contributions. (Formal volunteer recognition includes certificates, plaques, pins, or dinners to honor volunteer achievement. Informal recognition occurs in the daily interchange between volunteers and the organization when its staff conveys appreciation for the volunteers' work.)

Volunteer recognition programs also help to:

- Communicate basic volunteer standards
- Identify organizational volunteer best practices and trends
- Create role models and set benchmarks for volunteers
- Strengthen the bond between volunteers and the organization
- Create and/or strengthen brand awareness and marketing opportunities

Ask and answer these 10 questions to help your organization develop and implement an effective volunteer recognition program:

1. How much staff time can be devoted to administering the recognition program? Will it be administered from the organization's headquarters or local offices?
2. Who should be included in the development of the program?
3. How can senior management buy-in be secured for the recognition program?
4. How can the recognition program help to meet the volunteer program objectives and overall organizational needs?
5. What are the best practices of similar organizations' volunteer recognition programs?
6. Is there an existing recognition program that can be adapted and customized to suit the needs of the organization (e.g., President's Volunteer Service Award, Daily Points of Light Award)?
7. How do our volunteers want to be recognized for their community service? How can we incorporate recognition mechanisms that work for different types of volunteers (e.g., long-term and short-term volunteers)?
8. What will the award criteria and eligibility rules include? Who will judge the award nominations?
9. How will the volunteer award(s) be announced (e.g., special ceremony)? What communications vehicles currently exist to promote the award internally and externally?
10. Should external counsel and expertise be sought to help develop this volunteer recognition program? Are there core functions of the program that should be outsourced?

Courtesy of HandsOn Network (Corporate Volunteer Development Department)
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