

Subscriber Social: November 2022

Holiday Recognition for Volunteers

December is often a time for celebration and reflection in volunteer programs. With the year ending and the winter holiday season gearing up, many leaders of volunteers are thinking about the impact of volunteers on their mission, and how they can use this time to celebrate and say thank you to dedicated volunteers. On November 10, 2022 volunteer managers and coordinators came together to share their holiday recognition ideas and learn from each other.

Navigating Another Pandemic-Impacted Year

We asked Subscriber Social attendees to reflect on their own feelings about holiday recognition for volunteers at the end of 2022, a year that continued to see the COVID-19 pandemic impact our ability to deliver programs and gather in-person.

- Most organizations have not done or planned anything different this year. Programs and volunteers are coping with pandemic-related fatigue, even as they focus on rebuilding and adapting for the new normal.
- The question was raised about the hyper-focus on holidays at this time of year, and how we are excluding those who may celebrate at other times. There was a suggestion to re-focus on this time as an end-of-year celebration, instead of a “holiday” celebration for volunteers.
- Many organizations continue to focus on health and safety concerns related to hosting in-person events for volunteers and are considering how to navigate coming together with this in mind.
- Some volunteer managers were excited to bring back open houses and host downscaled versions of their holiday party for volunteers and staff, while fully maintaining COVID-19 measures (e.g., proof of vaccinations & fully vaccinated attendees)
- Cost considerations were also addressed, particularly for organizations with limited staff capacity and many volunteers, who want to ensure that recognition is meaningful and personal. Simple ideas like organizing lunch (keeping in mind dietary restrictions) and games were suggested to the group.



Recognition Goals: Connected and Impact-Oriented

Leaders of volunteers also discussed what recognition for volunteers will look like this year, considering the ongoing challenges with COVID-19, reduced program engagement, and overall fatigue that programs and volunteers are experiencing. The group focused on making recognition about connection and impact (i.e., directly connected to how volunteers supported the mission in a time of great change and uncertainty).



- Attendees discussed getting volunteer input on what recognition can and should look like and how they'd prefer to be thanked. Some organizations are including recognition questions in their volunteer feedback surveys.



- Some organizations are focused on keeping connected throughout the year through email, letting volunteers know the ongoing impact of their contributions and thanking them for their support



- One organization shared that they've developed an online wellness series for their volunteers that they host every 2 weeks to keep them connected. The program was developed with support from a placement graduate student.



- Another organization acknowledged struggling to stay connected to younger volunteers (high school students) and were looking for advice from the group.

Experimenting with Recognition Approaches

Here are some interesting recognition and celebration ideas that came out of the Social:

- Offer certificates of recognition for impact (compared to years of service)
- Host opportunities to socialize - food is a great motivator!
- Host opportunities to learn that are connected to volunteer interests
- Play games! Escape rooms and trivia have resonated with some
- Host a baking contest with volunteers
- Have an Ugly Christmas Sweater competition (good for in-person or online)
- For younger volunteers: experiment with new and innovative communication styles, e.g., turning written communications into images, videos and infographics.
- Consider the myriad reason youth may be volunteering (good question to address during screening) and cater to those:

Looking to Learn More?

Check out this Resource on adapting recognition approaches
Register for the Retention and Recognition Webinar (March 29)