Volunteer recognition ideas: 50 ways to show appreciation
Volunteers are an essential part of any organization. Volunteering gives individuals the chance to give back to their community, develop new skills, and meet people with similar interests. No matter the reason for their participation in your organization, volunteers are deciding to give up time in their busy lives to support your cause. Oftentimes, they are also your driving force, and biggest donors and advocates.

As we’ve seen, volunteers also have the potential to become organizers for your group. With distributed organizing, volunteer hosts are able to reach supporters and plan more events than the original organizers could have on their own. Maintaining close relationships with volunteers can potentially help your organization diversify and expand.

Thanking volunteers is an important part of managing their involvement and encouraging them to give more. There are many actions, big and small, that organizers can take to recognize their volunteers. Even with the larger gestures featured, the most important thing organizers can do is thank their volunteers verbally and regularly.
Our top volunteer recognition ideas

Our favorite ways to recognize volunteers are focused on making volunteers feel special. These individuals take time out of their schedules on a regular basis to support your cause, organization, or candidate, so take time and care in deciding what methods would be best. Also, although it can be, volunteer recognition does not need to be incredibly expensive! There are many cost-effective ways to

Some ideas may be more appropriate for your organization, so critically think about which types of gifts your volunteers will value the most. Planning events for volunteer bonding may be more fitting for some groups than others, and swag may not be a significant enough gift to recognize the work of your volunteers. Here are our five favorite ways to thank you volunteers!

1. Film a “thank you” video
If someone in your organization is iMovie-savvy, a thank you video is a great way to reach out to volunteers. Film horizontal videos of your volunteers in action throughout the year (and invite them to send you photos and videos as well!) and compile clips into a sweet message. This video can also feature thank you’s from the community, a message from organizers or leaders, clips from social events, and images about the overall impact of your volunteers.

Video editing may be intimidating, but by putting together two-second clips and adding some music, videos like these are fairly simple to put together. Post the video to Youtube or social media, play it at the office or an event, and post it on your company website.
Our top volunteer recognition ideas

2. Plan a night out
Get tickets to the movies or a play for volunteers. This fun activity is a social event that volunteers can attend to relax and get to know each other better. You can also choose a movie or play related to your organization to double the impact by educating volunteers about your cause. Otherwise, a fun comedy can also be refreshing.

3. Host a volunteer appreciation gala
An annual gala gives volunteers the opportunity to dress up and get together to celebrate everything they have accomplished. Invite family members, cater dinner, and make a special toast to the volunteers to make the event special. You can also add fun activities such as a silent auction, photo booth, or a visit from a surprise guest to make the night something to remember.

4. Send letters from the community
These letters will vary from organization to organization. Reach out to the communities that your volunteers serve and ask them to write letters or make cards. Bring all the letters into the office at the end of the week to give volunteers the opportunity to pass them around and read everything the community has written to them.

5. Pass out personalized merchandise
Get shirts, tote bags, or other merchandise from your company personalized with volunteers's names, pictures, or other details. Exclusive swag like this will make volunteers feel special.
Volunteers are an invaluable part of any movement. Showing appreciation for volunteers is a vital component of volunteer retention. When your volunteers feel that their efforts have been recognized, they are more likely to feel connected to the cause and continue to give back.

Volunteers can be an organization’s biggest recruiters and donors, especially as they reach out to their own, personal networks. Thanking volunteers also gives them a sense of pride in their work, showing them the value and importance of everything that they do.

Volunteers should feel excited about coming into shifts. They take time out of their busy lives to be there, and organizers must remember that. By investing in them, providing tools and support, and empowering them to lead, organizers recognize volunteers’ participation and can encourage them to get more involved with the cause.
What’s the best way to show appreciation to volunteers?

Because volunteers get involved for different reasons, there are multiple components to consider in order to retain them. Some volunteers get involved seeking connections. By fostering community between volunteers with social events and other methods, volunteers will feel more connected to one another, organizers, and the cause itself.

Leaders can also inspire volunteers to keep coming back by giving them opportunities. These opportunities can be within the organization, like a leadership position or job offer. They can also be professional networking opportunities, career advice, or letters of recommendation. Supporting volunteer interests outside of the organization shows that you care about them as an individual.

There are many other methods, such as the ones listed below, to keep volunteers engaged and participating with your organization.
How can you continue to support volunteers virtually?

Without in-person events, organizers may be struggling to affirm and thank their regular volunteers. However, there are many actions that can be taken from home. For example, there are social events such as Zoom calls that can be spiced up with surprises, guests, and other treats. Organizers can also send gifts home to volunteers, write letters, or use their social platforms to share their appreciation with the world.

Although it may be more difficult, thanking volunteers remains incredibly important during this time. Continuing to engage with and recognize volunteers while organizations can’t meet in person is essential to keeping your organization running virtually and maintaining your volunteer base when quarantine is over. Volunteers have remained involved with organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. We saw sign ups for 1,325,560 shifts in the first three months of the pandemic. Organizers will need to learn to get creative to overcome the challenges of working from home, but must do so in order to make volunteers feel recognized and appreciated.
Virtual volunteer appreciation event ideas

6. Bring on a local celebrity
Invite a local celebrity who supports your organization to surprise your volunteers on a Zoom call. Supporters will remember this event for a long time and will feel recognized not only by your team, but also by someone outside of the organization who they look up to. You can also ask the celebrity featured to make social media posts about the event and tag your volunteers.

7. Dedicate a blog post to thanking your volunteers
Make your post heartfelt and personal, sharing real anecdotes and stories from your volunteers. It is also important to give credit for the amazing work your organization has been able to accomplish. Send out the article in a newsletter or through social media to ensure that volunteers see it.

8. Send a handwritten thank-you note
Reach your volunteers using snail mail! A handwritten note goes a long way and makes volunteers feel personally appreciated by your team. You can make it short and sweet or long and detailed, but, either way, everyone loves getting mail.

9. Hold an invite-only volunteer networking event on Zoom
Invite volunteers to come together through Zoom or another video conferencing platform. Prepare questions or networking topics to provide structure to the call or send out a drink menu if you want to make the event more casual. By limiting the event to your top volunteers, they will feel that their extra work is being recognized and appreciated.
Virtual volunteer appreciation event ideas

10. Call and check in on them
Make a personal call to volunteers to chat and catch up. If possible, also offer assistance from your organization if they need it. These calls will allow you to form an individual bond with each volunteer you contact, and volunteers will remember that you and your organization care for them in and out of the office.
Other effective volunteer appreciation ideas

11. Bring in coffee and donuts
This is especially meaningful for events that take place early in the morning. Bringing in breakfast is an easy way to wake volunteers up and show appreciation for them losing sleep.

12. Send flowers or a card for special days
Show volunteers you care by sending out flowers, cards, or chocolates on special holidays. Look for opportunities such as birthdays, volunteer anniversaries, or other holidays such as Valentine’s Day.

13. Highlight a volunteer in every newsletter
Appreciate the extra steps and effort that your top volunteers have put into your organization. Give them a spotlight so they know you recognize that they have gone above and beyond.

14. Give new volunteers a welcome gift
Make this gift unique to your organization! For example, give all volunteers a tote bag with different items that’ll help them volunteer. For a campaign, this can be a mini sunscreen for long days spent canvassing in the sun, pens for writing out postcards, or a button they can put on their jacket. Personalize the gift by writing a short hand-written letter welcoming them to the team, thanking them in advance, and sharing your contact info.
15. Listen to your volunteers and actively seek their feedback
Volunteers can provide a fresh perspective about your organization's mission and best practices. By asking them directly for feedback, you show them how much you value and recognize their ideas. Gather this feedback by directly talking to them, having a suggestion box in the office, or sending out a survey.

16. Host a surprise party
Surprising your volunteers will catch them off guard and make them feel extra special! Order in pizzas, write letters to all of your volunteers, decorate the office, and play music to host a small event for them.

17. Celebrate with their entire family
When volunteers give time to your organization, they are often cutting into the time that would normally be spent with their families. For this reason, it is important to invite families to celebrations so they can also see how much you appreciate your volunteers and recognize the importance of their family member's contributions to your efforts.

18. Offer tickets to a game
Getting tickets to the game is a fun social event where volunteers can get together with their families and get to know each other outside of work. See if your local teams have deals if you buy tickets in bulk to save money.
Other effective volunteer appreciation ideas

19. **Host a car wash**
Hosting a car wash is a fun way to brighten up their day! You can work with a local organization—such as a Girl Scouts troop or high school club—by donating to the organization in return for washing cars. By partnering with a youth group, you are thanking your volunteers and donating to your community.

20. **Write LinkedIn endorsements for top volunteers**
LinkedIn endorsements are similar to letters of recommendations. By writing these, organizers will be able to highlight specific skills the volunteer has shown and it will be public on their profile to future employers. Encourage your staff to endorse them as well to make them really feel appreciated!

21. **Give away company swag**
Everyone loves free stuff! Give out lanyards, hoodies, hats, shirts, or mugs with the company logo. Volunteers will use these gifts in their daily life and will appreciate the recognition.

22. **Gift a potted plant**
Send volunteers home with a cute succulent, flower, vegetable, or other plants to say thank you! Volunteers will get to watch their gift grow and will be reminded of your organization as they take care of it.
Other effective volunteer appreciation ideas

23. Collect and display photos
A picture is worth a thousand words! Gather a collection of photos of volunteers at work, services they provided, or communities they served to remind volunteers of the importance of their work.

24. Give gift cards
Opt for gift cards to the movies, a local bowling alley, or a local restaurant. These types of gift cards give volunteers experiences rather than material items, which make for a more memorable and meaningful gift.

25. Bring in a food truck
A food truck is a fun way to appreciate volunteers and take a break. This type of gift will lighten people’s spirits and give them a chance to socialize and hang out during their volunteer shifts. Make this a monthly addition to your routine or announce it in advance to encourage volunteers to sign up when the food truck is there.

26. Display framed quotes
Choose quotes from your organization’s top leaders or candidate, or look for one that you feel relates to your mission. By framing these messages, volunteers will be able to hang or place them in their homes or offices to remind them of the value of their contributions. Present these framed quotes on a volunteer anniversary, at an event, or during the holidays to make it stand out.
27. Provide a sense of community
This is something that is easier said than done, of course, but community is what keeps volunteers coming back and donating in the long term. This is something that happens naturally by providing a supportive, personal, and social atmosphere in your office. You can also encourage this by asking experienced volunteers to mentor and welcome newer ones, hosting events outside of the office, and making group chats or social media groups unrelated to work.

Celebrate volunteers’s personal accomplishments together and support them through tougher times. These bonds will empower individuals to continue to volunteer even during more difficult times.

28. Re-tweet your volunteers from VIPs
These VIPs may be leaders in the organization, or elected officials, candidates, or celebrities.

29. Have your volunteers share with your staff
Invite volunteers to all staff calls to share their volunteer story. Make sure that they feel heard and that their experiences are valued in the decision-making process.

30. Invest in your volunteers
Train them with skills that will enrich their lives, personally and professionally. Trainings for activities such as phone banking, canvassing, or text banking will make volunteers more comfortable and confident, encouraging them to get involved more frequently.
Other effective volunteer appreciation ideas

31. Post volunteer interviews on social media
Pre-write questions for your volunteers to answer and film their responses. For example, asking about their reason for volunteering or their inspiration. Put together a video like this to put a face to your organization and send an inspirational message out to your volunteers. This will also encourage new people to get involved and volunteer as well.

32. Have volunteers write a letter from themselves
On their first day, ask volunteers to write down the reasons they’re volunteering. Send the letters back to volunteers around the holidays to remind them of why they joined your organization. Make this process even easier by having them address and stamp the letter when they write it so you can just drop it off at the post office to send it out. You can also have the volunteers write postcards rather than letters with pictures related to the organization.
Other effective volunteer appreciation ideas

33. Start a raffle
Give out tickets for different achievements depending on your organization. For example, a raffle ticket for amount raised, hours in the office, or phone calls made. Do a raffle with small prizes such as gift cards, merchandise, a parking spot, or dinner with the boss. Make this raffle weekly or monthly to give volunteers something to look forward to and work towards.

34. Designate parking spots
Reward regular volunteers directly with their own parking spot at your organization. This gesture will make volunteers feel important and appreciated by the organization, as well as making it a little bit easier for them to come into the office.

35. Take a group picture
Take a group picture of all of your volunteers. Tell them in advance so they can all prepare, and use this photo for social media, print it on personalized gifts, or get it framed. A group picture will remind volunteers of all the connections they made with your organization.

36. Share book bags
Pass out tote bags and books. Look for books related to your cause such as a politician’s biography for campaigns, educational novels for advocacy groups, or photo books for environmental groups. Make this personal to your organization specifically, and the books will educate volunteers and remind them of the importance of their work.
Other effective volunteer appreciation ideas

37. Use sidewalk chalk
If you or someone you know is artsy, use sidewalk chalk to draw a thank you mural on your company’s wall or parking lot that volunteers will see on their way in and out of work. Volunteers will appreciate the art and it will make them feel special as they come and go from your organization.

38. Host a group social event
Hosting a private event gives volunteers the chance to network and connect. Hosting a pool party, beach day, or movie night can be a fun way to bring volunteers together outside of the office. Include small gift bags for an extra special touch.

39. Give volunteers opportunities to design merchandise
Have a design contest where volunteers can submit ideas for volunteer shirts and let everyone vote on a winner. They’re the ones wearing the shirts to volunteer events, so they will appreciate having a say in which designs are chosen.

40. Post about your volunteers on Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn.
Write a note and take pictures of all the volunteers who support your group. Make these posts weekly or monthly or highlight a different volunteer every post to give it more structure. Use a fun graphic or photo to make the post something that volunteers want to share on their personal channels.
Other effective volunteer appreciation ideas

41. Gift seasonal items
Opt for gifts such as hand warmers, a scarf, or gloves for events held in winter. In the summer, give out water bottles, sunscreen, or hats. Make these gifts stand out by making company versions of swag rather than handing out the generic ones.

42. Give professional advice
Offer to look at younger volunteers’s resumes and provide feedback or connect top volunteers with contacts. This professional recognition will ensure that volunteers feel personally seen and supported.

43. Decorate the office
Make the office a place volunteers want to be by putting up decorations around the room. This doesn’t need to be anything fancy. Just putting up some framed artwork, quotes, or plants can make your place of work feel more homey. You can also surprise volunteers by changing up decorations for holidays such as hanging shamrocks for St. Patrick’s Day, a New Year’s resolution wall for January, or photos and notes for Volunteer Appreciation Day.

44. Coordinate a secret buddy gift exchange
This can be done during the holidays or just for fun. Invite volunteers to participate and give one another gifts. Make this more organized by having volunteers fill out questionnaires about their interests, setting a price limit, or setting a date for the gift exchange.
Other effective volunteer appreciation ideas

45. Remember to say “thank you” often
The easiest but most important thing you can do to make your volunteers feel recognized is say thank you to them in-person regularly. Say it on their way out of the office, into the office, during a break, and whenever you remember. Make a habit out of thanking your volunteers for what they do, so they know you see every small action they take for your organization.
How to recognize political campaign volunteers

46. Offer to be a personal reference for young volunteers
Many students get involved with political campaigns in hopes of pursuing a career in the field. Appreciate their work by helping them stand out to universities or future employers. The best letters of recommendation will include specific projects they worked on, personal details, and a strong endorsement.

Offering to write these letters early on will encourage volunteers to put in more effort in order to receive a glowing recommendation. Whether you write these letters for college or job applications, other young people will also seek out opportunities with you to receive similar recommendations.

47. Tell volunteers about the impact they are contributing towards
Inform volunteers about the impact they are making in your organization and community. Organizers can make a graph or report that includes how many doors volunteers have knocked on, phone calls they have made, or how much money they have raised if those statistics are readily available. Giving volunteers a detailed report of their overall impact can refresh their drive. This type of report can be especially impactful immediately before large events such as get out the vote. These events are especially draining, but volunteers will be motivated by seeing the importance of their work.
How to recognize political campaign volunteers

48. Offer coffee with the candidate
Reward top volunteers with one-on-one time with the candidate themselves! This will give the candidate the opportunity to see all the hard work being put into their campaign, answer questions, and learn more about volunteers.

49. Host a victory party
Host a party for your donors and volunteers as well as their families and friends. Election night is the culmination of all the hard work and effort your volunteers have been putting into your campaign. Celebrate together and make sure to recognize them with a toast, gift, or message from the candidate.

50. Hire your super volunteers
Be sure to share job postings internally to your volunteers before publicly sending them out. Volunteers clearly care deeply about your cause and are likely to make some of your best workers.
Continue your volunteer management research with these resources:

- **Volunteer Management: The Complete Guide for Growing Orgs.** New to strategically recruiting and managing volunteers? We've got you covered with this crash course.
- **Virtual Labor Organizing: The Ultimate Guide for 2020.** Virtual organizing is a brand new undertaking for many unions. Review the basics with this guide.
- **Virtual Fundraising Ideas to Drive Donations During COVID-19.** If your organization is struggling to keep donations flowing in a new virtual environment, we recommend these tips and ideas.