

## **The Volunteer Recognition Challenge – a Post-Seminar Take-Away Tool** by Ruth Vant

*Are we recognizing our volunteers in ways that are meaningful to them?*

To answer this question, we first need to find out what motivates our volunteers and match the *recognition* to the *motivation*. But that's not all. We also need to develop meaningful relationships with our volunteers as *individuals* and determine where they are in their life. What are their personal circumstances? Are they new to the workforce or recently retired? Do they have a family? Most importantly, what are their priorities and interests – and have these changed over time?

We also need to ask our volunteers *questions*. Ask for their feedback. Ask their opinions. Ask for ideas. Ask what they like and don't like about their volunteer experience. Ask how they like to be recognized.

Once you've had a chance to consider these factors, *let your imagination loose!* Brainstorm! And include your volunteers in the process so that their honest feedback helps shape your ideas.

Here are **eight key pointers** to consider while developing your volunteer recognition strategies:

1. Find out what motivates your volunteers.
2. Build meaningful ongoing relationships with them.
3. Determine where in their lifecycle your volunteer is. Remember that this will change over time, and their motivations may change with it.
4. Be organized and specific in what you require, but be flexible to accommodate your volunteers' needs as well.
5. Respect your volunteers as unique individuals.
6. Include both ongoing, formal *and* informal, episodic forms of recognition.
7. Create policies to ensure consistency. This will help you achieve #5.
8. Above all, remember that you can't say "thank you" too many times. And be sure that every time you say it, it's sincere.

Finally, I encourage you to **take this challenge**: take an **honest appraisal of your volunteer recognition strategies** and answer the following questions:

- Do you view your volunteers as individuals?
- Do you identify their motivations and needs?
- Do you keep track of how those needs shift as your volunteers move through various lifecycles?
- Do you tie recognition to both your recruitment and retention strategies?
- Do you monitor the effectiveness of your recognition program?
- Do you ask your volunteers what matters most to them?
- Do you say "thank you" often enough, and sincerely enough?