

**A Volunteer  
is for life,  
not just  
Volunteers  
Week**

**A guide to rewarding and  
recognising Volunteers**

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# The two most important words in a Volunteer Manager's Vocabulary!

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Volunteers Week is an important time in the volunteer manager's calendar, but the principles of this week should run throughout your volunteer programme, interwoven with your day-to-day activities.



Let's get thinking now about how you can show your volunteers you appreciate them, which in turn will lead to your volunteers staying with you as they will feel happy and valued. Retention is a talent volunteer managers need to cultivate!

I run regular information sessions in various volunteer management topics, including recruiting and retaining volunteers, and the list below includes some secrets for success from these sessions, willingly shared by people who manage volunteers:

- ☺ Make your volunteers feel included, valued
- ☺ Thank them! Pampering/events
- ☺ Pay expenses where possible
- ☺ Support them
- ☺ Give them opportunity to progress if wanted
- ☺ Respect them
- ☺ Group volunteer meetings
- ☺ Have just enough to do, not too much
- ☺ Include in Christmas meals
- ☺ Ask them for ideas
- ☺ Be aware of friction between volunteers
- ☺ Publicising their achievements – newsletter, newspapers
- ☺ Other support available if you're not there!
- ☺ Being approachable/available
- ☺ Respect them

# Volunteers Week

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Volunteers Week - 1st to 7th June is an annual celebration of volunteers and volunteering. It's a great opportunity to do something special for your volunteers to say THANK YOU and take the opportunity to maybe recruit some new volunteers too! So let's get you thinking about how you will say thanks, celebrating and recognising your volunteers' contribution.



I think this quote from NCVO's Quick Guide to Thanking Volunteers will hopefully get you thinking ... Saying thank you isn't just for Volunteers Week, it should be an integral part of your volunteer programme ...

*"On the surface, saying thanks is easy – we all do it every day without thought. But saying thanks in an organisational context can be a very different prospect. Firstly, it can be easy just to forget. If, like many charities, your trustees and leadership team have an ambitious vision, then the pressure is on to always look forward, at the expense of reflection. Or your charity may be characterised by a rigid hierarchy that doesn't always encourage positive feedback to be filtered down.*

*Because volunteers don't get paid, you might think that we should naturally be more inclined to thank them. But it might be just as easy to take their generosity for granted, especially if they have been with you for some time. Perhaps worst of all, though, is the ill-judged thank you – too fleeting, insincere, or undeserved. At best it may fall flat; at worst it can anger and linger.*

*So how, how often, and to whom you demonstrate gratitude should be as integral to your volunteer management strategy as their recruitment, training and retention. "*

**Why not get thinking about how you are going to**

**CELEBRATE your Volunteers**

# Why say Thank You?

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There are lots of tools you can use to retain your volunteers once you've found them and a key one is saying **THANK YOU**. These are probably the most important two words in any volunteer manager's vocabulary!

You should be saying thank you regularly, rather than once a year during Volunteers Week, so why not start thinking now of how you could do this more often?



*"You shouldn't need an excuse to say thanks to your volunteers; indeed, it is often the thanks that comes out of the blue that has the most impact. Conversely, there are certain occasions when a thank you might be expected, and therefore its absence creates an issue. "*

*The NCVO Members Quick Guide to Thanking Volunteers*

Say **THANK YOU** to your volunteers as they leave at the end of the session they are helping with. Encourage staff who work with volunteers in your organisation to do the same. After all a **THANK YOU** doesn't cost anything and will help the volunteer feel appreciated, and know you value the time they give to help.

Some volunteers don't like a lot of fuss and would be embarrassed, whereas others like to be the centre of attention. You know your volunteers best but if you don't, ask the person who looks after them when they are there and see what they think. A little research really helps making the **THANK YOU** more personal and genuine.

When you read surveys of why volunteers leave, one popular reason is not feeling valued or appreciated. You can easily rectify this with two little words, so get planning and say

**THANK YOU**  
**more often!**

# Who should say Thank You?

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We've talked about the whys and hows of saying **THANK YOU**, and I think another important thing to consider is who should be saying it!

This probably seems an odd thing to say but it's something you need to think about isn't it?



- ☺ The person who supervises the volunteer on their **regular volunteering slots could be saying THANK YOU** at the end of the session. If you train other people in how to support and manage volunteers, it would be a good idea to include a short section on how to recognise volunteers' contributions and the importance of those two little words!
- ☺ You as the Volunteer Co-ordinator could be holding an event to say **THANK YOU** to a group of volunteers.
- ☺ For a more formal event what about the Chair or Chief Executive saying **THANK YOU**? This would add a certain formality to a gathering, but would also hopefully make the volunteer feel important.
- ☺ If you are holding a formal event, you could have a V.I.P. taking on the role - maybe a local MP, the Mayor or some local dignitary who supports your project. In Dudley borough, the Mayor takes on the Volunteering Champion role each year as part of their duties and is usually delighted to support and events involving volunteers.

If the person saying **THANK YOU** isn't you or the person who supervises the volunteers, make sure you give them some background information about what the volunteers do, not just a list of names. This will help to make the whole thing more personal.

**Just remember** - try to tailor the way you say **THANK YOU** to the volunteer[s]. If they don't like a fuss, don't arrange a formal red carpet event or they may well not turn up! You may have to downscale it to coffee and cake to make them feel more comfortable!

# How to say Thank You

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*"How you decide to thank your volunteers can be as important as the decision to thank them at all. It will be informed by many factors: on a general level, how many volunteers you have, their physical proximity to you and the culture your charity has decided for itself.*



*More specifically, you should always tailor your thanks to the individual volunteers. A very public expression of thanks, be it in a report or at an event, may help to carry weight. Though for people who are uncomfortable in the limelight, a quiet pat on the back, a private email or a telephone call may be better."*

## The NCVO Members Quick Guide to Thanking Volunteers

When you are planning how to say **THANK YOU** to your volunteers you may have a number of things to consider:

- ☺ **How many** volunteers you have
- ☺ **When** you need to hold the event to ensure as many as possible can attend - there's no point choosing a Wednesday evening if half the volunteers are at their Zumba class! [checking availability is a sensible step]
- ☺ Is it an **informal** gathering or a more **formal** occasion?
- ☺ **Where** you will be holding it? Don't just think about the geographical location, but also about things like parking, access for those who may be less mobile and how big a venue you need
- ☺ **Who to invite** - if you need someone key to attend such as your Chair, Chief Exec or a local MP, you may need to work the event around their availability
- ☺ **Plan a programme** for the event - a rough plan of who's doing what and when is always reassuring and if it's a more formal event, you may wish to have a printed programme for guests
- ☺ **Budget** - this is probably the most important thing to consider! If you are a small organisation and don't have a budget for volunteer recognition and celebration, this may restrict your plans a little. You can do a great event on a shoestring, if you can find a free venue, free certificates from your local Volunteer Centre [we produce them every year for our local groups], get people to bring a contribution towards refreshments/buffet etc.

**Just remember it's quality that's important and a genuine wish to make volunteers feel valued.**

# How to tell the world you value your Volunteers

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**So how can you tell the world [well at least the local area] how much you value your volunteers?**

There are lots of ways you can do this and most of them are free!



- ☺ **Newsletters** - have you got an organisational newsletter? This is a great place to tell other staff, volunteers and clients, just how wonderful your volunteers are. Add a photo and you are onto a winner!
- ☺ **Website/Blog/Twitter/Facebook/other social media** - a popular way to share what you think of your volunteers with the world [literally via the World Wide Web] is via your website or social media streams. A winsome photo is a sure fire way to get your good news shared. When I published the photos from Dudley Volunteer Awards in October, I had 1012 hits in one day on my **Volunteering Counts** blog! If you aren't au-fait with the social media stuff, why not attend a free local social media surgery, where people who are will be able to talk you through it and get you up, and running in no time? Staff at Dudley CVS run these monthly in various locations around the borough.
- ☺ **Local media - newspapers, radio and TV** - are a great way to show your pride in your volunteer[s]. Don't forget to tell them why your volunteer[s] deserve recognition and hopefully this will also help raise the profile of your project or organisation. Don't know how to write a press release? Contact your local Volunteer Centre who may well be able to help or offer you some training.
- ☺ **Awards** - there may well be local or national awards you can nominate your volunteers for. Dudley Volunteer Awards are an annual event held alongside Dudley CVS's Annual General Meeting. Local volunteers [both individuals and groups] can be nominated and recognised at this high profile celebration. The winners are chosen by a panel made up of local decision makers, vcs reps and our Chairman. Other awards include the Mayor's Civic Awards, which are another annual award scheme. Why not look on the internet for information about local schemes.
- ☺ **Queens Award** - if you want to nominate a group of volunteers, why not consider this award? It's a prestigious award and you can find out more by visiting the Queens Award website.

# Recognising and rewarding the work of volunteers

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## **This excellent guidance is taken from Volunteer Centre Brighton's Volunteering Good Practice Guide:**

- Remember a volunteer's name, and use it when you greet them
- Don't forget to say 'thank you'
- Be interested in their personal lives and problems
- Celebrate major achievements - perhaps with an award ceremony to which you invite prominent local people
- Ensure they have a way of taking part in the decision making processes
- Ask them to make presentations at meetings
- Offer training and progression
- Bring food to volunteers meetings
- Nominate them for community awards
- Mention volunteers input at meetings, in the Annual Report, in your newsletter on your website etc.
- Remember their birthdays and send them a card
- If they need equipment to carry out their role make sure it works and it is as up to date as you can afford
- Keep a file of specific accomplishments so that you can use the facts when needed
- Use special days - Volunteers' Week & Make a Difference Day' to publicise their work and time put in
- Organise a social event, outing or party to say thank you

## **Key points**

- Make sure any way you choose of recognising and rewarding fits the type of achievement and the volunteer concerned - make it personal and meaningful
- Be honest and sincere - most people can see through superficial praise
- Be consistent and fair - don't have different rules for different people
- Make sure the paid staff are fully aware of how important volunteers are to your organisation and ensure they have some training in managing volunteers

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