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Why Be Boring When You Can Celebrate in So Many Ways?

By [Susan J. Ellis](#)

May
2005

It has been five years since I outlined my concerns about traditional volunteer recognition events and, having just completed a new round of National Volunteer Week meals, I'm afraid it's time to do so again. I just re-read my earlier rant on this subject and am dismayed that I still agree with everything I said in June 2000. I invite you to read it now, too:

[Enough Formal Banquets! Let's Transform Recognition Events](#)

Does anyone actually *like* sit-down banquets? To me they are stultifying – dull speeches (even if I'm the speaker!), poor food, boring table talk. Ever wonder why attendance at these things is comparatively low? To add insult to injury, these meals are also expensive. More important, they miss the point.

One event I participated in last month distributed certificates by unit or assignment held. The problem was that the emcee used abbreviations for each unit – without explaining what the initials stood for nor what the work was. I was puzzled, but assumed that it I was the only outsider, until a brave volunteer raised her hand in the middle of the ceremony and asked: "Could someone please tell us what these other volunteers *do*?" Of course the leaders were embarrassed and quickly added some sentences to each presentation thereafter.

This is prime time programming, folks! It's your chance to enlighten, amaze, surprise, and educate everyone. Remember that only the volunteer program manager sees the full cumulative effect of volunteer involvement for the past year. Paid staff, volunteers, and administrators only see their small part of the larger picture. They ought to leave the recognition event with new understanding and pride.

So here are some more ideas to revolutionize recognition. Please add your own!

Money doesn't matter!

It is a red herring to complain that your organization has no money for recognition. Why? Because the cost of the event is never the point. You can (and many do) hold a pot luck meal in which volunteers happily contribute the food themselves. What's important is what happens when you get together. You want to allow volunteers to meet each other, recommit them for another year, but mainly *celebrate!* Create buzz, laughter, and passion.

Plan the event *with* volunteers, not just *for* them!

Ask volunteers to evaluate past recognition events honestly. Even more important, contact volunteers who did not attend the event and find out why. Then ask what they might like to do as a celebration. (Note: Most volunteers will tell you they don't "need" recognition and don't want the organization to spend a lot of money on this. Well, the organization should say thank you once in a while. But try referring to this event as a "celebration of our efforts" and then ask volunteers of what they are most proud to have contributed.)

Allow volunteers to speak!

Where is it written that the way to thank people is to call out their names and hand them a certificate while they meekly and silently come forward to shake the hand of some dignitary they have not met before (while posing for a photo they never see)?

Why not let each unit prepare a presentation of their own about their work in the past year? You can ask them a month in advance to prepare a 5-minute report, skit, song and dance, whatever. Alternatively, use the first 30 minutes of the recognition event to allow volunteers, who do the same work but may not know each other, to share ideas on the spot and come up with "The 6 Best Things that Happened This Year" to present to everyone assembled.

Make volunteers feel *individually* appreciated, not just thanked as a corps!

Certificates of recognition that have nothing more than the organization's logo and volunteer's name may just as well be birdcage liners. If you must hand out certificates, at a minimum include the assignment the volunteer filled that year or the location of the work. Even better, add a sentence or two about what the person actually *did*: "Our thanks for how you always go above and beyond the call of duty to make sure our residents have a good time at the bingo game." "For scanning all our 2002 paper files into digital storage." "For your role in making sure your assigned child passed grade 4." (Sound like too much work? Ask staff who supervise the volunteers to give you these sentences and/or ask volunteers to recommend sentences about each other.)

Photographs clearly state "we saw you" (i.e., recognition). If you can't project slides showing as many volunteers as possible while giving out certificates, at least go to the trouble of providing shots of key award winners *doing their volunteer work*.

Don't worry about capturing every single volunteer's name if you have a large group. In fact, the real danger is that you'll leave someone out – the true opposite of recognition! Instead, act as if everyone

there is worthy of thanks and ask them questions about themselves which they can answer by standing up. Some ideas are:

- Who fills more than one assignment here as a volunteer?
- Who has applied something they learned at orientation?
- Who has hunted more than 15 minutes for a parking spot?
- Who has met the Executive Director before tonight?
- Who is also working at a paying job?
- Who recruited a friend or relative to become a volunteer here?
- Who speaks more than one language?

This is like an instant “poll” and, once people rise several times, they feel quite included.

Use the time you have!

- Create a mix and mingle opening. Don't rely on social graces to assume that volunteers will meet each other without your help. First, take a little extra time with nametags. Write first names large and boldly so they can be read. Include the assignment the volunteer holds, maybe the day of the week s/he works, the number of years (or months) s/he has been with the agency, and other identifying information. Do this for any paid staff or board volunteers who attend the event, too. You can get creative and ask everyone to answer one or two funny or unusual questions onto their nametags as discussion starters. (For a terrific resource about nametags, go to www.hellomynameisscott.com.)
- Have something interactive for early arrivals to *do*. Post newsprint sheets and have them write down their best memory of the year as a volunteer, or the funniest thing that happened during volunteering, or anything that makes them think back. Not only will more and more people arrive to add things to the sheets, but they'll all enjoy reading everyone else's comments. The next day, you can transfer these sheets to the hall outside your office and keep them up for about a week for others to enjoy. Be sure to transcribe them for future use.
- Project a self-running slide show with photos of the “year in review.” People love these and you'll also have pictures to use later in recruitment and orientation.
- Designate a leader for each table in advance. These can be staff members, board members, or representative direct service volunteers. Prepare this group to make the event memorable for their table by paying attention to make sure everyone meets everyone else, by seeding the conversation with fun questions, etc. You can also run friendly competitions between courses by giving prizes to the table that comes up with the most things that start with the letter V that can be seen at your agency, the most organizational acronyms in daily use, etc.

Remember who the special guests are!

Don't allow “dignitaries” to sit together at an honored front table, whether they are administrators,

board members, or politicians. This is a *volunteer* recognition event – the most important people in the room are the *volunteers*. Either scatter these folks around the room to force them to interact with the volunteers casually, or place their table in the back, and explain why to everybody.

So...please rant with me about terrible recognition practices you've witnessed but also please share great ideas you've put into practice to truly celebrate volunteer accomplishments.

Remember, too, that throughout the year you can share your successful and creative recognition ideas – and learn more from others – on the Recognition

[https://www.energizeinc.com/how_to_volunteer_management/recognition] page of our Web site's Collective Wisdom area.

Related Topics: [Executive Director, Role of](#) | [Recognition](#) | [Retention](#) | [Volunteer Resources Manager, Role of](#) | [Image of Volunteering](#)

Submitted on 9 June 2005 by Chris VanSloten, Hospice of Chippewa County, Volunteer Coordinator, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan USA

Our annual recognition dinner has changed a lot in the past couple of years. This year we had a great dinner, with wonderful decorations, a very inspiring speaker (a local Judge) who spoke from his own Hospice experience, then awards and then karaoke and dancing. We list and announce all of our volunteers and years so everyone knows who our volunteers are. We don't do certificates but did a gift for each instead. We not only recognize our volunteers, but honor a business who has gone above and beyond for us in the past year. We also invite and recognize our hospice nurses. Everyone is welcome to bring a guest and there is no charge to anyone. We seek out a few 'sponsors' who donate. We have been able to get cash donations from businesses, the food (turkey and pork) donated from someone, the place donated. We even got some other volunteers (not ours) to cook, serve and cleanup. We have taken our hum drum banquet and made it into a fun celebrative time. Next year we are doing a luau theme. We do a potluck luncheon at Christmas time and a potluck picnic in the summer. Our volunteers feel very loved and honored!

Submitted on 31 May 2005 by Dee Wadsworth, Plain O'Helpers, MS, CSA, Plano, TX USA

Great job, Susan, to encourage us not to do the same ole thing. To energize volunteers, we need to embrace a wide range of both the volunteers and staff in planning and hosting the celebration. Have the event at the most common time volunteers would routinely be present; include particular staff comments on the actual difference specific volunteers make; and, yes, let's forget those outside speakers who "lecture" rather than energize and inspire.

Our group held an ice cream social at 7pm, with gift certificates to local shops as door prizes. The low cost of ice cream, toppings, and cookies allowed us to invite spouses or families of the volunteers to attend. Our speaker, who experienced our work firsthand, gave an inspiring message of "Blowing on

the Coals", addressing the meaning of volunteerism. All in all, so much more fun than a "rubber chicken" lunch or dinner, with a speaker no one knew.

Submitted on 15 May 2005 by Patrice A. Lynch, Birmingham Area Seniors Coordinating Council (BASCC), Program Manager, Birmingham, MI USA

This month's hot topic is great! You've given me some great ideas for our upcoming recognition lunch in June. I will share this column with our VPM.

Submitted on 14 May 2005 by Judy Wilson, Hospice Care Team, Inc., Director of Volunteer Services, Texas City, Texas USA

I loved the suggestions and plan on trying some next year. We have been taking our volunteers off site for a recognition luncheon for the past 8 years. They enjoy the buffet in a private room with staff and other volunteers. We recognize them with gifts and certificates; volunteers of the year in different positions. They enjoy the comments submitted by staff that I say as well as all the thanks we share. It is always fun for everyone who attends. The pictures I take are used throughout the year and eventually put into a scrapbook for them to view at the Holiday party.

Submitted on 8 May 2005 by Marian Egli, RSVP Director of Woodford, Marshall, & Livingston Counties, IL

Last month at our Annual Spring Luncheon, The RSVP Advisory Council did a rendition of "The Radio Hour" with a volunteer theme. It was fun, funny, and enjoyed by all. Some of the volunteers were able to see their managers on stage. The entertainment was followed by awards and then a delicious buffet at Eureka College. (The Radio Hour skit came from the [Volunteer Recognition Skit Kit @2003](#), Energize, Inc.)

Submitted on 8 May 2005 by a Recreation & Volunteer Co-ordinator in Canada

At our facility in the year 2004 we had a mystery night. The volunteers received an invitation to show up for a night of mystery and to dress casual. The school bus pulled up to the building and everyone got on. As we drove to the destination the volunteers started to wonder. A night of bowling was planned. The volunteers were split into teams and the fun began. Pizza arrived after the first game. Come time for the second game the "competition" began. Which team was going to win. All in good sportsmanship. It was nice to see volunteers of a variety of ages interacting with each other. The bus drove us home and we gave each volunteer a token of thanks.

Submitted on 6 May 2005 by Jennifer DeLeon, Intercare Corporate Group, Volunteer Coordinator, Calgary, AB Canada

We operate Continuing Care Centres in the City of Calgary and because we have been under construction at each of them over the past few years, I have tried to host events away from our centres. This year I bought tickets for volunteers to attend a lunch hour theatre group and then took everyone out for coffee at a local restaurant. In the past we have also bought group Imax tickets. I have found the cost of the event no different than doing a banquet and the volunteers enjoyed being treated to something they would not necessarily go to on their own.

Submitted on 6 May 2005 by Diane Rawlins, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Mission Services of London, London, Ontario, Canada Every year during National Volunteer Week we host a Volunteer Appreciation Lunch. As our guests arrived they were greeted by myself and the staff members who work along side

volunteers. Each guest received a program that listed the volunteers by name, area and years of service. They also received a lanyard and a nametag that they can now wear to identify themselves as volunteers in each of our locations.

Then guests were directed to their tables by another staff member. At each place on the table was a locally made chocolate bar with a "Thank You" sticker on the back. Our program involved a short message from our Executive Director and Volunteer Co-ordinator followed by the presentation of recognition gifts to those volunteers who have given landmark years of service (10, 15, 20, 25 and 30) to our organization. While the presentations were made by the Directors in whose areas they volunteer, a PowerPoint Slide of each volunteer was projected at the front of the room. After the presentations, slides were shown of other volunteers while the Director of each location spoke about the many contributions made in their area.

Each Director had their volunteers stand up as a group. The staff were also asked to stand up as a group while volunteers were thanked on their behalf. Everyone then enjoyed lunch and socializing. After the meal was finished 1 and 5 year certificates were presented at the tables in front of peers by the staff member with whom they volunteer most closely.

At this lunch we like to focus on staff 'serving' the volunteers. Reading this site has given me new ideas for next year's lunch. Hints: start early, recruit help, listen to your guests, add new ideas, but keep the popular ones.

Submitted on 4 May 2005 by Jodi Freedman, Cedars Nursing Care Center, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Portland, ME USA

I just threw my first volunteer recognition event. We had a barbecue, so we really played on the theme. We set the tables in the dining room into clusters with checked table cloths so that they looked like picnic tables. This forced groups of 10 to sit together, which seemed to encourage mingling. We only had one short speech and then I said a few sentences about each volunteer personally. Our giveaway was barbecue sauce for the adults and hamburger yo-yos for the children, and at the end, we had a watermelon shaped pinata for the kids. Not only did the young volunteers enjoy swinging at it, but the adults loved watching!

Submitted on 4 May 2005 anonymously

I just read your rant on May 4 (2005) and I wish I had read it a month or two earlier! Your ideas are great and I would have loved to include some of them at my annual event. Be assured that I will in 2006.

I would like to add my two cents in to the mix and say that one of my pet peeves is that one of the administrators will surely say something about how much money the volunteers have saved the hospital and how much staff she didn't have to hire! Ahhh!!! I hate that! And the volunteers don't want to hear that! And it is actually not really true. The volunteers don't replace staff they only enhance programs already in existence; they only assist staff. So my suggestion is to tactfully ask to see speeches before they are read to avoid any "unwanted" points to be made.

Submitted on 4 May 2005 by Barbara Nelson, Trinity Health, Volunteer Coordinator, Minot, ND US

I work for a health organization and each year we have a theme. This year We had a "Red Hat Ladies"

group perform and the theme took off from there. Theme was "I shall wear purple with a red hat". Our invitations and booklet were purple with red pictures of hats. The front said "Live Well, Love Much, Laugh Often." We asked everyone to wear a hat of their choice. That evening, we had 200 people with various hats and lots of purple clothes. For the table decorations, which was also the door prizes, we had red bags with feathers and purple paper covering a box of chocolates. We played a version of "Ring around the Rosie" using a poem that told the tables when to pass the gift right or right. It was great. Everyone said it was the best dinner we ever had. Now we have to think of how to top it next year.

Submitted on 4 May 2005 by Kris Martinson, American Red Cross, Youth & Volunteer Coordinator, Rochester, Minnesota US

Like everyone else, we are very limited in our resources to host an appreciation event for our volunteers. Last year I came up with an idea to host "an evening of decadent desserts" instead of the traditional meal or cake and punch event. I solicited area restaurants to donate 2 dozen of their 'signature' dessert for the event. Community response was great...such a small donation is easier for them to say yes to! We are able to treat our volunteers to awesome cheesecakes, torte, baklava and specialty desserts from some classy places in town! This year we cut the items into smaller servings to encourage the chance to sample several items! Staff bring crystal platters and nice servers from home. We add donated floral centerpieces and linen tablecloths--our volunteers enjoy being treated to such a classy event. It is fairly simple to organize and more importantly--Everyone loves dessert!

Submitted on 4 May 2005 by Lorraine Berner, Bethlehem Haven, Volunteer Coordinator, Pittsburgh, PA US

Thanks for your great thoughts! We do not get the best response to our events, but have always been open to try new ideas. One year was an indoor picnic theme where the residents of our shelter helped cook the meal and last year we visited the National Aviary to celebrate our volunteers being "something to sing about". By far, the most memorable event was when we said "Thank you very much" with a Hawaiian theme complete with a show by an Elvis impersonator. Elvis was a little pricey, but we were able to do it when all of the food, drink and flowers were graciously donated. We made our wood columns into palm trees for the occasion and distributed leis and tropical flowers to all in attendance. I don't think the volunteers who came will ever forget that evening!

Submitted on 4 May 2005 by Stella Gaucher-Murovic, Douglas Hospital, Prog. Coord. - "Moving Ahead", Montreal, Quebec Canada

Volunteers with the Moving Ahead program of the Douglas (Psychiatric) Hospital are matched with clients (one-on-one) and improve the clients quality of life thru recreational, educational, cultural and sports related activities and outings. For the past 2 volunteer appreciation events, we've asked the clients to entertain the volunteers at this event as a concrete way to thank them. Great Results! And sometimes the volunteer participates along with the client. For example, a client who sings and a volunteer who plays guitar; a volunteer to accompany a client to whom he has taught magic tricks; a volunteer who practices music with his 3 clients (they formed a band and played for us this year -

everyone got up to dance - what a great time & far from boring); a client who wrote a beautiful poem for the volunteer and read it at the event.

Submitted on 4 May 2005 by William "Chip" Madsen, Protestant Community Centers, Inc., Associate Director, Newark, NJ USA

Great article Susan! One of the best books I've read over the past three years was written by a marketing guy, Tom Monahan. His book, "The Do-It-Yourself Lobotomy" goes with the premise that the only thing preventing us from being creative is the stuff we "know." If we cut all that away, we can truly see things with new eyes and develop crazy and creative ways to recognize our volunteers. I, personally, hate most volunteer receptions except for mine! Last year our theme was "Pathways to Success" and we used the "Wizard of Oz" theme. All of our tutoring centers (we have 26) came with story boards (cheap 3 fold things bought from Staples) showing how their program opened doors for our students. I had four volunteers dressed up as the Tin Man, Scarecrow, Lion and Dorothy (bought from E-Bay and resold after the event we even made money!). People were enchanted! While volunteers were waiting in line to register they received scrolls with questions pertaining to the Wizard and their own programs.

Our theme this year is "Oh, the Places You'll Go" with volunteers dressed up as different Dr. Seuss characters (I hope I don't get too many Cats in the Hats) serving hors d'ouvres. It's all very whimsical and (the bottom line) people turn out in droves to the event. They don't know what to expect and I expect to have well over 300 volunteers to attend. It's also a great "point of entry" event for potential donors. Ya gotta have fun!!!

Submitted on 4 May 2005 by Penny Aulston, Museum of Science and Industry Volunteer Resources Manager, Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, IL USA

I like the idea to get the volunteers involved. We have a volunteer council and you have inspired me to get input from them.

Here are ideas we used: One year we videotaped staff, who told us how important the volunteers were to them. They gave names of the volunteers and some told very brief stories. Each year, we provide entertainment -- always a surprise. I usually get the cost reduced as a donation. This year we had a jazz singer, last year we had students from Chicago's "Second City". We only have one speech and it is always under 10 minutes. Last year we raffled small prizes so guests and volunteers could participate. I would love to get more ideas from others.

Submitted on 4 May 2005 by Leslie Stauffer, RSVP of Chester County, Director, West Chester, PA USA

I think my goal has been to eliminate the "boring", but not the banquet! In fact, in a recent survey of our active RSVP members, the overwhelming majority said "keep the luncheon" when asked to rank their choice of future recognition events (other options: a cash-value restaurant certificate, an "RSVP Day at the Movies", a seminar with a famous speaker, discount card for a store like Target, a breakfast) For some of our volunteers, an elegant luncheon, at a place they might never go otherwise, is a real treat to be looked forward to!

We DID put volunteer's jobs on their nametag, to stimulate table conversation, and solicited nominations for "Volunteer of the Year"; reading the text of all nominations at the luncheon. We also had fun with a "hat-show lady", who invited audience members to be the models - what a great picture we have of a 90+ year old lady in a red feathered hat, beaming broadly from her wheelchair, complete with oxygen tank! And bigger attendance than ever.

So be sure not to throw out the baby with the bathwater....just jazz it up a bit!

Submitted on 4 May 2005 by Becca Pugh, Yellowstone AIDS Project, Development Director, Billings, MT USA

Viva Las Volunteers! The best volunteer recognition event I hosted was a Vegas themed event. We had a buffet of every kind of food you can imagine donated, along with a good sized room. A group of doctors from a suburb had formed a band and donated their performance. But everyone's favorite part was the play gambling - where staff members served as the blackjack dealers, roulette spinner and pit boss at the craps table! We didn't have a lot of money - so we simply bought several \$1 plastic green table cloths and converted them into blackjack, craps, etc. tables. We used a box to form the "cradle" for the craps, and an old roulette wheel on e-bay for \$7! After gambling, dancing, eating - we had an auction of donated items with the play money they won throughout the night! It was a great way for everyone to mingle... and 3 years later - they are still talking about being honored in "Vegas" right from Sacramento! (I'm not there anymore, but it's a night I won't forget either!)

Submitted on 4 May 2005 by Deirdre Araujo, Exploratorium Manager Volunteer Services, San Francisco, CA USA

Everyone had such great ideas and experiences, and I have as well - but I thought this time I should share a blooper.

Looking for an unusual onsite location in our museum that would highlight an area most volunteers never see, I asked colleagues if I could set up after hours in their Machine Shop. It was December 5th, and I brought in lots of hot food, desserts, and presents for the volunteers who arrived - only to discover the staff who I'd 'assumed' were co-hosting this event in their space - were tapping a keg in the back and completely ignoring the guests. Mingling was not a priority, and some actually seemed to flinch when approached by volunteers with questions about the shop's work.

Though the volunteers were especially gracious, taking the time to phone and write in at least one aspect they enjoyed about the event - I learned my lesson. People have very different ideas about what it means to host a party!

Submitted on 3 May 2005 by Karla Holmes, Adrian Public Schools, Community Resource Coordinator, Adrian, MI

We are a public school system with the normal limited resources. We have hosted a breakfast (cheaper than dinner) for our volunteers starting at 7 a.m. until 9:30 a.m. People can come and go as they please. At 8 a.m. we started entertainment by our school children. Teachers recommended students who could perform as individuals or small groups. A small token was given to each volunteer

as they exited the event. Administrators served the meal, cleaned up, greeted guests, etc. One school offered to do dish duty. Centerpieces were spring flowers I took home and planted in my garden. It was a fun and fairly inexpensive way to recognize our volunteers. The hall was donated by a local church with great parking and excellent location.

Submitted on 3 May 2005 by Beth Gazley, Indiana University, Asst. Professor, Bloomington, IN

I recently attended the best volunteer recognition event I have ever seen. The organizer, Bet Savitch, is the City of Bloomington's volunteer coordinator. The event, called "Hearts & Hands," awards \$500 to eight community organizations that nominated a star volunteer. While only one volunteer in each of eight categories (college, youth, team, board, etc.) "earns" this check, all 90 volunteers who were nominated were invited to the event, along with their family and friends. Every volunteer seemed to have brought five other people. It was a giant love-fest, with most of the county's nonprofit community in one room. We had a buffet of very good food, brief addresses by funny speakers (including the mayor), and plenty of time for each awardee to say some words. A slide show projected a photo of every nominee "at work." The highlight of the night was the speech by the recipient of the "Lifetime Award," an elderly lady who remarked "Now I'll have to put in another 20 years!" While I can't do justice here to all of the lovely small details in this event, you're welcome to email me offline for more.

Submitted on 3 May 2005 by Lillian Kerr Haversat, Maine Volunteer Connection, CAO, Augusta, Maine USA

The Maine Volunteer Connection in partnership with the Maine Commission for Community Service sponsors the Governor's Service Awards. This year it was held in the Hall of Flags, the Statehouse, Augusta, Maine. Over 300 people attended. The Governor spoke as did one of our Congressmen and all the Congregational delegation sent reps.

The nice part was that the Senior Service Corps served refreshments, volunteers served to escort and support everyone; even the pictures for the event were taken by volunteers. There was no charge for anyone as it was supported by the donor and membership base of the Maine Volunteer Connection.

This started as recognition for Volunteer Administrators and has now been extended to include those who give more than 500 hours of service to a particular organization. The organization is recognized as well. It should be noted that while more than 300 attended, there were over 500 certificates and plaques awarded. And a good time was had by all.

Submitted on 3 May 2005 by Hillary Roberts, Project Linus NJ, Inc., President, Keyport, NJ USA

I wholeheartedly agree that volunteers should be included in the recognition process. More than that, I believe that volunteers are the only category of "agency personnel" that should be recognized at these types of functions. Individuals or groups who contribute to an agency through their employer, or as hired consultants or political leaders have been compensated. Further, many more recognition events already exist to recognize these high level contributors through lifetime achievement awards and company picnics.

If the nonprofit sector is to succeed in this area, it must do more than acknowledge that a volunteer corps is worth their weight in gold -- they should listen and learn from the frontline. Volunteers know which agencies offer innovative opportunities and which seek a work horse.

Last year I attended a volunteer event that was a great example of innovation. 100 volunteers boarded a tour bus and were taken to NYC. Four "city guides" were assigned to groups of 25 volunteers. Each group was told they would enjoy a NYC adventure to learn about 1) fashion; 2) food; 3) theatre or 4) city politics. Each tour lasted 3 hours. Then all met back for a lovely buffet hosted by a local hotel. As you can imagine, each group had plenty to talk about with their fellow volunteers! The entire program took 8 months to plan, all services were donated or fees drastically reduced. The investment was solid time management, strong writing skills and the determination to make it work on behalf of volunteers. It was about offering a "day off" from volunteer duties to enjoy a special experience--because they deserved it!

Hard work should be rewarded and nothing says thank you better than demonstrating hard work!

Submitted on 2 May 2005 by Shannon Willmott, AIDS Committee of Ottawa, Volunteer Coordinator, Ontario Canada

We had a terrific appreciation party this year. I took a suggestion off the site and had a 1950s themed party for our Rocken' volunteers. We had '50s music and an old fashioned roast dinner, buffet style with a make-your-own-banana-split dessert. The buffet had us mingling and the music had some of our '50s generation volunteers showing us the moves. The dessert made for quite a bit of talk and laughter. This was all done on-site in our drop-in centre and we decorated with thank you banners and construction paper versions of vinyl records that said "ACO Volunteers Rock!" It was a hit!

Much better than the sit down dinner we had off-site last year. We had more people turn out and a lot more conversation. It was a real party!

Submitted on 2 May 2005 anonymously

I agree with changing it up! At my last position we had a potluck luncheon, invited EVERYONE (past, current and potential volunteers) and handed out unique hand-crafted awards made by our homeless clients. We also had a former staff member with a "famous face" give a presentation, as well as showcase volunteers from the year in a picture slideshow set to music with video transitions. It was really fun!

Comments from Readers

Submitted on May 19th, 2017

Anonymous, Chicago, USA

I'm a volunteer and I just received another Volunteer Recognition event invitation. That's how I came across this really old blog - because I was curious to see if people like attending these events. I really don't. I've always loved volunteering but I can't muster enough interest to sit for a couple of hours listening to speeches and doing chit chat.

It all depends on the kind of personality a person has. I'm activity-oriented so I would much prefer an event (a workshop party!) where we are doing something instead of having things done to us or for us. But, I understand no one can please everyone. So, let those who enjoy sit-down parties attend. I'll go back to my tinkering.

I wouldn't mind an entertainment event (like live music) though some would say the focus should be on recognizing us volunteers.

Submitted on May 19th, 2017

Susan J Ellis, Energize, Inc., Philadelphia, PA, United States

Thanks for affirming the point! Hope you someday get an invitation to a volunteer recognition event that you will really want to attend!

- Susan

Submitted on February 23rd, 2018

Kay, Program Director, Christian Community Outreach, Inc., Old Hickory, US

Just had an idea while reading this great article: How about a trivia game (like the ones run in restaurants and bars) focused on questions related to the agency, demographics of the populations served, etc? For example, our agency provides emergency assistance to residents of a specific zip code. Trivia questions might include things like "How many families live below the poverty line in our zip code?" and "What is the total dollar value of the hours that volunteers have contributed to serve people through our agency?"

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