

You can recognize volunteers and students for their accomplishments, time, and efforts in many different ways. Just as learners and volunteers are motivated to participate in your program for different reasons, they will also appreciate different types of recognition. Don't be discouraged if not everyone shows up for the end of the year party. You can mail them their certificate or recognition item with a thank you. A meaningful experience in your program and an opportunity to make a difference in someone's life may have been all that they were looking for. Here are some suggestions on how to recognize the volunteers and learners in your program in a positive way throughout the year. This list was compiled from many sources. Most suggestions have come from the many creative volunteer coordinators in the MLC network of literacy programs. Thank you!

Everyday Activities

- Return phone calls within 48 hours (24 hours, if possible).
- Be available to volunteers and students on a daily basis and provide them with the resources they need to teach and learn.
- Greet volunteers and students with a "Welcome!", "Good morning!", "Have a good day!", "Thank you." *Remember their names* and greet them by name every day you see them.
- Take photos and post them on the bulletin board.
- Provide cookies or treats during breaks.
- Give praise generously and often. Spend time with volunteers and learners to get to know their needs and figure out how you/your program may fill those needs.
- Provide volunteers and learners with information (training opportunities, information about cultural activities, services to the community, social services), and keep them informed about developments or changes in your program or organization.
- Provide a suggestion box, can, or notebook.
- Call volunteers monthly to see how things are going and to thank them for their help.
- Promote staff smiles.
- Say "we missed you."
- Take time to talk.
- Recognize and accommodate personal needs and problems.

Quarterly and on-going Activities

- Have a small party during class break time and have the students participate in planning the event. Having this recognition occur at this time allows you to recognize all volunteers and creates a comfortable atmosphere for learning. Volunteers are not always able to come to larger recognition events outside of class time.
- Write an article to a local newspaper about your volunteers' achievements in your program. Frame and hang it in the classroom, or copy it and send it to your volunteers.
- Provide in-services and ongoing training.
- Highlight a student or volunteer in a newsletter. Use their personal story or writing.
- Put up banners thanking volunteers or wishing them Happy Holidays, etc.

- Host a monthly support group or rap sessions for volunteers.
- Highlight a “Volunteer of the Month” or “Volunteer of the Week.”
- Adequately familiarize volunteers to your program.
- Keep volunteers informed about program news and changes.
- Include volunteers in special events at the workplace - makes them feel a part of the agency/organization.
- Nominate volunteers for awards within your program, the community, the greater metro area, or statewide.
- Invite volunteers and learners to participate in planning program and events.
- Get to know your volunteers and their interests; keep information about them in a card file and use it when talking with them.
- Give additional responsibility to your best volunteers.
- Ask students to evaluate a volunteer’s work.
- Invite volunteer and learner comments; make them feel their input is important. Ask their opinions in survey or evaluation form.
- Provide fresh flowers or sweets at volunteer stations.
- Designate a bulletin board for volunteers that includes a list of accumulated hours.

Yearly Activities

- Ask a newspaper reporter to come out and write a story on a volunteer or learner in your program. Send published volunteer feature stories from newspapers or newsletters to the volunteer’s employer.
- Write a letter to the editors of local newspapers, thanking volunteers.
- Ask students what they have thought of a volunteer’s help. Ask them to express this in words or drawings and create a booklet for the volunteer.
- Sponsor a student/volunteer essay contest for a cash prize: “How has this program changed your life?”
- Donate money for learner scholarships to purchase something connected to their learning (tape recorder, tapes, dictionary, etc.)
- Encourage volunteers to go to MLC’s [Sharing the Power Conference](#) in the spring. Pay for them to go to this or another conference or training.
- Highlight a volunteer or learner in your annual report.
- Ask volunteers to speak at school board meetings.
- Conduct individual evaluations that are directed at performance and not personalities.
- List volunteers in annual report, directory of employees and newsletters.

Cards

- Send birthday and/or holiday cards to your volunteers.
- Send a thank you card from a student(s), Volunteer Coordinator, or staff to a volunteer.
- Send thank-you cards or notes to the volunteer’s family, saying “thank-you for sharing your loved one with us.”
- Send a letter of appreciation to employers of volunteers.
- Send a card on the anniversary date the volunteer started.

Orientation Ideas

- Give learners and volunteers opportunities to be leaders. Match up experienced volunteers with new volunteers and ask the experienced volunteers to share their experiences and answer any questions. This relationship could last during the new tutor orientation or be a more extensive mentoring partnership where an experienced volunteer keeps in contact and provides support to a handful of new volunteers.
- Give information about the organization and the other programs it operates.

- Take time to introduce volunteers to staff.
- Send a personal note of welcome from the Executive Director.

Social Events

- Holiday party, picnic, luncheon, brunch or other recognition event. Ethnic food may be shared. Students and volunteers can share their musical, theatrical and other talents. Celebrate when learners meet their goals – give them certificates (filled out a job application, got a drivers license, finished book one, etc.), or give a certificate for advancing to the next class level. Provide volunteer certificates based on the number of hours donated. Invite school board members and legislators to these events. Ask them to present the awards and/or speak. Ask volunteers and learners to plan and carry out these events.
- Take a volunteer out to lunch or coffee.
- Host a volunteer movie night.
- Ask students to speak at annual events (school board meetings, etc.).

Gifts

- Organizational pins, pens, mugs, etc.
- Pictures: take a picture of the student or class each volunteer is serving. Include the volunteer in the picture. Buy an inexpensive frame and present it to each volunteer.
- Flowers, or a small potted plant
- Cultural item: give them something from their learner’s culture.
- A homemade bookmark and pad of paper.
- Donated coupons to restaurants, bookstores, movie theaters, concerts, sporting events, etc.
- Personal gift for over 100 hours of volunteering.
- “You’re worth a mint” - thank-you note with Andes Mints attached.
- Bags of popcorn or Chex party mix, tied with curly ribbon.
- “Apple of my eye” - wrap shiny, red apples in saran wrap, tie with curly ribbon. Tell volunteer or put up sign or note that says: “you’re the apple of my eye”.
- “Hugs and Kisses”, wrap Hershey kisses, tie with curly ribbon or bow, you or client supply the hugs.
- At volunteer work sites, leave candy kisses with a “thank you” attached to them.

Notable Dates

- National Volunteer Week is the third week in April and is sponsored by the Points of Light Foundation www.pointsoflight.org
- December 5, International Volunteer Day was designated by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1985.
- September 8, International Literacy Day.

Recognition Items for Purchase

- C.D. & M., Inc.
P.O. Box 970115
Boca Raton, FL 33497
Phone (561) 487-5684
Fax (561) 487-1439

<http://www.VolunteerGifts.com>

- The Thanks Company
P.O. Box 220
Cherryville, NC 28021-0220
888-875-0903
704-435-8828
www.thankscountry.com