

# NORTH OF TYNE VOLUNTEERING AREA OF EXCELLENCE

## SAYING THANK YOU TO VOLUNTEERS

Saying ‘thank you’ to volunteers is easy, especially if you get into the habit of saying it at the end of every session that the volunteer attends. By thanking volunteers individually you’re acknowledging their contribution and recognising that they are making a difference, not just to your organisation, but to your clients as well.

### **ALIGNMENT WITH THE HEALTH CHECK FOR VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS**

The Health Check for Volunteer-Involving Organisations considers whether you provide feedback to your volunteers, to show that their contribution is recognised.

### **THANKING YOUR VOLUNTEERS**

Some organisations arrange special events to celebrate their volunteers’ achievements. These can include meals, social events and even award ceremonies. Volunteers can be presented with a certificate and some organisations like to give each volunteer a lapel pin/ badge or a t-shirt that has the organisation’s name on. Such items can then be worn in the course of volunteering and can be especially effective when worn by volunteers who are in a public-facing role such as raising awareness or fundraising.

### **Volunteers’ Week (usually first week in June)**

This is an annual national campaign which can be used both as part of your recruitment drive and to celebrate your volunteers’ achievements. The Volunteers’ Week website sells merchandise with the Volunteers’ Week logo on it and has included items such as baseball caps, coffee mugs and certificates. The Volunteers’ Week logo is also available for free so you can use it in various ways depending on how you are planning to celebrate the Week.

### **Student Volunteering (SV) Week**

SV Week takes place in the last week of February every year. The Week was started in 2001 originally to coincide with International Year of Volunteers. It has now become an annual fixture in the student volunteering movement as well as the wider voluntary sector. The week is a chance to raise the national profile of student volunteers by promoting and celebrating local student groups. Around the country, universities and colleges put on special events and volunteering projects to reward existing volunteers and recruit new ones.

### **Other special occasions**

However, Volunteers’ Week isn’t the only time to say ‘thank you’. Depending on the nature of your organisation, you may choose to link your event with a special day. For instance, groups who specifically recruit volunteers who are parents may choose to send a ‘thank you’ card on Mother’s or Father’s Day.

Organisations that are linked to health conditions may choose to tie in a special event with their own themed week or special day. Calendars such as Count Me In and Interfaith provide details of national days and weeks as well as public and religious holidays. If your organisation aims to integrate immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers into the local community, you may decide to arrange an event to coincide with a patron saint’s day. Some organisations choose to send ‘thank you’ cards on the volunteer’s birthday or on Valentine’s Day.



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### Events

Some organisations thank their volunteers by arranging special events that may be specifically for volunteers or may include staff. Such activities can include meals, lunches, coffee mornings, fun days, champagne receptions, sporting activities, such as bowling or skittles, or maybe a visit to the organisation's head office so that volunteers can get a sense of how they fit into the overall structure of the organisation. Funding for such events should be included in the budget for the volunteer programme. After all, volunteers give their time for free and the least an organisation can do is to recognise this by demonstrating how much their volunteers are appreciated.

### Other ideas

If you're planning to hold an event to celebrate your volunteers you could write a letter to your local newspaper or invite a journalist along to report on the occasion. Some people like to have their photograph in the local newspaper because it means that they have been recognised for their volunteering efforts. They can also show the article to friends and family and keep it as a souvenir. However, some volunteers may not like such publicity, so it is always best to check first if they're happy to be included in any media coverage or have their photograph taken.

For many volunteers the most important part of volunteering is working alongside a client group. If a client or service user compliments a particular volunteer, you could include these comments in a 'thank you' card to the volunteer. Alternatively, you could design a 'Thank You' noticeboard, where clients or service users can show their appreciation by adding comments about volunteers.

Volunteers can sometimes be such a source of inspiration to clients and service users that they, in turn, may decide to 'give something back' to the organisation possibly by becoming volunteers themselves. If your volunteers inspire members of your client group, acknowledge this and let the volunteer know how they've helped change someone's life in some way. For some volunteers this is the biggest reward of all.

### Good practice

Whilst some organisations may choose to thank their volunteers by buying them gifts, it is good practice to avoid giving anything that sets a precedent or expectation on the part of the volunteer. If a gift is regarded as a 'perk' (something that the volunteer gains in exchange for volunteering) this may contribute to the creation of a contract with the volunteers, giving them employment status with the associated rights. Also, it is important not to give gifts that the volunteer can benefit from financially such as money, vouchers, tokens and gifts of appreciable value, as this can affect benefit claims and may be taxable. If presenting volunteers with gifts you could give small items such as flowers or chocolates or even home-made ones. Giving a packet of seeds is a small gift but the benefits can be long-lasting as the volunteer can nurture the seeds and watch them grow into flowers. Handmade bookmarks make both a small and personal gift and can even be made by the client group that the volunteers are working with.

In cases where you may wish to recognise an individual's longstanding contribution to your organisation it may be appropriate to give a more significant gift such as a commemorative paperweight. This may also be the case when volunteers leave or 'retire' from volunteering with your organisation. As this would be a one-off event there would be no reason for the volunteer to expect such a reward on a regular basis so the issue of setting a precedent would not apply.



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If you present awards or certificates to commemorate your volunteers' achievements keep it fair and ensure that, at the very least, everyone receives acknowledgement even if you just say 'thank you'.

### When volunteers leave

It's a good idea to have a written policy on how to say 'thank you' to volunteers when they leave your organisation to ensure that all volunteers are treated fairly and equally. This will be especially helpful for other members of staff if a volunteer leaves whilst you are away for any reason. For instance, you may decide to give the volunteer a 'thank you' card that other members of the organisation can sign, and/or a small commemorative gift. You could give each volunteer a similar gift or something that would appeal to their personal tastes. Whatever you decide to do it's worth setting a cap on the amount that you will spend on the gift. You could also present the volunteer with a certificate to acknowledge their volunteering contribution. Some people may regard this as a souvenir of the time they've spent with your organisation whilst others may find a certificate a useful way of demonstrating the skills that they've learnt and developed when applying for other volunteering roles or even paid work.

### In conclusion

Providing support and supervision, relevant training and offering extra responsibility, show that your organisation is committed to its volunteers and these tasks usually form part of a volunteer management strategy that takes place all year round. Whilst celebrating volunteers' achievements may take a bit more planning, it is well worth putting in the time and effort to do this because the rewards can be substantial. Volunteers need to feel valued and respected and showing your appreciation with a small event or gesture can really boost a volunteer's morale, self confidence and sense of self-worth. It can also help staff and volunteers to bond. In addition, such events and gestures will also help maintain volunteer loyalty and increase retention levels which, in turn, benefit the organisation and the people it is there to serve - its clients.

