

Employee Volunteer Programs: Recognition Best Practices

Recognition involves thanking employee volunteers and volunteer leaders in a way that acknowledges their contributions in a meaningful and credible manner. Including recognition as a component of the employee volunteer program (EVP) is important to its success and ability to retain volunteers. Recognition strategies help raise awareness within the employee base and also provide an opportunity to raise community awareness about the great work employee volunteers do.

Benefits of implementing an employee volunteer recognition program include:

- Increases workplace enjoyment through volunteer satisfaction and recognition amongst peers and leaders
- Creates and strengthens brand awareness, reputation, community relations and marketing opportunities for the company
- Strengthens the bond between volunteers and the company
- Communicates basic volunteer standards
- Identifies internal best practices and trends
- Raises attention for the community issues being addressed
- Serves as a tool for volunteer retention and recruitment
- Creates role models within the company and sets benchmarks for volunteer excellence

10 Things to Consider Before Starting a Recognition Program

An effective recognition program has the right mix of formal and informal approaches and truly functions as an integral component of a volunteer program. Formal volunteer recognition includes certificates, plaques, pins, or dinners to honor volunteer achievement. Informal recognition occurs in the daily interchange between volunteers and the company when its employees or leaders convey appreciation for the employee-volunteers' work. Ask and answer these ten questions to help your organization develop and implement an effective volunteer recognition program:

1. How much staff time can be devoted to administering the recognition program? Will it be administered from the company's headquarters or local offices?
2. Who should be included in the development of the program?
3. How can senior management buy-in be secured for the recognition program?
4. How can the recognition program help to meet the volunteer program objectives and overall company or employee development goals?
5. What are the best practices of similar companies' volunteer recognition programs?
6. Is there an existing internal recognition program that can be adapted and customized to suit the needs of the employee volunteer program?
7. How do our employees and volunteer leaders want to be recognized for their community service? How can we incorporate recognition for different types of volunteers (e.g., long-term and short-term volunteers)?

8. What will the award criteria and eligibility rules include? Who will judge award nominations?
9. How will the volunteer award(s) be announced (e.g., special ceremony)? What communications vehicles currently exist to promote the award internally and externally?
10. Should external counsel and expertise be sought to help develop this volunteer recognition program? Are there core functions of the program that should be outsourced?

10 Quick and Easy Recognition Ideas

Recognition should be appropriate to the company culture and the volunteers' values system. Successful employee volunteer recognition programs are thoroughly planned and designed, well-managed, clearly communicated and frequently monitored. Recognition can be as simple as preparing goodie bags or writing thank you notes for employee volunteers and as extensive as planning a large-scale company-wide recognition or award ceremony.

Some common elements of successful recognition programs are that they incorporate senior management support and participation, provide the nonprofit organization of the volunteer's choice with monetary funds, and tie-in with a special day of service or company event. For example, "National Volunteer Week" occurs each year in April and is specifically intended to celebrate volunteers and their contributions of time and talents.

1. Share stories and photos of great volunteers internally and externally. Develop a regular cadence of these stories and use communication vehicles that will reach as many employees as possible (e.g., intranet, newsletters, company magazine, website, CSR report).
2. Reserve a prime parking space for the "Volunteer of the Month."
3. Offer individual or group financial incentives in form of grants to the organization of his/her choice. Grants can vary from \$100 to \$25,000 per award.
4. Showcase top volunteers in-person during leadership or "all-hands" meetings or at special company events. Perhaps post a photo and profile in high-traffic areas for both employees and guests such as your main lobby or in elevator banks.
5. Produce certificates or a letter of appreciation signed by the CEO. Even better, ask for handwritten notes from senior leaders to thank volunteers or volunteer leaders for their contributions.
6. Hold a "volunteer contest" which recognizes an individual and team with the most volunteer hours for a certain time period. Use different communication vehicles to display an "Honor Roll" of volunteers – using number of hours served, number of projects participated in, or number of projects led.
7. Host an annual lunch, dinner or special event to highlight the work of top volunteers and volunteer leaders.
8. Schedule a recurring "bring your own lunch" with senior executives for your top volunteer leaders.
9. Create a point system based on number of hours volunteered or other outputs and have volunteers turn their "points" into rewards like gift certificates or branded-merchandise.
10. Integrate public-facing recognition mechanisms into your strategy such as the President's Volunteer Service Award or the Daily Point of Light Award. More information below.

DAILY POINT OF LIGHT AWARD

Created by the administration of President George H. W. Bush, the Daily Point of Light Award honors individuals and groups creating meaningful change in communities across America. Each weekday, one volunteer or volunteer effort is recognized with the Daily Point of Light Award. Whether it's a teenager battling culture bullies or a plumber creating a school's volunteer network, a mom leading a homegrown disaster relief drive or an athlete wielding his celebrity for good instead of goods – a Daily Point of Light embraces the challenge of tackling a community need through volunteer service. Nominate a local hero for a Daily Point of Light Award, visit www.pointsoflight.org/programs/recognition/dpol/nomination.

PRESIDENT'S VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD

The President's Volunteer Service Award encourages and recognizes citizens for their commitment to ongoing volunteer service and civic engagement. Individuals, families and groups are honored at different stages of their service journey by acknowledging annual volunteer hours served and the resulting positive community impact. Depending on which award package is ordered, award recipients can receive an official President's Volunteer Service Award pin, a personalized certificate of achievement and a congratulatory letter from the President. Visit www.presidentialserviceawards.gov to learn more!

What about Recognition for Employee Volunteer Programs?

When you're considering ways to honor and reward employee volunteers and volunteer leaders, also consider ways in which your company can be recognized for the hard work of your community affairs efforts. There are many awards and ranking programs available that can bring added value to your employee volunteer program.

Awards Programs:

- The Corporate Engagement Award of Excellence (CEAE) was designed by Points of Light to honor companies that have made a commitment to building strong and effective employees volunteer programs. Honorees demonstrate innovative and clear strategic EVP goals that are in line with the company's purpose and who move the needle with social progress. Celebrating 20 years of recognition with the program Points of Light is honored to have recognized and welcomed over 90 companies to the CEAE family. Visit the website for details on the program's criteria and the nomination process, and to download applications: www.pointsoflight.org/programs/recognition/corporate-engagement-award
- CECF's [Excellence Awards](#) are among the most coveted awards in the field, drawing an extraordinary pool of applications each year. Presented annually since 2000, these awards are juried by an external Selection Committee that is comprised of representatives from the corporate, nonprofit, multilateral, social investment, consulting, media, and academic communities. To win, companies must demonstrate exemplary evidence of each of the following Standards of Excellence: CEO Leadership, Innovation, Dedication to Measurement, Partnership.
- Each year since 2008, *CR Magazine* has awarded the prestigious [Responsible CEO of the Year Award](#), presented to deserving CEOs — from companies, NGOs, and governments — who, during the previous year, put themselves at personal and professional risk in order to deliver on corporate responsibility promises. This annual award is unique among business honors because it recognizes how individual CEOs have aligned their organization's interests with that of thousands of stakeholders to do well by doing good and acknowledges leadership in progress, since corporate responsibility represents a discipline that is ever to be improved upon.

- [IAVE](#) formally recognizes excellence in corporate volunteering through the only awards for global companies that are volunteering globally. Two awards are given at the IAVE World Volunteer Conference: **The Global Volunteer Program Award** recognizes a global company that shows an exemplary overall approach to global corporate volunteering – with a well-thought-out strategy that fits well with their values, priorities and culture; an understanding and appreciation of global issues and local realities; and, activities that address serious problems in a serious way. **The Inspiring Practice Award** recognizes a global company that has created a high impact volunteer initiative designed to meet a specific community or societal need. This award is about tangible outcomes that resulted from a specific volunteer-based strategy to meet a particular need.
- To find leading examples of the innovative and diverse ways business makes a difference in society, look no further than the [Corporate Citizenship Awards, created by the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Business Civic Leadership Center](#). Since 2000, the "Citizens" Awards have spotlighted successful and replicable models of important, positive business impact on people, communities and the environment. The finalists are characterized by the proof they offer that core business expertise and employee talent are among the most valuable ways businesses engage in society. Categories include: Best Business Neighbor; Best International Ambassador; Best Partnership and Best Corporate Steward.

Rankings:

- Launched in 2012, The Civic 50 is an initiative to identify the 50 most community-minded companies in the nation. The Civic 50 sets the standard for corporate civic engagement nationwide and creates a roadmap for S&P 500 companies seeking to best use their time, talent, and resources to improve the quality of life in the communities where they do business. The survey was developed by the nation's definitive experts on civic engagement, the National Conference on Citizenship and Points of Light, in partnership with one of corporate America's most respected sources of business and financial information, Bloomberg LP. The survey is powered by True Impact. For more information, visit Civic50.org or contact us at Civic50@NCoC.net.
- Fortune Magazine Rankings:
 - [World's Most Admired Companies](#) are selected based on innovation, people management, product quality, long-term investment, fiscal soundness, employee retention, social responsibility, use of assets, global competitiveness, etc.
 - To pick the [100 Best Companies to Work For](#), *Fortune* partners with the Great Place to Work Institute to conduct the most extensive employee survey in corporate America.
- [CSR Index 50](#) - For the last four years the Boston College Center and Reputation Institute have created a ranking of the top 50 companies in the United States that the public (based on a survey of US consumers) distinguishes for corporate social responsibility.

The [Points of Light Corporate Institute](#) is the go-to resource for community-minded companies looking to build and expand effective employee volunteer programs. With our global network of 250 affiliates and a team of experts, we can help you create a customized volunteer program, engage your employees, learn best practices, network with other leading companies, and gain visibility for leadership and excellence.



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