

Providing Recognition to the Extension Volunteer Teacher¹

Elizabeth B. Bolton²

This is one publication in the series The Cooperative Extension Volunteer Teacher. This volunteer teacher series addresses the need for guidelines to assist Extension county faculty in the important task of preparing the volunteer to teach.

Overview

Recognition is the means by which an institution shows a volunteer their services are appreciated. It is more than just saying “thank you” at the end of a service or task. Appropriate recognition acknowledges the work and contributions of a volunteer in a public way. Recognition is an important part of programs that utilize volunteers to deliver services, teach and carry out organizational tasks.

Many volunteers find the greatest satisfaction in helping others, and acknowledgement of this help is all they need. On the other hand, lack of formal recognition is often evidence of a poorly-managed program. Recognition can be done in many ways and each demands some commitment. A plan for recognition needs to be a part of the overall procedures for involving volunteers in the work of the local Extension office.

Behind every effective volunteer teacher is the Extension faculty member(s) who recruited, trained, and supervised the volunteer. The recognition system should also include a means of acknowledging the work of the Extension

professional(s). This accomplishes several goals. It increases the motivation of the Extension professional to work with volunteers. Building recognition of the staff person into the system is a means of building and maintaining a team approach to the work of the Extension program. It reinforces the importance of the multiplier concept, which implies that programs and information multiply when volunteers are involved in their dissemination.

Below are some principles that can be used to guide the development of a system of recognition for a county Extension program that utilizes volunteers.

1. Recognition and acknowledgement of volunteer service is a necessary part of the program that utilizes their resources.
2. A systematic plan for recognition reinforces the motivation of volunteers to participate and to continue their participation.
3. A systematic plan for recognition can build on levels of achievement and degrees of service that individual volunteers contribute.
4. A formal event for recognition can provide publicity for the individual and for the Extension program in which the volunteer participated. In other words, recognition for service is news.

1. This document is FCS9077, one of a series of the Family Youth and Community Sciences Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date October 1992. Revised October 2005, and October 2011. Reviewed October 2008. Visit the EDIS Website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Elizabeth B. Bolton, professor, Community Development, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611.

5. A systematic plan for recognition should be broad enough to provide acknowledgement for many levels of accomplishment and service and thus reward many volunteers rather than just a few.

Recognition is most effective when it is tied to the reasons or motivations a person has for being involved in volunteer work. The reasons people volunteer are shown in **Box 1** and each suggests a corresponding type of recognition (Bolton, 1985, p. 40).

Informal Recognition

Recognition strategies do not have to be formal and planned months in advance. There are some simple and inexpensive methods to show volunteers that their services are valuable and their time is appreciated. The following are some examples of informal recognition.

1. Pins or identification badges. Name badges or identification pins help the volunteers to identify with the agency or organization they serve. It also acknowledges that this person is important enough to have a special name plate or badge with his/her name. These can also be a symbol of status.
2. Including the volunteer in planning and evaluating the program.
3. Asking advice and giving praise, compliments and congratulations for performance.
4. Accepting volunteers as part of the team and treating them as peers.
5. Making volunteers aware of the relationship of the job they do to the overall objective of the program.
6. Making volunteers aware that they are needed and wanted. They are valuable human resources to an important community organization--County Cooperative Extension.

There are many small but significant ways to tell volunteers that they are appreciated.

Formal Recognition

Some of the more formal methods to give recognition include the following. They may or may not be tied to the motive for volunteering or the specific purpose of the organization.

1. A letter of commendation for accomplishments.
2. Put volunteer in charge of a project.
3. Have volunteer of the month with a special place to display picture and name.
4. Achievement day with attendance by influential people in the community.
5. Special awards for service, teaching or community outreach.
6. Certificates of achievement in a particular skill, subject, service project.
7. Utilize a recognition worksheet with professional staff and with volunteers to plan types and dates of recognition events.
8. Certificates of appreciation with the volunteer's name and the length of service.

References

- Bolton, E.B. (1985). *Volunteer Leadership Development: Document Results and Giving Recognition. Module V*. Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida, Cooperative Extension Service. (pp. 37-43.)
- Boyd, B.L. (2004). Extension agents as administrators of volunteers: Competencies needed for the future. *Journal of Extension* [on line]. Available:
- Mook, L., Sousa, J., Elgie, S., & Quaarterm, J., (2005). Accounting for the value of volunteer contributions. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 15 (4), 401-415.

Box 1.

Recognition Related to Motive for Volunteering	
Gain public visibility	Letter of recommendation; news release/feature story; greeting by name
Desire to learn	Achievement certificates
Socialization	Responsible for planning group functions; attendance awards
Building self-esteem	Promotion to higher level volunteer jobs; a job ladder
To help others	Thanks and appreciation from the recipients of the help provided
Community improvement	Award ceremony
Desire to utilize skills	Let volunteers run projects/teach/demonstrate skills
Commitment to organization	Acknowledgement from organization
Recognition can also be related to the purpose of the organization in which the volunteer works. The following examples are related to the Cooperative Extension Service.	
Recognition Related to the Purpose of the Organization	
Education	Leader training awards Teaching awards
Leadership development	Plaque for council office Names added to plaque Appointed as advisor to officers/council
Community outreach	Awards for outstanding service Newsletter story Club recognition Lapel pins