



Oasis Shelter, Gold Beach



SMART, Salem



Sisters Folk Festival, Sisters

VOLUNTEERING IN OREGON:

Volunteer Recognition Brief

The Volunteering in Oregon project, conducted in 2016 and funded by The Oregon Community Foundation, sought to explore key questions related to volunteering in Oregon among nonprofits in the state. The VIO project included a statewide electronic survey with nonprofit organizations, an electronic survey with volunteers within these nonprofits, interviews with representatives from nonprofit organizations and case studies of three organizations with robust volunteer programs. Ultimately, the aim of the VIO project was to identify recommendations and action steps for how OCF and its partners might best encourage and support effective volunteer engagement and service in Oregon. To read the full report, please visit oregoncf.org/VIO2016.

This brief is one of three from the VIO project, focusing on specific and/or innovative practices of Oregon nonprofits to recognize volunteers, e.g., express appreciation of volunteers and acknowledge the impact of their work. The other two briefs focus on volunteer recruitment and engagement. What follows is a summary of key volunteer recognition practices, described by organizations and volunteers involved in the VIO project.

Thanking Volunteers

Overwhelmingly, organizations and volunteers agreed that a genuine "thank you" is a meaningful volunteer recognition and appreciation practice. This was seen as a simple but important practice, and something that should happen during each and every instance a volunteer gives time for an organization. Handwritten thank-you notes were also recognized by organizations and volunteers as a small but meaningful way to thank volunteers. One staff person shared:

"I make it a point to say thank you to everybody every day. We see them as vital to our success, and any way that we can recognize them, we try to do that."

Highlighting Volunteers' Work and Impact

Organizations and volunteers reported that being able to see the impact of volunteer service is an important motivator, and connected volunteers' work with advancing the organization's mission. One volunteer coordinator described this as a component of the organization's recognition practices:

"You need to explain how your volunteers make a difference or give them an opportunity to see that what they're doing is making a difference."

Holding Recognition Events

In addition to building community awareness to recruit new volunteers, recognition events, often held annually, were generally described as a fun, public way to acknowledge the work of volunteers on a regular and expected basis. These were also described as ways to bring both staff and volunteers together to celebrate the successes from the past year. One organization shared:

"Once a year we have a volunteer event for anyone to come to [the brewery] for an evening, and we'll usually have over 200 people come out and have a great time, mostly with donated funds, but also out of our development budget. We thank them formally, we buy them food and wine. It's a lot of fun for everyone."

Other examples of appreciation events included celebrating and hosting festivities on Volunteer Recognition Day or during Volunteer Recognition Week, as well as other smaller volunteer events throughout the year. One organization described:

"We have a volunteer party on the weekend of Valentine's Day called 'We Heart Our Volunteers,' and we play a big Jeopardy game and provide food and drink."

Giving Honors and Awards

Organizations described highlighting the work of volunteers through different types of award ceremonies,



IRCO, Portland



Boomers and Babies, Family Building Blocks, Salem



Strengthening Rural Families, Philomath

typically held during annual volunteer recognition events. Some awards recognize volunteers who have given specific numbers of hours over a year or lifetime, while others recognize volunteers who have been involved for a certain number of years. Still other awards, for example, highlight the work of volunteers as “inspiration makers.” As shared by one organization:

“We give two volunteer awards every year, and usually the people who are awarded them give 1,000 hours a year or thousands of hours over the course of their lifetime.”

Offering Additional Incentives

Some arts and culture organizations, in particular, felt they could provide additional appreciation incentives, such as offering volunteers entrance to a music festival or annual museum membership where they volunteer. Organizations also described providing tangible incentives as thanks to volunteers, such as branded take-aways like mugs, reusable bags, stickers or T-shirts. One organization shared:

“We also give every volunteer a T-shirt that has our mission on the back.”

Finding Out What Matters to Each Volunteer

Finally, organizations and volunteers described that it is important to understand the kinds of recognition and appreciation volunteers need and want. By adopting multiple volunteer and recognition practices, an organization will be better able to meet the needs of different volunteers.

“Everybody responds to different things. Some people enjoy getting thanked, and getting to know your volunteers and what they respond to is very important. The program managers get to know the volunteers they work with and be personal.”

Selected Resources for Organizations

- Energize Inc.
www.energize.com
- Nonprofit Association of Oregon
www.nonprofitoregon.org
- Oregon Volunteers!
www.oregonvolunteers.org
- Points of Light
www.pointsoflight.org

Recommended citation for this report: Lambarth, C.H., and Cochran, L. (2016). *Volunteering in Oregon: Volunteer Recognition Brief*. Portland, OR: Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services, Portland State University.



Portland State
UNIVERSITY

Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services
School of Social Work
Portland State University
1600 SW 4th Ave., Suite 400
Portland, OR 97201
www.pdx.edu/ccf/



THE OREGON
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

This project was funded by The Oregon Community Foundation. For more information, please contact: Carly Brown
Community Engagement Officer
cbrown@oregoncf.org
www.oregoncf.org