

Recognizing Volunteers

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We all need a pat on the back from time to time. One of our deepest emotional needs is recognition and approval from other people. Satisfying this need is especially important for those working with people in a leadership capacity. Whether we call it recognition, appreciation or awards, we are recognizing others' efforts and contributions.

Giving volunteers visible appreciation should include recognition of:

- The importance of the job
- The quality of the performance
- The person or group involved

This doesn't mean pouring on praise when it's not deserved. It does mean giving credit where credit is due.

Effective recognition

In order for recognition to be effective, it should be:

Earned

Recognition should be given for significant accomplishments.

Unearned recognition could be embarrassing to both the recipient and his or her group. Clearly state why a person is being recognized or what he or she did to deserve the award.

Formal and informal

Formal recognition includes items such as certificates, ribbons or pins and is usually offered in public.



Informal recognition is not always planned in advance, but it is just as important, and sometimes more so, than formal recognition. We all could use positive affirmations such as, "You really taught a good workshop," "Gee, I'm glad you are here with these good ideas," or "Your committee is really getting things done."

Part of the total county or group program

Throughout the year, plan recognition into the club program. Advance planning allows opportunities to recognize volunteers' personal contributions.

Evaluation as Recognition

Evaluation can also be a form of recognition. Volunteers want to know how they are doing. Discussions with volunteers not only help

them to see their progress but also give them a chance to ask questions and make suggestions for the program.

Individual and group discussions with volunteers could help:

- Identify training needs
- Judge volunteers' potential for new leadership roles
- Determine the extent to which youth and adults are achieving their goals
- Provide feedback on the success of the 4-H program in different situations

Ways to recognize

- Give personal thanks or praise either on the spot or by telephone, or write a note of appreciation or praise.
- Invite volunteers to participate in team planning.
- Celebrate outstanding individual or group accomplishments or both.
- Plan special recognition programs, parties or other activities for parents, community supporters, project leaders, youth leaders first-year 4-H members, officers or other program contributors.
- Recognize individuals in front of people they consider important
- Send invitations for special 4-H events.