

# Don't forget Volunteer Recognition

<https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/dont-forget-volunteer-recognition>

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By Barry S. Mael

In synagogues across North America tens of thousands of volunteers are putting in substantial time to help our *kehillos* survive and thrive. In most cases, without volunteers, our synagogues couldn't offer the programs, services and operations they need to exist. From board officers, trustees, committee chair people and members, to those who set up *Kiddush*, teach classes, lead youth groups, read Torah and everything in between, volunteers are as integral participants in the daily life of our shuls. In fact, in 2017, [Independent Sector](#) reported that the value of a volunteer hour was estimated to be \$24.14, up 2.5% from the previous year. The research showed that 63 million Americans volunteered about eight billion hours, totaling \$193 billion. In this study, religious organizations were cited the type of organization that volunteers worked in the most at 34%.

As you think about the importance and value of your volunteers to your communities this time of year, it is vital that you also give some thought to volunteer recognition. How do you let your volunteers know they are appreciated? How do you say thank you in appropriate and creative ways? Do you take the time to acknowledge their commitment to your community or is it taken for granted?

Below are some tips courtesy of Volunteer Canada:

- Designate someone in your organization to be responsible for ensuring that ongoing recognition of volunteers takes place
- Recognition of volunteers should happen on a year-round, frequent and informal basis
- Vary your recognition efforts, from the informal thank you and spontaneous treats to more formal events
- Make each occasion to recognize volunteers meaningful and an opportunity to reflect on the value volunteers bring to your organization
- It's best to phrase recognition to emphasize the contribution of the individual and not the end result. "You did a great job!" as opposed to "This is a great job!"
- Make it appropriate to the achievement. For example, a paper certificate accompanied by a private thank you may be appropriate for a few months of service but a public dinner and engraved plaque may better suit 10 years of volunteerism.
- Make sure that whatever standards of recognition you establish can be consistently maintained by your organization in years to come. Holding a volunteer recognition dinner one year sets up expectations for future volunteers
- Try to arrange recognition soon after an achievement has been reached – delaying until weeks or months later diminishes the value of your gratitude

- Getting to know each of your volunteers and their interests will help you learn how best to recognize each individual and make him or her feel special

Below are several ideas we have heard and collected over the years from synagogues and other organizations.

- Host an annual volunteer recognition *oneg*
- Take pictures of volunteers at work and post on your website
- Send personalized thank you notes to each volunteer
- Host a volunteer recognition meal to thank volunteers and their families
- Provide VIP or reserved parking at services
- Display a volunteer hall of fame with pictures and bios on a wall in your synagogue
- Create a virtual scrapbook of volunteer activity throughout the year and give out at a recognition event
- Design or give out branded recognition gifts such as mugs, T-shirts, bags, hats etc.
- Give out a " Volunteer of the Year " award at the annual meeting
- Distribute certificates of appreciation at an event or at services
- Submit articles to local papers highlighting your volunteers
- Invite volunteers involved in ongoing programming to staff meetings
- Budget money to send volunteers to conferences or local training events and ask them to report afterwards on some aspect of the event they attended
- Establish a volunteer honor roll
- Feature a volunteer of the month on your website or in your newsletter
- Acknowledge your volunteers by holding a Thank-a-thon. Ask each board member to call a certain number of volunteers to say thank you!
- Keep track of volunteer hours per year or years of service and then on certain milestones give a special gift like a Jewish book or a *tallit*
- Ask outstanding volunteers to do training/orientations for new volunteers
- Surprise volunteers with birthday cards and/or gift cards
- Nominate your volunteers for local or state recognition awards
- Walk up to volunteers and say thank you!

According to [Give Gab](#), the nonprofit giving platform, "showing heartfelt appreciation is not only the right thing to do, but it's an effective and easy way to establish loyal volunteers and attract new supports and members to your community or organization. On average, people who volunteer for a nonprofit are four times more likely to donate to the organization than someone who doesn't volunteer (and they give ten times as much)!"

In *Pirkei Avot*, Hillel says, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?" (1:14). We rely on volunteers to help our communities thrive and while they don't do it for recognition, it is to our benefit to show them how much we appreciate their service.

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