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# **The Volunteer Recognition Program Model: Providing Volunteer Recognition Throughout the Year**

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**Abstract:** The Volunteer Recognition Model was developed as a tool for Extension agents and volunteer administrators to use in designing their own comprehensive volunteer recognition program. The model uses both extrinsic and intrinsic recognition throughout the entire program year. Recognition is vital to sustaining volunteers in the roles in which they serve, and it encourages volunteers to expand responsibilities into other areas. This model provides diverse methods of recognizing volunteers on all levels, regardless of their motivation for service.

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## **Introduction & Review of Literature**

Nearly every volunteer administration model includes volunteer recognition as a key component. These include the Bridge from Dreams to Realities model (Vineyard, 1980), the 4-H Leadership Development model (Kwarteng, Smith & Miller, 1988), ISOTURE model (Boyce, 1971; Dolan, 1969), the L-O-O-P model (Penrod, 1991), the Volunteer Management Cycle (Lawson & Lawson, 1986), the Volunteer Professional Model for Human Services Agencies and Counselors (Lenihan & Jackson, 1984), and the GEMS Model of Volunteer Administration (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells, 1998). Recognition of volunteers can be found within the GEMS Model of Volunteer Administration under the sustain phase. Other components within the sustain phase includes evaluation, retention, redirection, and disengagement (Culp, Deppe, Castillo, & Wells, 1998). Volunteer recognition is defined as "formal and informal *favorable attention* given to an individual to

provide a sense of appreciation" (Kwarteng, Smith, & Miller, 1988).

Determining which categories of recognition are most significant, as well as the specific types of recognition that are most meaningful to individual volunteers, however, is an open debate (Campbell, Culp, & Schwartz, 1999). The debate most often centers on whether extrinsic versus intrinsic recognition is most meaningful, appropriate, and appreciated by volunteers. Although extrinsic recognition is recommended by some (Murk & Stephan, 1991), the most important factor in volunteer development and administration has been found to be informal, verbal recognition, praise, and encouragement by others (Kwarteng, Smith, & Miller, 1988), which is clearly intrinsic recognition.

A research study was conducted of tenured Ohio 4-H volunteers who were attending a statewide recognition luncheon to explore the types of recognition 4-H volunteers preferred (Culp & Schwartz, 1998). The recognition types that most tenured 4-H volunteers in the study preferred were intrinsic, informal, and local (from the program participants) rather than from parents or Extension professionals.

## Discussion

Because studies have shown that 4-H volunteers prefer intrinsic over extrinsic rewards (Culp & Schwartz, 1998; Culp & Schwartz, 1999a; Culp & Schwartz, 1999b; Fritz, Karmazin, Barbuto & Burrow, 2003), the volunteer recognition program model was developed to recognize volunteers with acts of simple, intrinsic appreciation. The program model was created for volunteer administrators to use throughout the program year and can be adapted to fit any Extension program or non-profit volunteer organization.

The model is divided into months and includes gestures and/or activities to conduct throughout the month for recognition and appreciation of 4-H volunteers (Table 1.) Components of the recognition program model include many events and activities that will recognize all volunteers whether they are motivated by achievement, affiliation, or power (McClelland, 1955), and the program model includes both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. The model was developed so that volunteer administrators could provide inexpensive forms of recognition to volunteers through the entire year, rather than focusing all resources and attention on an annual volunteer recognition event. The program model begins in the month of August as volunteer administrators and Extension 4-H professionals are preparing for the onset of the next program year.

**Table 1.**  
The Volunteer Recognition Program Model & Timeline

Month	Recognition Event	Cost	Activities
<b>August</b>	Schedule and conduct a <i>Volunteer Kickoff Event</i>	\$10.00 / person	Open with a welcome and mixers
			Make introductions
			Share success stories
			Give each volunteer a tote bag or calendar (for club planning purposes)
			Enjoy an ice cream social
<b>September</b>			

	Mail <i>Welcome Notes</i> to volunteers from the Extension professional and/or middle manager	\$1.00 / person	
	Select and recognize a <i>Volunteer of the Month</i> based on members' recommendation		
<b>October</b>	Celebrate National 4-H Week	\$100.00 total	Place an ad in the local newspaper, listing volunteers and thanking them for their service for the year
			Submit weekly feature articles on volunteer impact
			Contact a reporter to emphasize volunteer impact
			Publicize National 4-H Week around the county, recognizing volunteer contributions
			Plan a recognition banquet, luncheon or reception; ask a civic organization to sponsor it
			Select Hall of Fame volunteers on the county level ( <i>criteria and categories at <a href="http://www.kentucky4h.org">www.kentucky4h.org</a></i> )
			Send Hall of Fame winners to state award selection committee as nominees for State Hall of Fame volunteer recognition
	Select and recognize a <i>Volunteer of the Month</i> based on members' recommendation		
<b>November</b>	Recruit local businesses to use their marquees to thank 4-H volunteers in the spirit of Thanksgiving		
	Select and recognize Volunteer of the Month based		

	on members' recommendation		
<b>December/January</b>	Send volunteers a holiday card	\$1.00 / person	
	Select and recognize Volunteer of the Month based on members' recommendation		
	Hold a holiday party meal (potluck) with optional gift exchange or give gifts to your community Angel Tree or local charity		
<b>February</b>	Encourage members to send thank you valentines to volunteers		
	Attend the State Volunteer Forum		
	Select and recognize <i>Volunteer of the Month</i> based on members' recommendation		
<b>March</b>	Mail a thank you note from agent and/or middle manager	\$1.00 / person	
	Select and recognize Volunteer of the Month based on members'		
<b>April/May</b>	Celebrate National Volunteer Month		Submit a news article about the importance and accomplishments of 4-H volunteers in your community
	Plan a community wide volunteer recognition ceremony with Soil Conservation Service and plant a tree in honor of volunteers for Arbor Day (could be funded by Soil Conservation Service)		
	Plant or landscape a place in the community with Master Gardeners in honor of 4-H		

	volunteers		
	Select and recognize <i>Volunteer of the Month</i> based on members' recommendation		
<b>June/July</b>	Plan a pre county fair volunteer meeting to discuss plans and recognize volunteer efforts		
	Plan and coordinate a volunteer appreciation luncheon	\$8.00 / person	Invite volunteers to have lunch with the agent (either catered or at a restaurant)
	Take thank you notes to camp and have campers write thank you notes to their cabin leaders or chaperones		
	Have 4-H members present an appreciation skit at camp		

Additionally, episodic volunteers who serve occasionally or at special events should also be recognized. Recognition should be provided as soon as possible after the service has occurred, in order to be most meaningful and beneficial to the volunteer. A partial listing of special events is found in Table 2.

**Table 2.**  
Recognizing Volunteers at Special Events Throughout the Year

Month	Recognition Event	Cost	Activities
<b>Special Events</b>	Recognize special events volunteers formally, in front of peers, and informally, after the event, by sending a thank you note.	\$1.00 /person /event	Reality Store
			4-H Summer Camp
			Communications Event
			Variety Show
			Fashion Revue
			Day Camps
			Horse Camps
			State Horse Show
			County Fair
			State Fair

			Annual Awards Recognition Banquet & service pins, Hall of Fame, Outstanding Volunteer
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## Implications

1. The recognition program model helps to fulfill the basic human need of recognition and appreciation.
2. The recognition program model helps to build positive self-esteem.
3. The recognition program model should be supported by the volunteers (for members) and by the Extension professional (for volunteers).
4. The recognition program model was developed for recognition to be presented soon after service is performed and in front of clientele, peers, and significant others.
5. The volunteer recognition program model contributes to effective recognition of 4-H volunteers.
6. The recognition program model assists the volunteer administrator with retention of well-rounded volunteers.

## Conclusion

An effective volunteer recognition program is one that fulfills volunteer motives and improves volunteer retention (Campbell, Culp, & Schwartz, 1999). Because volunteers are stimulated to serve under various motivations, the same mode of recognition for all volunteers will not be appropriate in all situations. Volunteer administrators need to discover what types of recognition are best for their program and meet program goals and needs. The recognition program model presented here is only a suggested outline and was developed so that volunteer administrators could provide inexpensive forms of recognition to volunteers through the entire year. Effective volunteer administrators will adapt what works best and fulfills a variety of needs and expectations.

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