



Safe Routes
to School
**National
Partnership**

We Rely on Safe Routes to School Volunteers: Volunteer Appreciation

Volunteers are often crucial to the success and sustainability of a Safe Routes to School program. These people give their time and skills to support students and schools. Given today's hectic schedules and competing demands, finding and retaining volunteers can be challenging. Fortunately, thanked and fulfilled volunteers tend to keep volunteering for programs and causes they believe in! Understanding the importance of volunteer appreciation will lead to success with volunteers and help create robust support for Safe Routes to School.

This resource describes strategies for appreciating volunteers. Examples and templates are included in the appendix.

Types of Recognition

There are many methods and tools for recognizing volunteers. What you choose to do will depend on your local resources and any restrictions your program may have. Find out how your volunteers like to be recognized. Be intentional, and tailor your strategies to make them feel the most appreciated. For example, some people enjoy being recognized publically during events, yet others do not like the spotlight. Recognition type can be further broken down by volunteer contribution. A new volunteer will warrant a different written thank you than a champion volunteer. Volunteer contribution can be measured in time and/or impact.

Verbal

Verbal recognition is quick and effective for thanking volunteers, but we sometimes forget about it. Including a simple “thank you” in initial volunteer meetings, trainings, and wrap-up is easy and free. If a volunteer is interacting with your organization in person, they should be thanked verbally. Make sure organization and community leaders are aware of the volunteers’ efforts so that they can verbally thank them as well. This form of recognition should be included in a volunteer program's protocol and considered a baseline recognition strategy in a volunteer program. Examples include:

- One-time volunteer: Verbal recognition at end of volunteer shift
- Re-occurring volunteer: Verbal recognition at school event where individual spends the most time
- Champion or spotlight volunteer: Verbal recognition at annual volunteer luncheon



Written

Written recognition is another fast, simple, and virtually free form of volunteer appreciation. Written recognition can include informal thank you emails, formal thank you letters, and certificates of appreciation. You can also integrate written recognition into any volunteer correspondence including surveys, instructions, and post-volunteer evaluations. This form of recognition should also be included in a volunteer program's protocol and considered a baseline recognition strategy in a volunteer program. Consider asking organization leaders, school administrators, or elected officials to sign or send the written recognition. A sample thank you letter with tips and a sample volunteer appreciation certificate are provided in the appendix. Examples include:

- One-time volunteer: Letter at end of volunteer shift
- Re-occurring volunteer: Handwritten note at school event where individual spends the most time
- Champion or spotlight volunteer: Note written by executive staff

Public

Public recognition is a method that takes advance planning, and in some instances, additional resources. Recognize volunteers at an event, during a public meeting, in a newsletter, or through social media. An organization can publically thank volunteers verbally or in writing by including names of volunteers in a printed program. Consider asking the school board or city council to recognize your volunteers at their meetings as well. Sample social media messages are provided in the appendix. Examples include:

- Re-occurring volunteer: Highlighted in newsletter
- Champion or spotlight volunteer: Honored at a community event

Gifts

Providing volunteers with a thank you gift is common. Gifts vary and often correlate with the amount of time a volunteer has donated to an agency. Include policies and procedures for recognizing volunteers with gifts in your program. Gifts are not typically provided for one-time volunteers, but rather returning volunteers that have provided service for one or more years. The cost of the gift could range from \$10 to \$100 depending on years of service and your organization's resources. Note: in a survey of Safe Route to School coordinators and volunteers by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, half of respondents felt bought gifts were unimportant for their own volunteer retention. While gifts are nice, they are not necessary. If resources are limited, don't feel like they need to be spent on gifts. You can also look for no-cost gifts. Businesses often donate gift certificates or products for cities, schools, and non-profits to use as thanks yous for volunteers. Look for local donation opportunities in conjunction with national volunteer week in April. Volunteers also appreciate gifts created by students! Consider asking a classroom to make thank you cards or artwork that can be given to volunteers. Examples include:

- Re-occurring volunteer: Thank you cards from students
- Champion or spotlight volunteer: Framed thank you poster from students

Experiences

Volunteers can be thanked for their service by providing an opportunity for a special experience. This method of recognition requires advance planning, and in some instances, additional resources. If your organization has existing opportunities such as a gala or special event, offering this type of recognition could require fewer costs. Experiences are not typically provided for one-time volunteers but rather returning volunteers who have provided service for one or more years. Looking to other community organizations for a donation trade is also common. For example, consider working with a bicycle organization to provide a free tour of the city for your volunteers in exchange for something your organization can provide. Examples include:

- Re-occurring volunteer: Volunteer appreciation lunch
- Champion or spotlight volunteer: Special city tour

Champion of the Month



Walking School Bus Leader Eric Mauldin

[Read more about Eric Mauldin](#)

The February 2018 SR2S Champion of the Month, is Eric Mauldin from Callison Elementary School in Vacaville. He has been a Walking School Bus Leader for the last two school years, walking with students daily after school. Eric along with his wife Cherita, the Callison PTC President, are very engaged in the school.

The Solano County (California) Safe Routes to School program recognizes volunteers through a Champion of the Month feature in their newsletter and on their website.

Other Recognition Ideas

- Interview a volunteer and feature the interview on social media, newsletter, or local paper.
- To recognize a long-term volunteer, have an article or a post framed with a photo and display it in the school or organization office.
- To recognize a long-term volunteer, provide lunch opportunities. Invite school administrators, officials, and executive staff to join the lunch.
- Provide non-disposable nametags for regular volunteers.
- Provide coffee mugs for regular volunteers. Look for items that could be useful during their service.
- Recognize key volunteers in an email from a manager or board member to all staff.
- Have students create a thank you poster or card.





Process for Thanking Volunteers

Develop a plan for volunteer recognition and integrate the process into your volunteer program. A detailed, formal plan is not necessary, but it is a good idea to think about how you are going to recognize your volunteers in advance of their work. Understanding why your volunteers donate their time and skills is important for creating a successful approach to recognition. What motivates them? Not all volunteers give their service for the same reasons. Make sure your current program encourages volunteer retention – volunteer appreciation and engagement overlap and thrive off each other. A sample survey in the appendix includes questions that will help you assess how engaged your volunteers are and how they feel about volunteering. If it is not possible to evaluate each volunteer's motive, create a volunteer recognition plan using several of the methods described above. Your organization or program might already have clear procedures for appreciating volunteers. Be sure to integrate these procedures into your plans.

A chart with the types of recognition and potential strategies corresponding to the length of volunteering or level of engagement is provided in the appendix. Use this chart as a starting place for thinking about and planning your recognition program. Create your own chart so that you can recognize your volunteers consistently.

Conclusion

Volunteers are an integral piece of Safe Routes to School programs. Recognition goes a long way to keeping volunteers coming back. Everyone wants to be recognized and thanked for his or her hard work and time! A volunteer program that prioritizes engagement and recognition will lead to volunteer success.

For more tips and tools for recruiting volunteers and boosting volunteer engagement, see the [Volunteer Toolkit](#).

Volunteer Recognition Chart

Reference the Volunteer Recognition Chart for recognition strategies based on length and impact of volunteer engagement and types of recognition. A champion volunteer is defined by one or more years of impactful service or an ongoing volunteer under one year of service making a similar impact through service.

Length of Time and/or Impact of Volunteer Engagement	Type of Recognition					
		Verbal	Written	Public	Gifts	Experience
	One-time/new volunteer	By volunteer coordinator or staff	Email from volunteer coordinator/staff	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Recurring volunteer	By executive staff, principal, or other organization leader	Thank you letter or handwritten card; volunteer certificate	N/A	N/A	N/A
	1-Year Champion	By executive staff, principal, or other organization leader	Thank you letter or handwritten card; volunteer certificate	Honored at a community event; highlighted in newsletter	Thank you cards from students	Volunteer appreciation lunch
	2-Year Champion	At board meeting	Thank you letter or handwritten card; volunteer certificate	Honored at a community event; highlighted in newsletter	Volunteer business card	Volunteer appreciation lunch; special city tour
	5-Year Champion	At board meeting	Thank you letter or handwritten card; volunteer certificate	Honored at a community event; highlighted in newsletter	Framed thank you poster or artwork from students and staff	Volunteer appreciation lunch; special city tour

Thank You Letter Instructions

A sincere and substantial volunteer thank you letter is important. A generic letter can be a turnoff for volunteers and not provide the intended recognition. A less formal and shorter length handwritten note is appropriate for thanking volunteers. A thank you note often includes a short personal message about the volunteer's role, such as a unique observation or quality.

Header

Agency Contact Information

Date

Insert first name of volunteer,

Body: Consider including specifics on the following:

- What the volunteer did
- When the service was provided
- Number of hours contributed
- The impact this work made
- An anecdote or personal example of how the volunteer contributed or how they went above and beyond
- What is next for the organization/program
- An invitation to return
- An invitation to provide comments on the experience/recommendations
- Your organization's mission

Closing:

Signature

Include Tax ID if appropriate

Sample Post-Volunteer Survey

1. How much of an impact do you feel your service had?
 - A. A lot
 - B. Some
 - C. None
2. Did you feel prepared to do the role asked of you?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Somewhat
3. Did you enjoy your role?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Somewhat
4. Did you feel appreciated for your time and effort?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Somewhat
5. Was this your first time volunteering with this program?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
6. Will you volunteer for this program again?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Maybe
7. Was this your first time volunteering with this school?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
8. Will you volunteer for this school again?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Maybe
9. In a typical month, how many hours do you volunteer for this program?
(Fill in the blank)

Sample Social Media Posts

Using social media platforms to thank volunteers can be effective at virtually no cost. This approach provides public recognition for volunteers and exposure for your organization's volunteer program. Including a volunteer's story or testimonial in a post or tweet can inspire others. Post about one volunteer at a time to show your program's depth and commitment to volunteer recognition. Try to tag volunteers in event photos and other posts if possible; sharing their service with their personal network may increase your volunteer pool. If possible, use first names when thanking volunteers. Make sure your organization has permission to use photos of volunteers and tag them. Including a photo waiver and asking for social media handles on a volunteer form is recommended. Determine which platforms are popular among your volunteers to increase reach.

- We love our volunteers! A big thank you to (insert first names here)!
- Volunteers are the backbone of our work! A big thank you to our dedicated volunteers. Come join our team and make a difference volunteering today.
- Have you recognized your amazing volunteers today? We are thanking ours right now! Thank you (first names)! Your work makes a huge difference.
- A big thank you to (insert first names here)! You make all the difference!
- Thank you volunteers for your time and skills. We know you have so many things you could be doing; we are humbled by your choice to make a difference in our community!



This Certificate of Appreciation

is presented to

Jerome Jones

For volunteering time and effort to the <NAME> Safe Routes to School program.

Signed _____

Date _____