

Ombudsman Volunteer Recognition Planning Idea List

Following is a list of ideas that may be helpful in planning an ombudsman volunteer recognition event. This list created by the Ombudsman Compendium Advisory Committee is intended as a starting point to aid ombudsman volunteer coordinators or others in planning recognition events such as banquets or ceremonies.

Location

- Some low cost (or no cost) places to hold a volunteer recognition include: public libraries, church social halls, county recreation centers, senior centers, apartment or town home community centers, restaurants
- Check with any groups or membership organizations that you are associated with to see if there is any free or low cost meeting space available to members
- Ask volunteers if they have any connections or contacts that might result in a low cost or free meeting space
- Host an event at your own home (space permitting this adds a nice "personal touch")

Resources

- If you have a budget be sure to put aside some funds for a volunteer recognition event
- Consider using some of your recruiting budget to focus on retention of staff through recognition
- Ask for donations of items that can be used as door prizes or other give away items
- Seek sponsorships from community businesses that might be willing to donate food or meeting space (grocery stores, restaurants, retailers, whole salers, etc.)

Think it out before you begin planning:

- Know your volunteer staff well enough to know what type of recognition is meaningful to them.
- Some volunteers do not like a formal recognition, but would like to receive a special training from an expert in the field, or have a party for some special seniors from an nursing home or assisted living facility (allow them to define what "special" means to them. Allow them time to tell of their favorite experiences. Assign one or two volunteers ahead of time to give the sharing time a jump start. Include paid staff with the volunteer staff.
- Encourage them to invite someone as a guest.
- Make it a meaningful event.
- Include volunteers to help you plan the event.

Activities/Programming

- Find a meaningful theme to create the event around
- Have pictures of volunteers involved with residents
- Use a "get to know you" (or "ice-breaker") exercise at the beginning of the event to give volunteers who might not know anyone a chance to meet others
- Have a short speech or presentation recognizing the value of volunteer work
- Provide entertainment by inviting a local singing quartet, a humorous or motivational speaker, or a senior acting group
- Include a ceremony to honor volunteers (hand out certificates or honor volunteers with the most years of service)
- The program for the event can include presenting a few amusing quips or stories from volunteers' experiences
- Be sure to include food!

Types of People to Invite

- Invite the mayor or another public official to present
- Ask someone from the aging network to provide remarks (Area Agency Director, State Ombudsman, or representatives from the American Association for Retired Persons, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, or SeniorCorp)
- Include someone from your Board of Directors or Commission on Aging to provide a special "thank you"
- Check to see if someone from a community volunteer center would come to speak about the value of volunteer contributions
- Always include paid staff. It really means a lot if the paid staff attend, it tells volunteers that they are an important part of the team.

Awards

- Provide longevity awards (certificates, pins, placards, etc.)
- Recognize those who have served 5 years, 10 years, etc.
- Make sure that every volunteer receives something for their service and dedication to the program
- Invite facility staff and/or residents or families to provide complimentary remarks about their ombudsman volunteer(s) and incorporate this feedback into an award (e.g. framed quotation)
- Incorporate humor into award presentations by recognizing unique accomplishments (ex. an award for the person who provides the "most detailed," "most complete" reports or for consistently submitting reports on time)
- Give gag gifts for special accomplishments, for example:
 "We appreciate Maggie's 'stick-to-itiveness' and dedication to the residents in the face of significant staff turnover during her tenure at [Nursing Home X]. We honor you with this glue stick, Maggie – a symbol of how you have been sticking it out all these years and for persevering through some sticky situation!"

"Give-Away" Items

- Use door prizes and/or raffles to provide additional prizes or "give-aways"
- Contact your community volunteer center to see if they provide items for volunteers such as lapel pins
- Give away table decorations such as centerpieces as door prizes
- Find out if volunteers would rather provide something special to a particular facility, etc., create a reading library for a facility, create a movie library for a facility, help facilities recruit volunteers to assure residents have more contact from the community