

# THE SAFE STEP

Your connection to protecting those who improve your community



## RECOGNITION AND REWARDS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Welcoming back former volunteers is often called "boomerang volunteers" it can be a strategic advantage for nonprofit organizations. These individuals bring familiarity, renewed enthusiasm and often, new skills. However, their return should be managed with care to ensure alignment with current practices and safety standards.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR INCLUSIVE RECOGNITION

#### 1. Safe Recognition Practices

- **Non-Cash Gifts Under \$100:**

Non-cash items such as mugs, t-shirts, certificates or event tickets may qualify as de minimis fringe benefits, which are generally excluded from taxable income.

*Avoid cash or cash-equivalent gifts (e.g., gift cards), as these are considered taxable compensation.*

The IRS emphasizes that de minimis benefits must be occasional and minimal in value, typically under \$100.

- **Public Recognition:**

Celebrate volunteers through:

- Newsletters
- Social media spotlights
- Award ceremonies
- Team meetings

*Public praise boosts morale and reinforces a culture of appreciation.*

- **Reimbursement for Legitimate Expenses:**

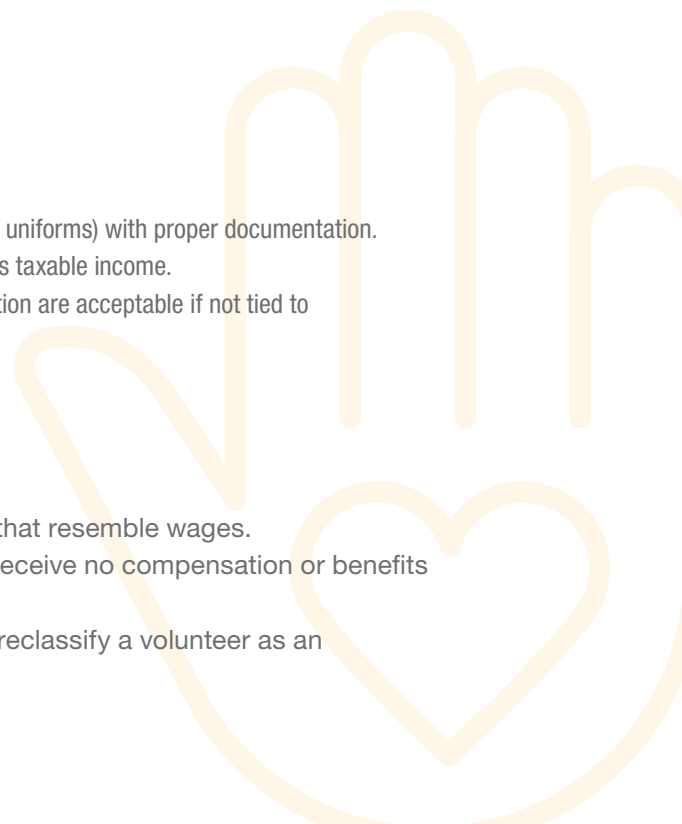
- Volunteers may be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses (e.g., travel, uniforms) with proper documentation.
- Reimbursements must follow IRS guidelines to avoid being classified as taxable income.
- Nominal stipends or reimbursements for training, meals, or transportation are acceptable if not tied to productivity.

#### 2. Legal Considerations

- **Maintaining Volunteer Status:**

To preserve a volunteer's legal status:

- Volunteers must not receive compensation or benefits that resemble wages.
- The Volunteer Protection Act protects individuals who receive no compensation or benefits exceeding \$500 annually.
- Payments based on hours worked or productivity may reclassify a volunteer as an employee under FLSA regulations.



### 3. Risk Management Tips

- Clearly document volunteer roles and agreements.
- Avoid offering benefits that vary based on time spent volunteering.
- Train supervisors on legal boundaries of volunteer engagement.

## ENHANCING VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

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### Boomerang Volunteers

Encourage returning volunteers to:

- Share their stories
- Mentor new recruits
- Join alumni networks and events
- Recognize their evolving skills and match them to appropriate roles

### Strategic Engagement Tactics

According to VolunteerHub, nonprofits can retain volunteers by:

- Setting SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound)
- Offering personalized training
- Building human connections and respecting volunteers' time
- Using social media for storytelling and recognition
- Hosting volunteer appreciation events

## INCLUSIVE RECOGNITION IDEAS

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- Spotlight volunteers from diverse backgrounds and roles in newsletters and social media.
- Offer recognition in multiple formats (written, verbal, visual, translated).
- Ensure events and awards are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Provide opportunities for volunteers to give feedback on recognition practices.
- Celebrate milestones for all volunteers, not just those with the most hours or highest visibility.

## CONCLUSION

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Volunteer recognition is a powerful tool for nonprofit sustainability. By balancing appreciation with legal compliance and inclusive practices, organizations can foster a thriving volunteer culture that supports their mission long-term.

## RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

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- [Volunteer Management: Legal Considerations for Non-Profit Organizations](#)
- [IRS: De Minimis Fringe Benefits](#)
- [Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 - Congress.gov](#)
- [FLSA Volunteer Guidelines - eCFR](#)
- [VolunteerHub: 8 Strategic Ways to Retain Volunteers](#)