
Title: Creating an Organizational Culture of Volunteer Celebration

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Summary: Extension Volunteer Specialists collaborated to create an organizational culture of volunteer celebration! Beginning with personnel trainings on volunteer recognition and appreciation practices, they worked to develop promotional materials for localized use during National Volunteer Appreciation Week (NVAW).

Situation: Volunteer engagement is mission-centric for UGA Extension. Annually, nearly 8,000 adult and teen volunteers support 4-H/Youth Development, nearly 3,000 Extension Master Gardener (EMG) volunteers support Agricultural and Natural Resources (ANR), and more than 2,000 additional volunteers support Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) and other programs, such as Master Naturalists (Hobbs & Dorn, 2020). Best practices for volunteer management include recognition and appreciation of volunteer contributions through both formal and informal methods. Nonprofit best practices include volunteer recognition and appreciation to help accomplish organizational goals (Chapman & White, 2012).

Response: To create an organizational culture of volunteer celebration, 4-H and EMG volunteer specialists teamed up to offer statewide appreciation campaigns along with training and standardized resources focused on best practices for volunteer recognition and appreciation. Since 2017, UGA Extension personnel have had the opportunity to participate in a training webinar --“Celebrating Extension Volunteerism During National Volunteer Appreciation Week” -- or attend sessions at the annual UGA Extension Biennial Conference.

Extension personnel were annually provided with digital resources through the assembled “Building an Organizational Culture of Volunteer Celebration Promotional Package.” The package developed by the specialists included examples of a scholarly poster, two promotional plans for 4-H and Master Gardener program areas, promotional graphics, videos, press release, two webpages, a Qualtrics link for nominating volunteers for statewide recognition, and an employee-only intranet site for staff across program areas to utilize the materials. The target audience of this package was 4-H youth development professionals and EMG Coordinators for use with celebrating and recognizing local volunteers. These materials could also be utilized across program areas to celebrate Extension Volunteers during National Volunteer Week. The resources were developed to provide statewide consistency in messaging with volunteer appreciation and recognition across Extension, while also celebrating the thousands of volunteers that support UGA Extension.

To gauge effectiveness and understand how to build future tools to support local Extension personnel with volunteer celebrations, a Qualtrics survey was distributed via email to all Extension professionals via a personnel listserv in May of 2020. Personnel were asked about ways they celebrated volunteers during National Volunteer Appreciation Week and their use of the provided tools, to help specialist gauge the use and need for resources. The survey included 10 close-ended questions and one open-ended question.

Results/Impacts: The statewide appreciation campaign held during NVAW from April 18-24, 2021 reached nearly 3,500 contacts through the Georgia 4-H Volunteer Facebook group and more than 5,600 contacts through the Georgia Master Gardener Facebook page.

Collectively across program areas, 62 UGA Extension personnel have been instructed about volunteer celebration importance through participation in the Extension in-service training. In addition, the poster “Building an Organizational Culture of Volunteer Celebration” was shared at the Extension Biennial Conference in 2020 for all Extension professionals and again at the National Extension Conference on Volunteerism for volunteer-development professionals across the country. The poster “Extension Personnel Perspectives Toward an Organizational Culture of Volunteer Celebration” was shared with Extension professionals across the nation at the national Epsilon Sigma Phi conference. Both posters received recognitions: the former was awarded first place for Specialist posters at the UGA Biennial Conference and the latter was honored among the top ten posters at the national Epsilon Sigma Phi conference.

A voluntary sample of 51 UGA Extension professionals completed a post-survey in 2020 of their experience with the resources, including 40 personnel representing 4-H Youth Development, 10 ANR personnel, and one FCS professional:

- 51% of respondents collaborated with coworkers across program areas for the celebration.
- 81% of respondents strongly or somewhat intended to appreciate volunteers at another time.
- 75% of respondents strongly or somewhat intended to host a volunteer appreciation event in 2021.
- 85% of respondents indicated that they used the provided resources. Respondents who used the resources rated them very useful ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.83$).

Extension personnel also expressed through the survey, through a 10-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree and 10 = completely agree):

- It is important to celebrate volunteers ($M = 9.8$, $SD = 0.53$).
- Volunteers in my community saw my efforts ($M = 8.6$, $SD = 1.9$).
- Others in my community saw my virtual celebrations ($M = 7.8$, $SD = 2.0$).
- Volunteer appreciation week was worth investing my time ($M = 9.2$, $SD = 1.4$).
- Volunteers in my community seemed to appreciate my efforts ($M = 8.3$, $SD = 1.8$).
- Planning volunteer appreciation events was worth my effort ($M = 9.1$, $SD = 1.5$).
- It was a great week celebrating volunteers ($M = 8.5$, $SD = 1.7$).
- I am glad that I made the effort to celebrate volunteers ($M = 9.4$, $SD = 1.1$).

As a result of the study, specialists learned that personnel have a high value for volunteer recognition and volunteers seem to appreciate the efforts. Providing tools and resources helps support personnel in volunteer recognition and celebration; so, specialists will continue to invest time in this endeavor as well. Volunteer celebrations offer a fun way for personnel to collaborate across program areas.



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The University of Georgia 4-H program is the largest youth leadership organization in the state.

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