WORLD SCOUTING

Value volunteering: building our culture of recognition in Scouting

World Scout Bureau

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A culture of recognition

Do you lead other adults in Scouting? Then you are already running a recognition system. A culture of recognition is made of every welcome, every thank you, every time you ask for input, every moment of trust you offer.

Medals and awards are one form of recognition. **But long before any ceremony, volunteers stay because they feel they belong and that their contribution matters. Volunteers who feel valued continue showing up and making a difference in the lives of young people. This makes recognition much more than a process or system, but a culture that every person in a position of leadership in Scouting drives, and a key strategy to ensure NSOs have enough volunteers to continue delivering the mission.**

Use this resource to explore ideas on how to build a culture of recognition in Scouting adapted to new ways of volunteering. Use it on your own or share it with your team to open the conversation.

Case study: Look for the lightbulb symbol for case studies to inspire you.

Try it: Look for the gear symbol for concrete ways to operationalise the ideas in your Scouting team or NSO.

Volunteering is evolving: recognition and leadership must follow

In a volunteer-driven organisation, valuing volunteering means making people feel how important they truly are every time they contribute, because our mission only succeeds if volunteers choose to keep showing up. NSOs have been highlighting how retention and recruitment are limiting their growth, explaining why "value volunteering" became a strategic priority for World Scouting in 2024. In parallel, expectations by volunteers around what form volunteering should take are evolving, affecting the entire adult management systems of NSOs, especially recognition. **What do volunteers today expect from their experience in terms of recognition?**

World Scouting's 2026 **Flexible Volunteering Guide** and its complementary **Volunteering Motivations and Barriers Report** highlight that while volunteers still desire to contribute, the forms, expectations, and conditions under which people are willing to engage have changed substantially. The main motivation is still value-based: volunteers want to help others, serve the community, and contribute to social change. However, volunteer motivations are increasingly multidimensional.

> *"Contemporary volunteering is increasingly understood as reciprocal. People want to contribute, but they also want to know that their contribution matters, that it develops something in them, that it fits within their life and that it is recognised appropriately."* (*Volunteering Motivations and Barriers Report)*

Reciprocity is particularly important to attract and retain younger generations. They expect to see value and care for their wellbeing from day 1, not because they are less altruistic, but because they live in a world of uncertainty. They are highly digitally connected to the world's pressing problems and want to see immediate impact; on themselves and the issues they care about. Faced with this uncertainty and mistrust of the systems shaping their lives, many young people face anxiety about their futures, especially employability. This creates pressure to prioritise the present and seek quicker validation rather than wait on promises of future impact or future awards.

> *"Today, volunteers often expect participation to be meaningful not only for the cause, but also for their own growth, connection, recognition and well-being. This is especially evident among younger generations, who often interpret volunteering through the combined lenses of purpose, identity, skill development and future opportunity. (...) (They) are often drawn to visible impact, social transformation and mission clarity rather than to abstract loyalty to an institution." (Volunteering Motivations and Barriers Report)*

Before any ceremony, what these volunteers look for is **consistent cues of belonging and impact**: thoughtful leadership that can connect their contributions to the larger issues they care about, and recognition that their identity and values have a place in the Scout Movement and are strengthened through it.

Another growing motivation for volunteering highlighted in the reports is **employability**, especially for people starting or shifting careers. Improved recognition therefore also includes formal and informal ways to communicate and transfer what is gained in Scouting to the outside world, whether through skills certifications, networks, access to employment opportunities, or visible CV (curriculum vitae) additions.

As more roles and processes become digital, volunteering becomes easier to access but also feel less personal. Building back from the COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted many awards and recognition systems, recognition for *digital* volunteers must therefore be included in our systems. This implies giving them opportunities to feel belonging to the community and helping them see the impact of their work, even when not in person.

Read World Scouting's 2026 Flexible Volunteering Guide and its complementary Volunteering Motivations and Barriers Report.

Valuing all ways of volunteering

The **Flexible Volunteering Guide** presents different *ways* of volunteering today that are not just based on the traditional model of a role. Below, you will meet some fictional volunteer personas who volunteer in different ways and what they want as recognition.

Do you recognise any of these profiles in your team?

Who am I?		What do I want as recognition?
	**I'm 16 years old and I'm in my first year leading Cubs as part of the young leader's scheme.**	I feel appreciated when I get to spend time with my friends. I also really like getting coached by my group leader when I'm unsure about how I did in the meeting. I'm happy I can have my volunteering count towards school volunteer hours.
	**I'm a parent of a child in the Cub section, and since I'm a professional accountant, I'm in charge of the unit's accounting this year.**	I see the impact Scouting has on my child and want to make sure they can continue. The best recognition is seeing the smile on my child's face and the whole unit functioning smoothly.
	**I've been a Scout leader for 25 years, growing our group fivefold. I'll be leading our biggest contingent yet to the next Jamboree.**	I've dedicated a big part of my life to the Scout Movement, and it would be an honour to receive a top award for my impact.
	**I'm a Rover studying project management and I'm coordinating the Rover moot this year.**	I'm learning so much on managing big projects, and I can add it to my CV! I would love a recommendation letter for work, and I am hoping this can open doors for new leadership roles in the NSO or at international level.
	**I'm a retired Scout group leader and had a meeting with the new group leader to help solve a safeguarding problem they were having.**	I'm retired, and I want to stay active and feel useful in my community. I feel recognised when I see I'm leaving a lasting legacy, so I love when I get the chute to transfer my experience and mentor others with what I've learned.
	**I'm part of the national diversity and inclusion committee. We meet online every two months and develop resources for adult volunteers.**	I want to see more inclusive practices. I'd love my competencies recognised, but what I really want is to meet other people that care about this topic as much as me. It's sometimes lonely working behind my computer, so I'd love to meet in person and exchange with others in conferences on the topic.

	**I'm a professional interpreter and I did interpretation at a regional event as a pro-bono contribution.**	My company gives us hours for volunteering, and I chose Scouts since I could apply my skills directly instead of doing an unrelated task. I don't expect much in return for my time or to be singled out, but I'll be happy if something unexpected comes my way.
	**I'm a teacher and lead Scouts on Fridays.**	I want a formal recognition system that tracks my hours and training and counts it as credits towards my work and possible promotion. I love certificates I can share online when I finish a new training since I feel proud of my accomplishment.

(Note: these profiles are an amalgamation of different stories from the NSO case study interviews, but do not represent real people.)

Try it: In your next discussion with them, ask them: *what do YOU like as recognition?* Write it down in your notes or make a recognition board so all your team can see what others enjoy as recognition.

The role of leadership

All these volunteers are important, but if recognition is reserved only for those who accomplish an exceptional project or leadership feat, it will miss most of the people who keep Scouting alive. Therefore, those best placed to tailor recognition are the individuals in those teams, leading the volunteers who are being recognised.

The key to a culture of recognition in the Scout Movement lies in thoughtful local leadership. If you are a leader of volunteers, you see all the contributions: the highly visible ones, and the ones nobody sees. You see the volunteers whose work goes unrecognised, and who will not qualify for a formal award anytime soon. Just like being a role model for young people, what you say and do continuously signals to your volunteer team what matters; this is building culture.

You make one of the biggest differences in whether a volunteer stays or leaves, because more than anything else, you are creating a genuine human relationship. You are getting to know what matters to them and what makes them feel valued. This might be nominating them for an award, helping them see the impact they had on youth, making space for their mental health, coaching them through a problem, giving them an opportunity to mentor others, etc. This also takes the form of investing in their development as leaders (e.g. group financial support for a Wood Badge training, participation in events, etc.) which tells them you value what they bring.

If you are a **leader of leaders**, you are also key to building that culture. This is not only by modelling recognition for your leaders, but also by choosing them wisely, training them, and giving them the tools they need to set that culture in their leadership.

Inversely, if you are **a member in a team**, you are also a culture builder. In a volunteer-led movement, recognition is not uni-directional: showing appreciation to your leader and to the other members of your team also builds that trust and belonging.

So how can you create value today for all these profiles of volunteers? The next section breaks down ideas for you to explore and adapt.

Ideas to build a culture of recognition

Recognition is used in the Adults in Scouting Policy to include all we do to show gratitude for our volunteers. It includes formal NSO awards systems just as much as informal thanks. In the adult lifecycle, it is embedded across the "performance" and "decisions for the future" stages. The policy reminds NSOs:

> "*We must communicate on a regular basis to our volunteers and professionals, our permanent attitude of genuine gratitude for a task well done. Recognition of members should be fair, significant and motivating to adults in the organisation and should serve to send a message to society about our values and the commitment shared amongst ourselves.*" (World Scouting, 2018)

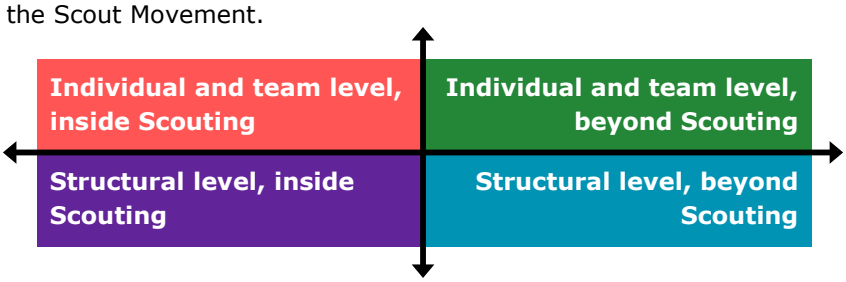
In the below graph, you can explore the spectrum of ideas between a "thank you" and your NSO's top awards. You will find ideas categorised in four quadrants.

Individual and team level (top) focuses on noticing the unique contribution of a person or team, and is *accessible to everyone, especially people in leadership positions*.

Structural level (bottom) focuses on building fair systems and processes that make volunteer recognition consistent and accessible, and is *mostly coordinated by regional or national teams*.

Inside Scouting (left) means using the Scout Movement's own systems to support appreciation and growth.

Beyond Scouting (right) means making the impact of volunteering in Scouting visible and valued outside the Scout Movement.



Try it: Different cultures of regions, countries, or teams can influence what works best with your volunteers. While reading, reflect on what works well, what is already being done, and what should be done more.

Next to each idea, take notes with symbols:

- **A heart: This works well with the volunteers in my team**
- **A checkmark: We already do this well**
- **A star: We should do more of this**

After reading, refer to your list. Focus on the three practices that you think will have the most impact in your context and plan the next time you will try them.

Do you believe you already do this well and want to go further? Document the when, where, who, and how you do these ideas with your team, and coach them on building this practice into their own leadership.

Individual and team level, inside Scouting

Giving continuous cues of appreciation and belonging

Appreciation is not a one-off action: it means continuously **observing** and being grateful for what volunteers do. Cues of appreciation and belonging focus less on the results achieved, and more on showing them they are seen for who they are, how they display the values of the Scout Movement, and what they contribute to the bigger mission. **Symbols** are also great cues of belonging that already exist in Scouts: scarves, uniforms, clothing, pins, or badges with their name and role, etc.

- **When saying "thank you", tell the person exactly what you are thankful for: the what (the observation), the why (why it shows the values of the Scout Movement), and the impact (how their contribution links to the bigger change they are creating).** *"Thank you for staying late today, I saw the look of relief and safety on that parent's face after talking through the upcoming camp with you." "When that conflict broke out between the patrol leaders, you really stepped up. You were fair and really got them to focus on respect. Great job." "Building these benches means that thousands of young people will get to experience the magic of campfire connections for the first time thanks to you."*
- **Check in on their wellbeing, inside and outside Scouting, with open questions.** *"That was a tough meeting today, and I know you're still recuperating from your exam period. How did it go for you? I'm interested in hearing what's on your mind."*
- **Celebrate the team wins, and their unique contribution that made the team succeed.** *"That was one of the smoothest fundraising campaigns I've seen thanks to the admin team. And that team couldn't have run as smoothly without your accounting skills."*
- **Personalise important moments in their journey, including beginnings and ends (moment of receiving their scarf or uniform, completion of an important step of training, transition to a new role, retirement, etc.).** *"Let me tell you a story of how this volunteer has grown in the past months…"*

Case study: *At **Kandersteg International Scout Centre**, recognition is built into the volunteer journey by focusing on belonging and community from day one. In their first 15 days, new volunteers will get a full integration, including being picked up at the train station, training, a village tour, and meet up with local merchants, and a personalised graduation event when they become "Pinkies".*

Every morning, the whole team meets, and before any business is discussed, a "thought for the day" is shared by a volunteer (a story, a book passage, energisers, games etc.) that brings humanity into the room and a reminder of the reasons they are at KISC for.

In appraisals whether on their first week, during their season, and at the end of their journey, they are recognised less on tasks completed but more on how they display the values of the Centre, and how their team succeeds at delivering the mission. It links their values to why they are there, reinforcing that feeling of belonging.

Taking pauses to reflect and appreciate

We use *plan - do - **review*** with youth, but sometimes not enough with adults. Plan longer moments to talk, either during appraisals, or in informal events like sharing a meal, and reflect together on what should be celebrated and learned.

- **Ask what they need.** *"What do YOU like as recognition? What type of recognition makes you feel like staying?"*
- **Use reflective recognition** (Littlefield, 2022): this can unveil invisible work that is actually most important to them. *"What are you proud of in the last weeks, and why?"*
- **Show them their impact on those they care about, in numbers or stories.** *"In the last weeks, the report on volunteering you produced was consulted 500 times, and we got great feedback on how useful it was."*
- **Highlight their growth.** *"After you did the listening ear training, I've seen you become the go-to person of trust for our volunteers to talk to."*
- **Check in on any adjustments they need for their wellbeing.** *"You've been carrying a lot lately. How are you feeling, and is there anything you need off your plate?"*
- **Invite Feedback**. Inviting feedback tells a volunteer that you value their contributions and are open to listening when they have something to share. *"How do you feel the team/project/camp is going? What could we improve?"*

Making invisible work visible

Some volunteers are working behind the scenes to make the Scout Movement run: they are rarely seen, and they themselves do not get to directly see the impact on youth, or the recognition on their faces. This applies to **digital volunteers**, **administrative volunteers**, and **many volunteers completing micro-tasks or helping out informally**. Recognition can be making their work visible:

- **Use gatherings**, like Scout meetings, board meetings, events, camps, etc. to name them, their contributions, and their successes.
- **Invite them to a meeting, camp, or event** where they can network, connect, and see the impact of their work.
- Use **internal media to feature contributions**, like monthly highlights in emails to parents, posts on social media, etc.

***Case study:** The **Arab Scout region** made a post on social media after recruiting over 140 volunteers for the new operational framework showing every volunteer that joined the team for the triennium. Volunteers started sharing their picture on their own media to show they were part of the team. The region brought all digital volunteers to an induction to make them feel part of the team.*

Offering mentorship and continuous support

Recognition is also showing volunteers we care that they succeed, especially at the beginning of a role when it is the hardest. This is a great occasion to engage alumni and older adults who can be a valuable source of mentoring, institutional memory, and strategic support.

Connect the new volunteer with a mentor (or "buddy-buddy") in their first weeks.

> 💡 ***Case study: Kids Help Phone Canada*** *assigns professional mentors to each of their new volunteer crisis responders. Newbies get a little sign on their name so other volunteers can welcome them and offer support if needed. Especially during and after difficult conversations, mentors check in continuously with responders on how they feel and offer support. Additionally, if texters left a positive review on the counsellor after a chat, volunteers receive on the platform a compilation of the compliments they received.*

Opening doors to new opportunities (e.g. events, training, letters of recommendation, networking, etc.)

Recognition can also come from giving volunteers access to personal development opportunities:

- Sharing opportunities with them, like an **interesting training**, a **paid or unpaid role in Scouting** that matches their skills and interests, an **occasion to represent Scouting internationally or externally**, etc., and recommending their name.
- Writing them a **letter of recommendation** (for a job, a scholarship, etc.) with the projects they did and skills they demonstrate or acting as their reference.
- Building their **network** by helping them meet people in teams or projects they would be a good match for.

Nominating volunteers for formal awards

Formal awards often exist at every level of Scouting, whether it is at group, district, national, regional, or international level, but they are sometimes under-used because volunteers do not know they exist. Experience at one level of Scouting can also be lost at another (e.g. a volunteer in an international team never having their experience recognised at national level).

Research the award systems at your level and nominate volunteers from your team. If you are leading a national team, look at regional and global awards. If you are leading a global team, look at their respective national awards.

Multiplying recognition with other team members, parents, youth, and more

Recognition is not uni-directional. It works best when it comes from all directions.

- In meetings, ask volunteers to **give shout outs to other volunteers** who did something great.
- **Ask youth to make cards or gifts** for all the volunteers; their leaders and the ones working behind-the-scenes.
- **Ask parents to write short stories of the impact the Scout Movement has had on their youth** and share it with all volunteers. You can also **ask alumni youth** (those who left the Scout Movement) to write these stories.

Individual and team level, beyond Scouting

Involving the communities that matter to the volunteer (family, school, elders, workplace, religious or community groups, etc.)

If recognition comes from someone you love, admire, or are deeply connected to, the impact can be multiplied exponentially.

Ask the volunteers in your team who are important to them, and who they wish they could be seen by. With their consent, contact them; invite them to events where the volunteer will be recognised, or to see them in action, or to record a short video thanking them for their work.

Using local media to highlight volunteer contribution

Identify one local newspaper, community radio station, or Facebook community group that covers local stories. With the volunteer's consent, draft a short paragraph describing their contribution and send it to the media outlet with a picture.

Celebrating and respecting people's life outside of Scouting

Volunteering is only one part of someone's life, so you can show appreciation for them as a person by engaging with who they are outside of that role. This also implies respecting their time outside Scouting when they do not want to be contacted or involved.

At the start of the year, note in a shared calendar important milestones, like birthdays, weddings, etc. If a team member experiences a notable life event (a loss of a family member, a surgery, a graduation or promotion, etc.), reach out to share that you are thinking of them.

Thanking informal volunteers

Not all volunteers are involved formally in the organisation. A person might volunteer to clean the camping tents once a year, a parent might coordinate the carpooling each week, a community member might help during a natural disaster alongside Scouts.

Encourage everyone to spot these volunteers and say thank you.

Nominating volunteers for local, regional, and national awards outside Scouting

Even if your group does not have a formal award system, maybe your community does. Recommend volunteers in your team for these awards.

Structural level, inside Scouting

Continuously investing in your NSO Adult Management Systems

The best recognition system may not be your awards programme: it may be a smooth-running and updated **Adult Management System**. Symbolic appreciation (like awards and gifts) remains important, but not sufficient if the management system takes volunteers for granted and does not offer them the support, wellbeing, and flexibility they need. Operationally, this can look like:

- Investing in **professionals and specialists (staff or volunteers) in volunteer management** (e.g. hiring experts, contracting consultants, training and coaching to develop internal expertise, etc.).
- Prioritising volunteer experience in **resource allocation** (people and budget).
- Optimising volunteer procedures (e.g. registration, camp authorisations, etc.) to reduce the bureaucratic burden put on volunteers to a minimum.
- Updating your **Adults in Scouting policies and training.**
- **Measuring volunteering** (e.g. cost-benefit analyses, exit interviews, surveys, impact assessments, etc.) and **using the data to drive decisions.**

Try it: Ready to start the conversation around internal structures? Refer to Recognition Is More Than a Medal by Jorge Luis Salas Cuzquen. Refer to the Adults in Scouting service in the Treehouse for ideas and support to improve your system.

Ask yourself these questions before you start:

- Do you know your current retention statistics? How long, and why, do volunteers stay? When, and why, do volunteers leave?
- Where does improving recognition fall in your current priorities?

Case study: *The* ***Asociación de Scouts de México's*** *work on recognition fits into a broader evidence-based review of its Adult Management System and policy. While the association has an extensive system and tradition of formal awards and medals, it increasingly focuses on a culture of continuous recognition and symbols of belonging (team t-shirts, badges, etc.) in its approach to Adults in Scouting, which resonates strongest with their younger volunteers.*

They also decreased their adult lifecycle duration to three years to respond to the growing need of volunteers to change roles. At the end of the cycle, adults receive a recognition based on their personal assessment of their work.

Research done by volunteer teams with their Rover network revealed that administrative burden and burnout were driving young people towards simpler volunteer opportunities in other organisations, leading the organisation to focus on making their procedures easier.

Finally, to improve the training experience, they have now made all their training modules available in their learning management system. Any completed module is updated directly into the volunteer's profile in their membership management platform, and they can download a virtual certification, and a virtual badge that they can share on social media platforms like LinkedIn.

Offering a fair, transparent, and accessible formal awards system

The Adults in Scouting policy states "a formal system of recognition (e.g. awards system) of all adults in an NSO should be documented, openly disseminated and reviewed periodically to ensure adequacy, appropriateness and usefulness." Many existing formal awards systems are inherited from traditional institutions, like the military or formal education, often bringing rigid hierarchy and sequencing with them. If volunteers feel that the system is outdated, unfair, or only reserved to a "select club," many will not use it, and it will miss many volunteers who deserve celebration and for whom recognition might be the key to retention.

Based on the recent changes made by NSOs who renewed their formal awards system, some new practices for formal award systems adapted to new ways of volunteering to consider are:

- Ensuring **awards guidelines are published and easily accessible**, with clear, written criteria for each award on who is eligible, what is being recognised, how to apply or how someone is nominated, and how the decision will be made.
- **Removing barriers to entry** like:
    - Minimum number of years volunteered. Reviewed systems continue to recognise exceptional long-term contributions, while also offering awards for impact, including short-term projects and contributions by young and/or new volunteers.
    - Hierarchical ladders of awards that require volunteers to receive a local or regional award before receiving a national one. Reviewed systems recognise that volunteers might only volunteer at one secondary level, without passing through the others, and should not be excluded for not passing by each level.
    - Nominations that can only be done by one person. Reviewed systems allow a variety of members to nominate, which helps make invisible work visible and avoid possible bottlenecks if only one person is charged with nominations.
- **Building local, regional, and national awards and recognition teams as part of the broader Adults in Scouting team**. This implies involving dedicated people (volunteers and staff) that are representative of the diversity of the Scout Movement (ages, gender, background, etc.) and are responsible for running the system at each level, including reviewing nominations and promoting a culture of recognition.
- Implementing **awards that go beyond the individual**:
    - For **short-term and long-term project teams** that realised something big.
    - For **Scout groups** for growth, years in service, great projects, intergenerational collaboration, etc.
    - For **institutions outside Scouting** that have helped operationally or financially.
- Starting **recognition of years of service in Scouting from the first year on.**
- **Reviewing award names, symbols and imagery, and ceremony formats** to ensure they are culturally relevant, inclusive and recognise the diversity of members that compose the organisation.
- **Diversifying award formats** beyond medals: certificates, special edition scarves, prizes, event participations, art pieces, etc.

💡 ***Case study: Escoteiros do Brasil*** *are continuously improving their approach to recognition to respond to changing volunteer expectations. They see recognition as an ongoing practice that allows volunteers to feel part of something bigger and aligned with the organisation's purpose. They structure recognition across four distinct dimensions: relational, operational, formative, and symbolic. Formal awards ("symbolic") are only one piece of a much larger system. The formal system has various levels of recognition, ranging from the local unit level to national-level awards.*

Their national board sets the criteria, but the operations are handled by the level concerned, which may or may not require authorisation from hierarchical levels above. This formal structure is documented in the openly available Recognition and Decorations Manual, most recently updated in March 2026.

They are also focusing on external recognition. When public communications spotlight the impact of Scouting and its volunteers, individuals also get recognised externally as people making a real social contribution. This not only adds value to the brand but also serves as a major draw for recruitment.

Investing in digital membership tracking systems

When no record system exists to track experience, volunteers can go unrecognised for many reasons: their contributions are not visible enough to be caught on by someone who knows about awards, they are unmotivated to build up a whole case in order to prove why they deserve an award, they leave Scouting before a recognition can be given to them, etc.

A **membership information/record system for volunteers** can help with many aspects of volunteer management, and more notably recognition by tracking: years of services, completed training, active and past roles, past awards, realised projects, etc. Digital tools are most useful here: a digital system allows volunteers to update their own profile, keep their information when changing district or roles, notify leaders and the team responsible for awards when a volunteer deserves one, etc.

Try it: What can an NSO do if they have no membership tracking system, and implementing one is beyond their capacity or resources? An alternative used by many NSOs is a generalised use of paper and virtual certificates. For every training, project, or role, volunteers receive a certificate stating what they accomplished. This allows volunteers to compile their own portfolio of achievements.

Making recognition part of the training, tools, and expectations you set for leaders

Thoughtful leadership, from the local leader to the head of the organisation, is key in building a culture of recognition. As recognised in World Scouting's competency framework, leadership in Scouting is more and more about recognising how to take a holistic approach to adult development to serve and guide those you lead. Some leaders do not recognise others because they feel insecure in doing so: because they do not know how, or afraid they might do it wrong. By making recognition part of the training, tools, and expectations you set for leaders, NSOs can help all their leaders feel comfortable with doing so, and continuously remind them of the importance of recognition.

Case study: *The* ***Scout Association (UK)*** *has a central Awards and recognition page on their website with all their resources, awards, and ideas on how you can recognise youth and volunteers. Within their training and hub of Tools to Support Leadership Teams, they include how to celebrate success and how to thank volunteers.*

Recognising competencies, skills, and training in Scouting

Many volunteers feel valued when their competencies and skills developed within or outside of Scouting are recognised, and that they can be awarded for what they know, and easily access training or support for what they do not. The Wood Badge Framework based on a competencies approach allows adults to grow within their own path and still be recognised for it: it associates the recognition (e.g. different levels of Wood Badge beads) with clearly demonstrated competencies within a role, not to a number of modules or training hours. It can be adapted to national contexts and structures.

Case study: *The* ***World Scout Bureau African Support Centre****, in collaboration with the global support centre, developed the Implementation Guidelines for the Wood Badge Framework in the Africa Scout Region, a practical tool for NSOs to strengthen their adult development systems through the Wood Badge Framework. These guidelines offer a number of case studies of volunteers whose experience and contributions end up being excluded from recognition and learning through the traditional model of Wood Badge beads, since they are not trainers. It suggests concrete ways to adapt an NSO training system based on Wood Badge competencies to recognise adults who have developed and demonstrate competencies relevant to their roles.*

Involving volunteers in decision-making

Volunteers increasingly want to be active participants in decisions. Recognising the experience and expertise that volunteers have, and truly engaging them in the decisions that affect them is one of the most impactful forms of recognition. (Bénard, 2026) Democratic participation can be done at every level: from asking a new young volunteer what role they want to do (and not imposing one on them), to asking your group team for their opinions on current challenges and sharing ideas on how to solve them, to involving volunteers in co-creating the updates to the Youth Programme, or writing the new Strategy. **Asking volunteers to participate also implies accountability**; if you ask their opinions and do not act, it has the opposite effect, telling volunteers they do not matter.

Covering volunteer costs

Covering volunteer expenses, such as transportation, uniforms, materials, and participation fees, shows volunteers that the organisation financially values their contribution. This is usually significantly less than what an organisation would have to pay for staffing these roles and recognises the sacrifices that volunteers might be making to be able to contribute to the Scout Movement. This also allows NSOs to be more inclusive by overcoming some financial barriers to volunteering, which tend to affect young volunteers and those from disadvantaged communities most. Enabling these volunteers to participate might in itself be the most impactful form of recognition.

Structural level, beyond Scouting

Increasing the public legitimacy of volunteering

Recognition is also about making volunteering considered by public authorities, educational institutions, employers, and the general public as a serious and necessary social practice that produces civic value. This applies not only to volunteering in Scouting, but to volunteering in general. For volunteers themselves, that broader legitimacy makes them feel seen and socially valued. For organisations, it increases their capacity to secure funding, build partnerships, and attract more volunteers.

Targeted marketing can be used by NSOs to increase the public opinion on volunteering in Scouting. In contrast, when it comes to the perception of volunteering in society more broadly, Scouting cannot build this legitimacy alone. NSOs must engage with other actors in their sector. This can include participating at local, regional, and national level in:

- Driving public visibility campaigns on the benefits of and need for volunteering;
- Creating public policies, strategies, and laws that recognise and support volunteering in all forms, including online, short-term, or informal volunteering;
- Creating protection frameworks for volunteers' rights and wellbeing, especially in high-risk areas;
- Increasing private and public funding and investment in volunteer management infrastructure;
- Conducting research on volunteering;
- And more.

Try it: Join your voice as an NSO to national campaigns around volunteering. World Scouting invited its members to participate in the survey that led to the Call to action for the future of volunteering by the International Association for Volunteer Effort. Look up what your country is doing to promote volunteering.

Using special events and campaigns to celebrate volunteering

NSOs can join their voice in the context of larger initiatives:

- Regional or national volunteering days or campaigns, like days of service, or volunteer action weeks.
- International days, like World Volunteer Day on 5 December
- International years, like the International Volunteer Year 2026

Case study: *During the International Volunteer Year 2026, the* ***Asociación de Scouts de Venezuela*** *created a special recognition called the* ***Orden Año del Voluntariado Scout*** *to celebrate and thank every one of its volunteers for their service to the Scout Movement. The national organisation asked regional and district leaders to distribute the award, and all volunteers received a certificate, badge, and pin.*

The award was issued in five categories, recognising volunteers from newly established Scout groups as well as those with different lengths of service. Many volunteers were surprised and happy to receive the award.

The final category, known as the "institutional" category, recognised individuals and organisations outside Scouting, such as sponsors and community leaders, who volunteered alongside or in support of the Scout Movement. This category was extended after the earthquakes in June 2026 in Venezuela to all external supporters that contributed to relief and recovery efforts.

Recognising volunteering in Scouting with professional development credits and certification

Volunteers can put their experience in their CV or online employment profiles for professional recognition. To go beyond this individual approach, NSOs can build systems that help translate volunteer experience and/or training in Scouting into professional development credits or certifications, based on either regional, national, or international certification systems. This increases volunteer legitimacy and recognition with employers and professional orders.

Case study: *The* ***Scouts Australia*** *Institute of Training (SAIT) has been a Registered Training Organisation since 1996. SAIT enables members of Scouts Australia who have completed learning through either the Youth Program (as Venturers or Rovers) or Adult Training & Development the ability to seek nationally recognised qualifications through a Recognition of Prior Learning assessment. This includes qualification and skill sets like outdoor recreation and leadership, active volunteering, project management, diversity and inclusion, and many more. Individuals are assigned an assessor and must present a portfolio of experiences as evidence to have their training recognised.*

Case study: *L'****Association des scouts du Canada*** *is an official assessor for the Diplôme d'Aptitude aux Fonctions d'Animateurs (DAFA) certification, a national certificate of competence for leaders working with youth, developed in collaboration with youth organisations across the province of Quebec. Volunteers completing the first part of Scout leader training within the NSA's Wood Badge competency framework (French) can be assessed at the same time for the DAFA certification and use this to get employed in camps and youth organisations across the province.*

Incentivising employment benefits for volunteering

Many employers and governments have policies and benefits around volunteering that sometimes go underused. This type of recognition can take the form of extra annual leave for volunteering, tax incentives, or subsidies for participating in youth organisations, etc. NSOs can collaborate with other volunteer-led organisations to encourage bodies to implement these benefits, or to maximise their use.

Case study: *Within* ***Persekutuan Pengakap Malaysia****, recognition for teachers who volunteer within their school-based part of Scouting takes place within the Malaysian Ministry of Education's broader policy of supporting teachers' involvement in recognised co-curricular organisations.*

Teachers who volunteer in these organisations are eligible for up to 15 days of paid special leave annually (subject to approval) to participate in approved activities, training programmes, camps, and official events, without affecting their annual leave entitlement.

Continuous Professional Development hours are awarded for approved professional training conducted under the Ministry's professional development framework, including some Scouting-related training programmes.

Recognised certificates *for participation or leadership in Scouting and* ***official appointments*** *are important as these are proofs that are recorded in the Ministry's school management system; these achievements contribute to the teacher and the school's overall performance records, and can be awarded at the district, state, national, or international levels. All these public measures give formal value to volunteering within these youth organisations.*

Offering scholarships

Scholarships to cover the expenses linked to education can recognise the value in the time that volunteers are giving the organisation that is not spent pursuing gainful employment during studies.

Case study: Scouts Canada *offers a Scholarship Program for youth and volunteers in Scouting under 26 years old pursuing full-time studies at Canadian universities or colleges through various Foundations. They set the criteria online and people can self-apply.*

Conclusion

If you, the reader, are a volunteer as well, thank you for everything you do. We hope this resource recognises and inspires the work you do to help the Scout Movement grow.

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AI disclosure

Claude was used to do an initial mapping of NSO resources on recognition and awards, in editing for clarity and structure, and in proofreading. All AI-generated content was reviewed and verified by the author for accuracy, and no content was included verbatim without significant editing.

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Abstract

Do you lead other adults in Scouting? *Then you play a key role in making volunteers fee recognised and valued. In this International Volunteer Year 2026, and when discussing strategies for volunteer retention, World Scouting invites everyone who leads other volunteers to think about how we can strengthen our culture of recognition.*

This resource builds on the Flexible Volunteering Guide and interviews with National Scout Organisations (NSOs) and National Scout Associations (NSAs) across the regions. It invites leaders in Scouting to go beyond formal awards when we think of recognition and explore new ideas that respond to what makes volunteers feel valued and want to stay.

For Adults in Scouting (AiS) teams and professionals in NSOs and NSAs, start with this article by Jorge Luis Salas Cuzquen on how ***the best recognition system may not actually be your awards programme****: Recognition Is More Than a Medal.*

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