

The Five Love Languages: Showing Appreciation To Keep Association Chapter Volunteers Inspired



Gary Chapman's 1992 book, "The Five Love Languages," defines a person's "love language" as the way they express themselves to those most important to them. Since its release, the book has helped millions of people strengthen all manner of relationships. It has of course, helped those in romantic relationships, but it has also helped people in general learn how to better interact with those around them.



Did you ever wonder if the five love languages could be applied to showing gratitude to volunteers in your chapter, to help them feel appreciated and engaged, build stronger connections and foster lasting engagement? Well, we've thought about it for you, and it's not a difficult application.

Volunteers are the backbone of any nonprofit or community-driven organization. They give their time, energy and skills selflessly to support causes they care about. However, keeping volunteers engaged and feeling appreciated can be a challenge. That's where the concepts discussed in the Five Love Languages can be a game changer for chapters.

The Five Love Languages

Though originally designed to enhance personal relationships, the Five Love Languages are a versatile, effective framework for making your volunteers feel valued and motivated:

- Words of affirmation
- Quality time
- Acts of service
- Gifts
- Physical touch

The Five Love Languages as They Apply to Chapter Volunteers

Words of Affirmation. Let your volunteers, and your general membership, hear how you value volunteers and all they do for the chapter. Many people find hearing and reading words of encouragement and appreciation incredibly uplifting. Volunteers who resonate with this love language thrive when they receive verbal acknowledgment of their contributions. They feel seen and valued, with a sense of pride and belonging.

Here are some ideas for using the “words of affirmation” love language with your volunteers:

- Send personalized hand-written notes or emails highlighting their specific contributions. Instead of a generic “Thank you for helping,” say something like, “JoAnne, your coordination of our chapter’s January’s virtual speaker series was essential to the success of the event. We couldn’t have done it without you!”
- In meetings, publicly recognize their efforts. A simple shoutout like, “Jane’s effort in organizing this month’s advocacy event made a huge difference,” can have a big impact.
- Share their work in a volunteer spotlight on your website or social media, showcasing their stories and achievements.

Quality time. For some, feeling valued comes from spending meaningful time together. Volunteers with this love language appreciate opportunities to connect with team leaders and other volunteers. Connected to the people and mission they serve, these people are more likely to stay engaged and invested in their roles.

Here are some ideas for using the “quality time” love language with your volunteers:

- Host informal gatherings for chapter volunteers to interact with your board and other volunteers, helping them build camaraderie and provide a sense of community.
- Find time to have one-on-one conversations, which can show that you truly care. Ask about their experiences, challenges and goals.



- Invite them to participate in planning or brainstorming to give them a sense of ownership and collaboration.

Acts of service. Some volunteers feel appreciated when others lend a helping hand or make their tasks easier. For these individuals, the things you do to help them speak louder than any words you might say about what they've done for the chapter. Demonstrating a willingness to support your chapter volunteers through your actions strengthens trust and reinforces their importance to the team.

Here are some ideas for using the “acts of service” love language with your volunteers:

- Offer to help with challenging tasks or provide resources that make work easier, like training sessions or more effective tools
- Organize logistics to make it easier for them to get through an event. For example, arrange transportation for volunteers who may find it hard to get to a location or provide snacks and refreshments during long shifts
- Check in regularly to see if they need support or resources to accomplish their duties

Gifts. Some volunteers feel most appreciated when they receive thoughtful tokens of gratitude. It's not about the monetary value but the thoughtfulness behind the gesture. These gestures serve as tangible reminders of their contributions and the value they bring to the organization.

Here are some ideas for using the “gifts” love language with your volunteers:

- Provide chapter swag, like branded T-shirts, reusable water bottles or portfolios
- Celebrate milestones or achievements with personalized gifts, like a certificate of appreciation or a framed photo of the team
- Send surprise packages during holidays, Volunteer Appreciation Week or just because

Physical touch. While this love language may be the most challenging to use in a professional setting, it's not impossible. When used appropriately it can still communicate warmth and appreciation. Volunteers who resonate with this love language often respond to gestures that create a sense of belonging while enhancing feelings of camaraderie and community.

Here are some ideas for using the “physical touch” love language with your volunteers:

- Give volunteers a warm handshake or high-five to celebrate a job well done
- Create a welcoming atmosphere through group photos or team-building games



- If it's appropriate and welcomed, a light pat on the back or an occasional hug can convey gratitude

Applying the Love Languages Strategically

Not every volunteer resonates with the same love language; it's important to tailor your approach. So how do you figure out which "language" is best?

- Observe and listen: Pay attention to how volunteers respond to different types of appreciation. Do they light up when praised or do they seem to value shared experiences more? Or do they seem to light up when they get or give hugs?
- Ask directly: If you think it's appropriate, ask volunteers how they prefer to be appreciated. This can be done informally or through a quick survey.
- Diversify your efforts: Incorporate a mix of love language-inspired strategies into your volunteer management plan to better ensure everyone feels valued.

Why appreciation matters

Chapters can only succeed through the work of volunteers. When volunteers feel genuinely appreciated, they are more likely to stay committed, perform at their best and advocate for your cause and your chapter. Recognizing and addressing their unique needs through the lens of the Five Love Languages not only fosters satisfaction of individual members but also strengthens your organization's community and impact.

Volunteering is a "labor of love," and showing gratitude in ways that resonate with your volunteers can create a culture of appreciation and connection. By applying the Five Love Languages, you can transform your volunteer program into a thriving, engaged and motivated community ready to make a difference. Whether through heartfelt words, shared time, supportive actions, thoughtful gifts or warm gestures, showing that you value your volunteers is the key to sustained engagement and mutual success.

