



1-YEAR

VOLUNTEER CELEBRATION PLAN

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USER AGREEMENT

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OVERVIEW

We don't always think about celebrating or appreciating our volunteers as a form of training, but maybe we should! Because here's the thing: **what we celebrate gets repeated.** So when we celebrate our volunteers for being awesome and following through on the vision and expectations we've set for them, we're reminding our whole team about what matters most. Oh, and a little celebration can make our volunteers feel pretty awesome too.



CELEBRATION

If you're following along with our 1-Year Volunteer Strategy, you'll see this icon on your **1-Year Volunteer Calendar** every month.

EVERY YEAR

At the beginning of each year, we recommend doing a quick survey of your volunteers, like [this one](#), so you can ask about their favorite ways to be appreciated.

Each year, we recommend setting aside two days to simply celebrate your volunteers with a party: **Christmas** and **the end of the school year**. Once you've got the dates for those parties determined, get ready to celebrate! Because your volunteers are worth throwing parties for.

EVERY MONTH

Once your annual celebrations have been scheduled, choose some ways you can celebrate your volunteers on a monthly basis. Throwing a party every month would probably be a little over-the-top, **but there are small things you can do each month to let your volunteers know they're appreciated.** Know their birthdays, for example! Every month, set aside a few minutes to write a birthday card for every volunteer with an upcoming birthday. Plus, follow this guide for some creative ways to honor your volunteers (or just have some fun together), inspired by some little-known holidays.

EVERY WEEK

Maybe it feels overwhelming to think about celebrating your volunteers every single week. But it doesn't have to! **You don't have to celebrate every volunteer every week, but you should celebrate at least one volunteer every week.**

How? It's actually pretty simple. Each week (maybe the day after your weekly program), choose one volunteer to celebrate, honor, or thank. Maybe it's a volunteer who did something really amazing last week. Maybe it's someone who keeps showing up to serve even though you know they've got a lot going on right now. Or maybe it's someone you want to simply honor for no particular reason at all.

What matters is that, every week, you've got at least one volunteer on your calendar who you're going to celebrate. **Writing weekly thank you notes will do big things for your volunteer culture and it will do big things for you, too.** Because when you spend time each week thanking your volunteers, you'll become a lot more aware of all they do for you and your ministry.

And if you're looking for some great thank you cards, we love [these](#) and [these!](#)

AUGUST TELL A JOKE DAY

WHAT TO DO

August 16 is **Tell a Joke Day!** So, this August, celebrate your volunteers (and this very important national holiday) by hosting a Volunteer Comedy Contest during your weekly program. To pull it off, text your volunteers during the week and tell them to come prepared with their very best joke. Then, during your program, have your volunteers join you up front. Introduce them, have your students cheer for them, and then let them tell their very best jokes. Ask your students to vote on their favorite comedian, then present the winner with a prize!

WHAT TO GET

- A prize for the best comedian.
- Consolation prizes for the not-best comedians (like candy or high-fives).



SEPTEMBER MINIATURE GOLF DAY

WHAT TO DO

Sometimes, the best thing you can do for your volunteer culture is to spend more time making volunteering *fun*. Sure, sometimes you'll want to celebrate your volunteers for their hard work, their achievements, and the impact they're making. But other times . . . well, you'll want to celebrate them just because you like them.

So for **Miniature Golf Day** (September 21), try creating a fun and simple experience for your volunteers as they arrive. Set up a toy miniature golf set under a banner that says *HAPPY MINI GOLF DAY!* Then let your volunteers challenge each other to a round of golf before and after your weekly program. You might even want to keep score so you can reward your top-scorers with a prize.

WHAT TO GET

- A toy miniature golf set, like [this one!](#) (Or a golf ball, golf club, and empty glass could work, too.)
- A build-your-own party banner kit, like [this one.](#) (Hang onto it for future celebrations!)
- A prize for the winners.



OCTOBER NATIONAL CAKE DECORATING DAY

WHAT TO DO

October 15 is **National Cake Decorating Day!** Sure, you could just pick up a cake at your nearest grocery store, ask the teenager at the counter to write “We Love Our Volunteers” on it, and hope you don’t receive a cake that says “We Love Our Volunteers On It.” Or . . . you could get creative, and get your volunteers involved in the cake-decorating process.

Before your volunteers show up for your weekly program, set up a cake-decorating station (preferably out of the sight and reach of students). Top it off with the [sappy little sign](#) we designed for you, and point your volunteers toward the treats!

WHAT TO GET

- A blank frosted sheet cake.
- Plenty of icing, sprinkles, edible glitter, and anything that might be fun to put on a cake. ([Toy dinosaurs?](#))
- Plates, utensils, napkins . . . and maybe a tarp.
- [This sign](#) printed on cardstock.



NOVEMBER CELEBRATE YOUR UNIQUE TALENT DAY

WHAT TO DO

This November, give your volunteers a chance to really shine . . . but not because they’re great at leading small groups or advancing the worship slides at exactly the right time. To honor **Celebrate Your Unique Talent Day** (November 24), dedicate the entire month to your volunteers’ weird talents. Each week in November, ask one (or a few) of your volunteers to provide some entertainment during your weekly program by demonstrating their weirdest talent. Then, at the end of the month, have your students and volunteers all vote on their favorite act. Picture America’s Got Talent . . . but with volunteers. And maybe don’t allow any fire-juggling or sword-swallowing. You know, for insurance purposes.

WHAT TO GET

- Prizes for your participants (like [these thumbs up trophies](#), maybe?)



DECEMBER CHRISTMAS PARTY

WHAT TO DO

Okay, it's probably a good idea to celebrate a *normal* holiday once in a while — especially when that holiday is celebrating the birth of Jesus. So before your volunteers disappear for the holidays, you might want to do a little something special for them by throwing a **Volunteer Christmas Party!**

Since the holidays can be a little crazy, you might want to schedule your Christmas Party at a time that won't require your volunteers to leave the house for an extra night — like right before, or right after, your last weekly program before Christmas.

To prepare for your Christmas party, here are a few things you probably want to think about . . .

THE ENVIRONMENT

Christmas is special. Your volunteers are special. So think of a few ways you can make your physical space feel special for your party. Set the tables. Make a few Christmas centerpieces. Light a Christmas tree. Blast some Christmas music. But, remember, this is still a youth ministry event, so keep your environment fun . . . and maybe free of poinsettias and Barbra Streisand Christmas albums.

THE MENU

It's not a party if there's not food! Fill a table with all the food you can manage. Pizza! Christmas cookies! Candy canes! A hot chocolate bar with whipped cream and sprinkles! Spaghetti with maple syrup!

THE FUN

Do a Crazy Christmas Outfit Contest. Check out the Games section of Grow and play **Cookie Face** with Christmas cookies or **Conjoined Christmas**. Ask your worship leader to write and perform a parody of *Jingle Bells* that's all about how awesome your volunteers are. This isn't a meeting. It's a celebration!

THE PRESENTS

If you don't do this already, it's probably a good idea to set aside a few bucks in your annual youth ministry budget to buy some Christmas presents for your volunteers. That doesn't mean you need to buy everyone an Xbox or a \$50 gift card. Even a \$5 gift card or a bag of candy can mean a lot to a volunteer if you pair it with a handwritten note.

THE THANK-YOU'S

Before you wrap up your party, make sure you take a few minutes to tell your volunteers how much you appreciate them. This could be as simple as a two-minute word of thanks, or as complicated as a video featuring thank-you's by every student in your ministry, followed by a live Christmas concert by Hillsong. But maybe just stick with the two-minute thing.

WHAT TO GET

- Christmas decorations and table centerpieces.
- Food and drinks.
- Plates, cups, utensils, and napkins.
- A Christmas playlist.
- A crazy Christmas outfit for yourself.
- Christmas cookies.
- Wrapping paper and tape.
- The biggest Christmas sweater you can find.
- Prizes for the winners of your games.
- Christmas presents for your volunteers.



JANUARY BACKWARD DAY

WHAT TO DO

Some people celebrate New Years. But this year, you're going to celebrate a much more important holiday known as **Backward Day** (January 31). This Backward Day, celebrate your volunteers by writing each of them a short note of thanks. But, like, backward.

You probably don't want to try to hand-write these things, though. Instead, type them up, flip the image so the text is backward, then print and tape it inside a note card. We even made you some [printable note cards](#) to make your Backward Day celebration even more awesome.

WHAT TO GET

- This [note card design](#) we made for you, printed on cardstock.



FEBRUARY NATIONAL TORTILLA CHIP DAY

WHAT TO DO

Do you have any idea how many things taste delicious with tortilla chips? It's just slightly shy of everything, I think. To celebrate **National Tortilla Chip Day** (the week of February 24), let your volunteers know how much you appreciate them by giving them the gift of food. Specifically, an assortment of chips and dip.

Sure, salsa and guacamole are a safe bet. But you can do better than that.

What about spinach and artichoke dip? Buffalo chicken dip? A complete nacho bar? Go ahead . . . go a little crazy. Your volunteers are worth it.

WHAT TO GET

- Tortilla chips.
- Things to dip the tortilla chips in.
- Plates, utensils, and napkins.



MARCH AWKWARD MOMENTS DAY

WHAT TO DO

Youth ministry is basically one long string of awkward moments. Like when a water balloon explodes on your lap right before you have to teach. Or when you try a trust fall, but your students drop you and you get a concussion. Or when you ask a kid how their hamster is doing and they tell you they accidentally dropped a textbook on it and now it's dead.

So this year, on **Awkward Moments Day**, turn all of that awkwardness into a fun contest for your volunteers. The week of March 18, announce The Awkward Moments Day Contest to your volunteers. All week long, ask them to submit their funniest and most awkward youth ministry stories. Then, at the end of the week, choose a winner and give the winner a sweet (or maybe awkward?) prize.

WHAT TO GET

- [This image](#) we made for you, in case you need it for your social media announcements.
- A prize for your most awkward volunteer.



APRIL PRETZEL DAY

WHAT TO DO

Let's talk about the thing that's always a quick way to the hearts of your volunteers: food. Each year, on April 26, planet earth celebrates **Pretzel Day**. This year, get in on the action by setting up a hot pretzel bar for your volunteers. You can find frozen hot pretzels in the freezer aisle and keep them warm in an oven or a catering tray.

Next, spend some quality time thinking about your pretzel toppings. Because yum. Nacho cheese. Fancy mustard. Honey mustard. Chocolate sauce. Peanut butter. Cinnamon and sugar. Caramel. So many options! Just try not to eat everything before your volunteers show up.

WHAT TO GET

- Pretzels.
- Things to dip pretzels in.
- Plates, utensils, and napkins.



MAY PHOTO MONTH

WHAT TO DO

The whole month of May is **Photo Month!** So go ahead and turn this month-long celebration into an opportunity to celebrate your volunteers by setting up a photo booth. Your students can use it too, but you’re going to want to make sure you save a special time slot for your volunteers to get their pictures taken. (*Hint, hint.* You’re going to need those pictures in June!)

To create your photo booth, block off some space in a corner or classroom in your building. If you don’t have a solid-colored wall to serve as a backdrop, hang a large sheet – just make sure you *really* iron it first. Next, set up plenty of lighting so your pictures will be bright and clear. And, oh! Don’t forget about the props. Hats, sunglasses, stuffed animals, masks, feather boas, pool inflatables . . . the possibilities are endless. Lastly, come up with a plan to collect and sort through your photos when they’re finished. You’re going to need them next month and your volunteers are going to want them, too!

WHAT TO GET

- Someone with a fancy camera. Or a phone.
- A backdrop, like a blank wall or wrinkle-free sheet.
- Lots of light or sunshine.
- Plenty of props.



JUNE END-OF-THE-YEAR PARTY

WHAT TO DO

Can you believe it’s the end of the school year already? Celebrate the end of a successful school year, and thank your volunteers for all their hard work, by throwing them another party! Because, remember, your volunteers are definitely worth throwing parties for. So, to give your volunteers one last celebration before the year ends, put together a fun summer-themed party.

To prepare for your end-of-the-year party, here are a few things you probably want to think about . . .

THE ENVIRONMENT

Now that summer is here, head outside if you can! You might host it at your church, a local park, or someone’s backyard for a fun off-site alternative. Whatever you choose, make sure it’s a place where everyone can eat, talk, and play. Then turn on some summery music!

THE MENU

Since it’s the summertime, try having a cookout, or a picnic, or a build-your-own ice cream sundae bar, or the biggest selection of popsicles you can afford! And don’t forget about the lemonade. Yay summer!

THE FUN

To keep your volunteers entertained while they eat, set up some icebreaker questions or activities (like the game **Hedbandz** at each table). If your party is happening outside, you might want to skip the organized group games and go for some more casual fun. Set up a few lawn games, like **ladder toss**, **Flickin Chicken**, or **Kan Jam**. If you do want a few group games, though, try **Musical Beach Balls** or **Ducks Away** in the Games section of Grow.

THE THANK-YOU'S

It's the end of another year. For some of your volunteers, this may be their last chance to spend time with you and your team, so don't let this opportunity go to waste. Go ahead and get a little mushy. Recap the incredible things that happened during your year of ministry together. Give awards to a few volunteers who deserve a little extra recognition. Take the photos of your volunteers you took in May and turn them into a slideshow. Tell your volunteers how much you love and appreciate them. And finally, don't let anyone leave without a hand-written thank you note from you and your church.

WHAT TO GET

- Food and drinks.
- Plates, cups, utensils, and napkins.
- A summery playlist.
- Ice cream or popsicles.
- Lawn games.
- Prizes for the winners of your games.
- Awards for a few notable volunteers.
- Photos of your volunteers from your photo booth.
- Thank you notes.



JULY WORLD EMOJI DAY

WHAT TO DO

If you're like most youth workers, July is a pretty busy month. Between summer camps, mission trips, family vacations, and dips in attendance for both your students and your volunteers . . . well, you've got a lot going on. So let's keep July's celebration simple, shall we? July 17 is **World Emoji Day**. To celebrate, take a few minutes to send each of your volunteers a quick text message to say you can't wait to kick off a new year of ministry together, and to express (in emoji form) how you feel about having them on the team. You can even do this one while you're relaxing on a beach somewhere.

WHAT TO GET

- Your phone.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

KENNY & ELLE CAMPBELL



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Kenny and Elle were youth pastors in Buffalo, NY (home of the chicken finger sub) for almost ten years. Kenny was the Middle School Pastor and Elle was the Small Groups and Volunteer Coordinator for Middle School Ministry. While they were there, they founded Stuff You Can Use, a youth ministry resource company, as a way to share the resources they were already creating for their ministry with others.

Today, Kenny and Elle live in Atlanta, GA, where they lead the Stuff You Can Use team full-time, host the podcast Youth Ministry Answers, coach and train youth workers around the country, and serve students and small group leaders every Sunday as youth ministry volunteers.

Kenny and Elle are also the creators of [Eventfeed LIVE](#) and [PHARISEES: The Party Game](#), and Elle has co-authored the books [Creating a Lead Small Culture](#) and [The Art of Group Talk](#).

When Kenny and Elle aren't creating youth ministry resources, they're usually playing games, listening to podcasts, exploring new cities, and looking for things that make them laugh.

If Kenny could ride any animal into battle, he would choose a sand seal (the rentable variety, not the wild ones) because it worked pretty well for Link when he was fighting Divine Beast Vah Naboris.

If Elle could hang out with any celebrity, she would meet Emma Watson at a used book store because Hermione Granger and the Hogwarts library are sadly not actually real.

And if you want to chat with Kenny or Elle about youth ministry, board games, pizza, or which podcasts you're currently listening to, reach out on social media! They like making new friends.