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# ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS: LET'S STAY TOGETHER

PREPARED BY





Our City strives to meet the needs of all residents who choose to call Orlando home. To do this, I have made it a priority for the Neighborhood Relations team to organize, support, mentor and guide residents and neighborhood organizations in their effort to keep Orlando a great place to live, work and play. In 2014, we launched iLead, a comprehensive neighborhood-training program that informs, connects and involves our neighborhood leaders through a series of interactive guides, videos, webinars and workshops. I encourage you to use the iLead program to build and sustain your successful neighborhood organization.

Bully Myre

Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer



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   Neighborhood History

View the full list of guides on a variety of topics relevant to neighborhood associations at **orlando.gov/ilead**.

# ENGAGING NEIGHBORHOOD VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are the foundation of any neighborhood organization. This guide, will focus on the basics of recruiting volunteers and creating an organizational culture where volunteers keep coming back. A neighborhood organization's board of directors and officers need members to volunteer their time, talent and expertise to ensure the organization remains healthy.

Members will volunteer when they feel their time, talents and expertise are being used and appreciated. It's important to remember that it's not what your members can do for you that will keep them coming back; it's what you can do for your members, your greatest asset.

Let's get started with establishing or reinforcing a supportive and fun atmosphere for your neighborhood organization volunteers.



USING VOLUNTEERS: A GREAT WAY TO GROOM LEADERS, SHARE THE WORK ... MANY HANDS MAKE THE WORK LIGHT.



## BUILDING YOUR ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEER FOUNDATION

As neighborhood organization leaders, you need to be able to clearly, briefly and concisely answer these questions. These questions are designed to keep your organization focused on its purpose, to help stay on track and experience success.

# 1. What is the association's purpose?

Every meeting, event, activity and party should reinforce the purpose of the association. If the activity doesn't help the association achieve its mission or goals, then it's not the right activity for the association.

# 2. Why get involved in your association?

"Because we need you" isn't a good enough reason. Think about the impact the association has. Some examples may be:

a) by getting involved you are helping to protect one of your largest assets - your home;

b) you are contributing to a better quality of life for your family; and,

c) you are getting to know your neighbors which increases a sense of pride and security

#### 3. Are your goals SMART?

Keep your goals simple and focused using the "SMART" method, which stands for S-Specific; M-Measurable; A-Attainable; R-Realistic and Results Oriented; and, T-Timely/Time Bound. Goals will help you define your success.

# 4. What are you doing to help the neighborhood?

Can you quickly and briefly provide concrete examples of the positive impact the association has had on the neighborhood? People want to be a part of success.

# 5. Does your association have an inclusive culture?

Does your association work to include all neighbors? This would be a great goal of your membership committee.

# 6. What is the attitude of your association and its leadership?

A positive and upbeat attitude among the association leadership will motivate and create an atmosphere that attracts, involves and keeps members coming back. Demonstrating a can do and realistic attitude may make the difference in achieving association goals.







### MAKE IT WORTHWHILE-WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Why would members or neighbors want to volunteer for your association? To understand recruiting and keeping volunteers, you need to think about why you volunteer for your association and what keeps you coming back. What are you getting out of your volunteer experience? In other words...what is in it for you?

The What's In It for Me or "WIIFM" dynamic helps your members become personally invested in the mission and goals of your neighborhood organization. By giving your members and neighbors a chance to participate, you are engaging them and making it as much about them as it is about the association.

The dynamics of the WIIFM approach has proven over and over again to be extremely successful in engaging and keeping volunteers. Give it a try. Here are pointers to help you make the WIIFM approach a part of your association's culture.

First, you need to ask and answer these questions, which will help you make the WIIFM tangible and easier to incorporate into the operations of your association:

- 1. Why are you volunteering for your association?
- 2. Why do your board members and long-term volunteers volunteer with the association?
- 3. Why did your neighbors join the association? This really only applies to volunteer associations since property owners in mandatory associations are automatically members of their association.
- 4. Why do your members participate in the association meetings and its activities?

Now take this information and use it when identifying volunteer needs. Share the WIIFM with all your volunteers.



#### WHEN USING WIIFM:

- Make the connection: Be sure the volunteer experience is relevant and connected to the mission of your neighborhood organization. Share with the volunteer how their role and tasks helps the association achieve its mission. Your volunteers need to know they are contributing to the neighborhood organization.
- Be Inclusive and work as a team: There is no "I" in team. Work as a team with the old adage that many hands make the work lighter. It's important for leaders to be aware of all members and do what they can to include as many members as possible in association decisions and projects. Including members increases ownership and builds capacity. It takes time and being strategic in promoting inclusiveness, yet the payoff is huge with people feeling valued and willing to volunteer their time and talents.
- Let them know they're part of something big: Your association plays a vital role in the quality of life of your neighborhood; remind your neighbors and members of the mission of your association and share association successes. People like to be a part of success. There's power in numbers and when your members are involved in your association, those who are not, will want to be a part too.
- Create a path to association leadership: Volunteering on a committee or serving as a chair is a great way to ease into association leadership. Volunteering provides opportunities for members to be more involved in the association and explore their options for future leadership roles in the association.
- Provide opportunities to learn new skills: Volunteering can be a great way for members to enhance their skills and learn new ones. Just because volunteer work is unpaid does not mean the skills learned are basic or not useful. When identifying volunteer tasks, take a minute to think about the skills needed to complete the task. Use this information when recruiting volunteers. Some of your members may want to learn how

to plan and put on events and may be great volunteers for association social events. Maybe some members joined the association to get to know more neighbors, so being a part of the welcoming or membership committee may give members a chance to meet more people. Volunteering with the association can help members try new things and build skills that will help them personally and professionally.

• Value your volunteers' time: Time is precious and in great demand; don't take it for granted. When making volunteer assignments, be realistic and practical about the estimated time to complete the task. Also, when setting up a volunteer schedule, be sure your volunteers don't arrive too early for no reason or stay if there isn't work to be done. Treat their donation of time as you would a monetary donation, because, some would say, a donation of time is more valuable. Use your volunteers' time wisely.

• Keep volunteers engaged and busy: When using volunteers for shift work, make sure they are kept busy their entire shift. If the volunteer doesn't have anything to do for most of their shift, they may feel that their role isn't important or contributing to the mission of the association. When recruiting volunteers for committee work or special projects, be smart and strategic with the number of members it will take to accomplish the assignment. It's important that the time commitment expected of the volunteer is realistic based on the task or assignment. Bored volunteers will rarely come back.

# DEFINE VOLUNTEER ROLE & EXPECTATIONS

When recruiting volunteers, it is in the best interest of the association to ensure the volunteers are used efficiently and effectively. The best way to make this happen is to take the time to define volunteer roles and responsibilities up front. Your volunteers will appreciate having a clear understanding of expectations from the beginning.

It's not necessary to write a full job description or spend hours outlining the role...who has time for that? Here are some tips for defining volunteer opportunities.

#### Write a job description

- •Keep it simple and clear.
- Start with purpose of the volunteer job/ task and how it helps meet the association's mission.
- Include general responsibilities and descriptions of key tasks and their purpose, time commitment, expectations, outcomes and deadlines.
- Outline the WIIFM approach.
- Post the job description for members to view; consider adding a volunteer opportunity section to your association website.
- Give a copy to members that accept the specific

volunteer job or committee role.

#### Be clear about time commitment and deadlines

- Do the best you can to estimate the amount of time it will take to accomplish the volunteer assignment.
- Define when the assignment or committee work needs to be completed.
- •Be sure the volunteer(s) agree with the deadlines.

#### The Ask

Okay, you have written out the specifics, now you are ready for the ask. It's time for your sales pitch and sharing the WIIFM approach with your members. How and when you ask will determine your success. Timing and how you ask is everything.

Here are a few pointers:

- SELL IT and relate the volunteer tasks to its impact on the association;
- make it easy for members to volunteer by having signup sheets;
- at meetings and events, set up a table with the volunteer opportunities and signup sheets and members that are able to answer questions;



- give members contact information if they have additional questions – make it easy for your members to get answers; and,
- post volunteer opportunities on the association website and social media sites, including the point of contact.

#### Asking at a membership meeting

This is a great way to be inclusive and give all members a chance to volunteer and serve. The downside of asking at meetings or in a large group is that people are less likely to step forward, especially if nobody else is volunteering. Also, some people may feel they are not able to handle the tasks or are worried about the time commitment. It's always a good idea to ask people to sign up after the meeting, especially if no one volunteered during the meeting.

#### **Asking Specific Members**

When you need specific skills for a volunteer assignment, think about your members that have these skills and ask them personally. Call them or visit with them to explain the assignment and why you feel they would be the best person to handle the task. Remember to emphasize WIIFM. Be careful that you are not just going to friends and the same volunteers, because you are comfortable with them, know they are reliable and will deliver on the task. When using this approach only, you could overlook a member who is passionate about the task.



### **VOLUNTEER** RECOGNITION

**Recognition is a crucial part of keeping association volunteers engaged and coming back**. When your volunteers feel appreciated and important, they are more likely to feel connected and committed to your neighborhood organization. Recognizing and expressing appreciation of your volunteers will take some effort, but the effort and time will have huge dividends!

You need to recognize your volunteers in a meaningful way for their time and contributions. By establishing an environment where volunteers feel appreciated and needed, your association will benefit from a number of positive effects, such as a willingness to give their time and talent, an increase in reliability and volunteers recruiting other members or neighbors to volunteer.

Your members have different personalities, are motivated to serve the association for different reasons, and serve in different ways. Understanding what motivates each volunteer is an important step in ensuring effective and positive volunteer recognition. Since what motivates one individual may be very different from what motivates another volunteer, it's a good idea to use a variety of methods which will appeal to all your volunteers and to make it personal and meaningful.

Keep your recognition as timely as possible. Recognition and thanks for volunteer work should come as soon as possible after the work has been done. Don't save up your recognition for the annual meeting or event. If a volunteer has to wait months before hearing any word of thanks and praise, they may develop resentment for lack of appreciation and recognition in the meantime.



#### **RECOGNITION IDEAS**

Here are some easy ways for the association to recognize and say thanks to those invaluable volunteers:

- Use e-mail to send a thank-you message.
- Send a postcard or thank-you note after a volunteer attends a project.
- Send a birthday card.
- Submit a picture of the volunteer to be in your association's newsletter or a spotlight on your website.
- Post a picture of the volunteer(s) on a bulletin board at your association meetings and events.
- Give the volunteer additional responsibilities.
- Create a photo collage or slide show all your association volunteers' activities to show at a meeting or event; this could be done annually or monthly.

#### PLANNING RECOGNITION

Spend a little time and put some thought into the best way to give recognition to your association volunteers. The following two sections include points to consider whenever recognizing volunteers.

Recognition should be given:

- from the association on behalf of the members and neighborhood;
- frequently and timely -- as quickly after the task was completed as possible;
- at an association meeting or event;
- by an association leader, preferably the president or vice president, on behalf of the association;
- given honestly and genuinely;
- in presence of other members and neighbors; and,
- with a personal touch.

#### **OTHER POINTS TO PONDER:**

• Give it to the volunteer, not the work: This is a subtle but important distinction. If volunteers organize your annual neighborhood picnic event and you praise the event without mentioning by name who organized and worked the picnic, the volunteers may feel resentful and unappreciated. Make sure you connect the volunteer's name to their work.

- Give it honestly and genuinely: Don't give praise unless you mean it. If you praise lack luster or poor performance, the praise you give to other volunteers for good work will not be valued. If a volunteer is performing poorly or didn't deliver, you might be able to give them honest recognition for their effort or for one of their personality traits.
- Give it consistently: If two volunteers are responsible for similar volunteer work, their recognition needs to be similar. We are not saying that the recognition has be identical, just the same thought and effort is put into the individual recognition.
- Give it on an individualized personal basis: Different people like different things. Some like public recognition, others find it embarrassing. In order to provide effective recognition, you need to get to know your volunteers and what they will respond to positively.
- Give it in relationship to your association's mission and goals: Let them know how their volunteer work has helped the association achieve success and meet its mission and goals. Volunteers will greatly appreciate hearing how they helped the association move forward. Celebrate and appreciate how their volunteer efforts made a difference for the association and neighborhood. Everyone likes to feel appreciated and to know when they are doing something right.





## KEEPING VOLUNTEERS COMING BACK

#### •Make it fun

Your volunteers want to enjoy what they do. If people have fun getting involved with the association they are more likely to come back. Make your events and meetings fun; you may even create a Fun Committee to make sure the fun is a part of the association. Hosting social events to recognize your volunteers can help foster a team spirit and help people get to know each other better.

#### • Give volunteers meaningful roles

Your association volunteers want to feel their time and talent is valued. Understanding the skills and interests of your volunteers and placing them in roles where they feel valued will motivate your volunteers and benefit your association. Remember to include WIIFM and why their role is important. Also, be sure to define what success will look like when the committee or task has been completed. Your volunteers need to know what success looks like.

#### Ask in specific and actionable ways

To successfully recruit volunteers, avoid the general "we need help" or "join us" calls to action. Be specific when you need volunteers and make it easy for them to follow up. Make sure you have a signup sheet to capture contact information. This is where the written job description can be a big help.

#### Delegate authority

Delegating builds confidence and ownership among your members and helps to foster future association leaders. Delegation is the art of handing over authority to others in order for them to successfully complete assignments. Successful delegating involves clearly defining what's to be done and what the outcome should be before assigning the task. It's clearly and concisely communicating this information to the member or committee handling the task or project in the beginning and then letting the volunteer or committee complete the task. When people step up to serve as committee chairs or accept specific tasks or projects, it makes them think about their capabilities of becoming a leader.

#### Make resources available

Not only is delegating critical to a positive experience for your volunteers, but making sure the committee or volunteers know what resources they have to complete the task is important.

#### Right Attitude

Positive and upbeat attitudes of the association officers, board members and committee chairs will motivate volunteers and contribute to an atmosphere that attracts, engages and involves members. The team spirit and a realistic "can do" attitude will make the difference in achieving association goals.

- Make volunteers feel needed and appreciated Always express the association's appreciation and thanks to your volunteers. Every volunteer is invaluable to the association. Your association will not function without your volunteers...keep reminding everyone how important their time, talent and skills are to the association.
- Make sure communication channels go both ways

Let your members know how their work in committees and individual tasks make the association work. When a committee is finished with a project or a volunteer completes a task,



make sure you explain how their work has helped the association meet its mission. Ask your volunteers for feedback; how did they like their tasks or volunteer experience and what, if any, changes would they make to the assignment or experience? It's important for the association leadership to pay attention to volunteer feedback. Officers and chairs need to listen to what your volunteers have to say, too. As the people on the front lines, they often have a lot of valuable information to share and important questions and concerns that you need to address.

• Show volunteers what they have achieved and how they have contributed to the association Volunteers need to know their time, talent and expertise have made a difference. Always take the time to share with the volunteers and the association their impact. Photos and videos can help your volunteers see the results of their work, even if it's occurring on the other side of the world. Think about using a volunteer to document the roles and assignments of other association volunteers to tell the story of volunteering for the association.

#### Ask your volunteers back

Once you have volunteers excited and willing to help out, be sure not to drop them and move on...ask them to volunteer for other tasks and committees. Let volunteers know how much you value them and what a difference they made in your association's success and why you need their continued help...think WIIFM.

### THE VOLUNTEER DIDN'T DELIVER, NOW WHAT?

Everyone who relies on volunteers has experienced the challenge and disappointment of a volunteer not delivering. Sometimes life gets in the way for the volunteer and when they originally sign up, they thought they had the time and ability. But, when it comes to delivering, they aren't showing up and didn't meet expectations. This is a challenge for all neighborhood leaders, learning which members will follow through, are dependable and reliable to meet the expectations of the job to realizing some members like to volunteer but don't show up or deliver. This will always be the downside of relying on volunteers and most of the time, you find out about these volunteers through experience.

You have a few options. These options should be done one-on-one, as to not embarrass the volunteer or the association. It is in everyone's interest to allow the member to save face and not be publicly humiliated for not living up to their volunteer commitment. This is not an environment you want to create for your association and it doesn't do any good being punitive with a volunteer, which is a lose-lose situation. Get over the frustration and move on focusing on what needs to be done to meet expectations.





#### Consider any of these options:

- Check in and reinforce the commitment and expectations: In any volunteer assignment, it is best to have dates of when you will be asking for a status from the volunteer. This way you will be able to determine if the assignment is on track. If it doesn't look like the assignment will be completed or meet association expectations, sit down with the volunteer and go over the written job description, timeline and expectations that they originally agreed to. Discuss with the volunteer if they feel they will be able to accomplish the task as expected and on time. The volunteer may rise up and meet the expectations and deadline. If the volunteer is waffling, then you may want to reassign the task. Keep your frustration and possible anger in check. Most likely the volunteer is feeling bad enough. Make a decision and move on to the next step.
- Reassigning the task: It may require early on talking with the volunteer and recruiting another member to assist them or assume the volunteer assignment. This is why you want to create a timeline at the start, which includes some check and balances, to make sure the assignment will be completed on time.

- **Recruiting additional help:** Ask the original volunteer if you can bring on another volunteer to help. The volunteer may appreciate this and even have a suggestion of another member they would like to work with.
- Declining the offer with a "no thanks": Yes, you can say "no thanks" to someone who volunteers for a specific task when they have a track record of not coming through or are causing problems. If you are going turn down the offer of a volunteer, do it privately as to not embarrass the volunteer. Tell them the reason why you don't feel the specific assignment is a good fit for them; focus on the behavior and skills that may not fit with the assignment versus simply telling them they are not the best person for the job. Be respectful and appreciative for them willing to donate their time and talent.

Bottom line, address the situation where the volunteer is unable to accomplish the task early on so that the assignment can be completed and the association's expectations are met. Remember to do this respectful and with appreciation for the member's willingness to serve.

## INCREASING THE ODDS FOR SUCCESS

How do you increase the odds of the volunteer completing the task on time and meeting the expected outcome? There isn't a fool proof answer to this age old problem. Here are some tips to increase the success of volunteers completing their tasks.

#### Expectations and outcomes in writing

Yes, you have read this throughout this guide, this can't be emphasized enough. Be sure the volunteer is clear and understands the tasks and deadlines. Give them a copy to keep.

#### Go over resources

Make sure at the start of the assignment they know and understand how to use resources needed to accomplish the task.

#### Delegate

Let them do the assignment the way they want to do it as long as the outcomes and deadlines are met and they haven't offended others or embarrassed the association. Delegating to volunteers, then micromanaging them or doing their tasks before they get a chance is the fastest way to sabotage volunteers. It also sends the message that you don't think they are up to doing the tasks or that your way is the only way. By not delegating, you are going to find yourself having to "do everything" to keep the association running. By doing this, burnout is just around the corner.

#### Schedule checkups

Based on the length of tasks, build in dates for status briefing with the volunteer. This will help to keep the project or assignment on track.



### REMEMBER TO CELEBRATE YOUR VOLUNTEERS

Even though members are willing to volunteer for your neighborhood organization, it's important to keep in mind that it's not what they can do for you that keeps them coming back, it's what you can do for them...WIIFM. Given the points outlined in this guide, it's easy to see that many volunteer retention factors are under the direct control of the association. Although it appears there are many aspects to juggle, in terms of your association's time and energy investment, it's worth the effort to use and keep a volunteer.

It's important to remember that your association's general goals should be twofold. First and foremost, is to fulfill its mission within the neighborhood. And, secondly, enhancing the lives of your volunteers who contribute to the achieving the association's mission. By focusing on these two goals, your association will see an increase in volunteer involvement and retention.



### TOP 10 BEST PRACTICES RECRUITING AND KEEPING VOLUNTEERS

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." -- Benjamin Franklin

- Clear, concise, written volunteer assignments

   spend time outlining what the assignment
   or job involves, expectations/outcomes, time/
   deadlines, resources and authority to accomplish
   the assignment.
- 2. Use the What's In It For Me method and find out what your neighbor cares about and enjoys doing or wants to learn about and match their interest with the needs of the association - train volunteers properly.
- 3. **Be careful not to overwhelm** neighborhood volunteers with tasks/assignments. Make sure new volunteers have assignments that may

be quickly accomplished to promote their satisfaction, while getting association business done.

- 4. Be realistic with the assignment and timeline. Build in more than enough time for the assignment to be completed by "part time" volunteers...remember that volunteers have many other commitments that compete for their time and energy.
- 5. **Delegate** delegate delegate! Delegate the authority to complete the assignment/ job. Recognize that others may not complete the assignment the way you may have, this is why it is important to outline the assignment outcomes/expectations at the start of the assignment and then allow the volunteer or committee to complete the job/assignment.



- 6. **Build in checks and balances.** As a part of the assignment identify specific dates that have been agreed to by the volunteer or committee for the volunteer/committee to update the president/association on the status of the assignment. Make sure the dates allow time for any corrections that may be needed to ensure the assignment is completed on time.
- Stay positive when receiving updates or discussing the status of the assignment with the volunteer, committee or during a meeting. Staying positive, even if the assignment is off track, will help keep the volunteer/committee motivated.
- Reinforce the expected outcome(s) and express confidence in the individual(s) assigned the task/job publicly...don't go overboard... need to stay genuine in your comments.
- 9. **Recognition** is its own form of currency! Recognize volunteers for their time, efforts and accomplishments. Let them know that their services are always needed and appreciated.
- 10. **Have FUN** and continue to utilize the talents, experiences and interest of volunteers – keep them engaged and committed, without over committing and burning the volunteers out.

# FUN, INEXPENSIVE WAYS TO SAY THANKS

- 100 Grand Candy Bar: You're worth even more to our association! Or Thanks so much! You're GRAND!
- 2. Almond Joy Candy Bar: Thanks for volunteering and being JOY to work with!
- 3. Whoppers: That was a whopper of an idea (or job) . . . and what a great one it was!
- 4. Animal Crackers: Our neighborhood (association) would be a zoo without you.
- 5. Any Candy: It's a real treat to work with you. Thanks!
- 6. Babe Ruth Candy Bar: Thanks for going to bat for our association (neighborhood)!
- 7. Cadbury Creme Egg: You've been an EGG–celent volunteer! Thanks so much!
- 8. Candy Corn: This is kinda CORNY, but you're the best volunteer! Thanks!
- 9. Candy Hearts: Thank you for putting your heart into our association.
- 10. Charleston Chew: If we had to pick 1 person to be thankful for, we'd CHEWs you!
- 11. Dots: Your help was right on the DOT! Thanks so much!
- 12. Extra Gum: Thanks for going the EXTRA mile
- 13. Gobstopper: Just STOPping by to say thanks!



- 14. Gold Wrap Candies/Kisses: You are more precious than gold to our association (neighborhood).
- 15. Good and Plenty: You deserve PLENTY of thanks!
- 16. Gummy Bears/Cinnamon Bears: This BEAR-ly does it justice, but thank you!
- 17. Gushers: We're just GUSHING to tell you thanks!
- 18. Hersey Kisses & Hug Candies: Here's a kiss and a hug for all you do for our association!
- 19. Jawbreaker: Your help was JAW-dropping! Thanks so much!
- 20. Jolly Rancher: We better JOLLY-well say thanks!
- 21. Lemonhead: You really helped me get aHEAD. Thank you!



- 22. Lifesavers: You're a lifesaver!
- 23. Mike and Ike: We L-IKE to say thanks!
- 24. Milk Duds: We'd be a DUD without you. Thanks for all you do!
- 25. Milky Way Candy Bar: You're a star in our galaxy!
- 26. Mints: Thanks! That MINT a lot to me.
- 27. Mounds Candy Bar: You've made a mound of difference to our neighborhood!
- 28. Peanut M&Ms: Our association would have gone NUTS without you! Thanks!
- 29. Peanuts: The association is nuts about you!
- 30. Peppermints or York Peppermint Patties: When it comes to helping out, you're worth a mint!
- 31. Popcorn: You add POP to our association!
- 32. Red Hots Candies: Thank you for being a red hot volunteer!
- 33. Reese's Pieces: I'd be in PIECES without you. Thanks for all you do!

- 34. Skittles: You've been the RAINBOW in our cloud. Thank you for coming to the rescue!
- 35. Snickers Candy Bar: You never snicker about helping out; thanks for being such a great volunteer!
- 36. Starburst Candy: You're a STAR for volunteering! Or You're a superSTAR! We are so thankful we could BURST!
- 37. Swedish Fish: You are o-FISH-ally the best! Thanks!
- 38. Sweet Tarts: Thanks so much! You're a SWEETHEART!
- 39. Tootsie Roll: You're on a ROLL! Thanks for volunteering!
- 40. Winterfresh Gum: Thank you for staying fresh with your ideas.



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