



***Cultivating Community  
Means Never Having to Say  
Thank You .... and Other Phrases that  
Discourage Community Engagement***



## Our Vision

- All people have a deep reverence for our natural areas
- All people are connected to them and taking ownership of them
- All people know of their obligation and privilege to care for them
- All people consider the impacts their decisions have on all other beings



- **We need thousands more people**
- **We need engagement at a deeper level**
- **We need hundreds of devoted, learning-oriented, community leaders**





- **Collaboration**
- **Initiative**
- **Participation**
- **Inviting people into the work**
- **Sharing the work**



*When we say “thank you for coming, I couldn’t have done it without you!,” it creates an environment that it’s the staff thing and the folks that came are just volunteers that are helping out. It’s only staff that’s doing the great job.*





- What's said: "Thanks for helping us! We really appreciate our wonderful volunteers! Here, have some swag!"
- What volunteer hears and thinks: "This was great, they are so nice. My job here is done. This is their gig, they don't need me anymore. I'll take my swag, go home, and forget this happened in an hour"





- Exchange was polite, but uses us/them (in group/out group) and possessive language
- Volunteer not invited into the group, doesn't see themselves as real part of the project
- Low stakes for involvement, low likelihood for return – will remain a “once-a-year” sort of thing
- Volunteers with high potential to contribute are looking for more



- Thank you implies ownership
- We thank guests, people who help us out





- **“Our restoration crew has been working hard to clean up brush, fallen trees, and invasive shrubs to keep the forest preserves beautiful, healthy, & thriving.”**
- **“We don’t need volunteers to help with burns. We have enough equipment to do it without them.”**



“I always thought it was  
someone else’s job”



**“If you are new to burning, this will be a learning experience. What’s better than on the job training! :) Most of us who have become prescribed burn volunteers have learned this way. You will learn by doing, but, I will provide information on responsibilities and safety.”**



# Bureaucracy vs. Facilitation



**What do you say  
instead?**

**What policy, guideline,  
rule, or practice might  
need changed?**



**Our vision is too important to not do this hard work and challenge our biases .... language matters.**

