

A CULTURE OF APPRECIATION

Diverse talents, perspectives, ideas and creations of individuals are at the heart of Burning Man. From these individual sparks, collaborative efforts are initiated and executed in ways that make ours a uniquely connected and accomplished community. Burning Man strives to create a culture where everyone recognizes and appreciates the skills and contributions of others, however, sometimes each of us get caught up in a new project or are striving to meet a deadline and we forget to take the time to appreciate ourselves, others, and the amazing experiences that we share together. There are times when each of us may, for one reason or another, whether real or perceived, feel unappreciated. This document examines the nature of appreciation and outlines some ways that we can make appreciation an integral part of our daily lives and our interaction as a community.

What is appreciation?

1 a: a judgement that is critically favorable **b:** sensitive awareness; especially: recognition of aesthetic values **c:** an expression of admiration, approval, or gratitude

2: increase in value

Why is appreciation important? It makes people feel:

- Like valued members of the Project.
- That their ideas are needed, wanted, and welcomed.
- They are contributing to a higher cause and community.
- Their artistic expressions are valid and enjoyed by their peers.
- Others are sensitive to their feelings and needs.
- Their hard work is recognized by others and is making a difference.
- They are honored as individuals.
- They are respected.

In order to understand appreciation, it is important to understand that there are times when any of us may feel unappreciated. It is important to watch body language, facial expressions, signs of stress and other clues that someone is feeling unappreciated. When people feel unappreciated there are immediate and long term effects on the larger community or organization.

What are some reasons that people feel unappreciated?

(The key is how the individual *perceives* the situation, regardless of whether it is actually true).

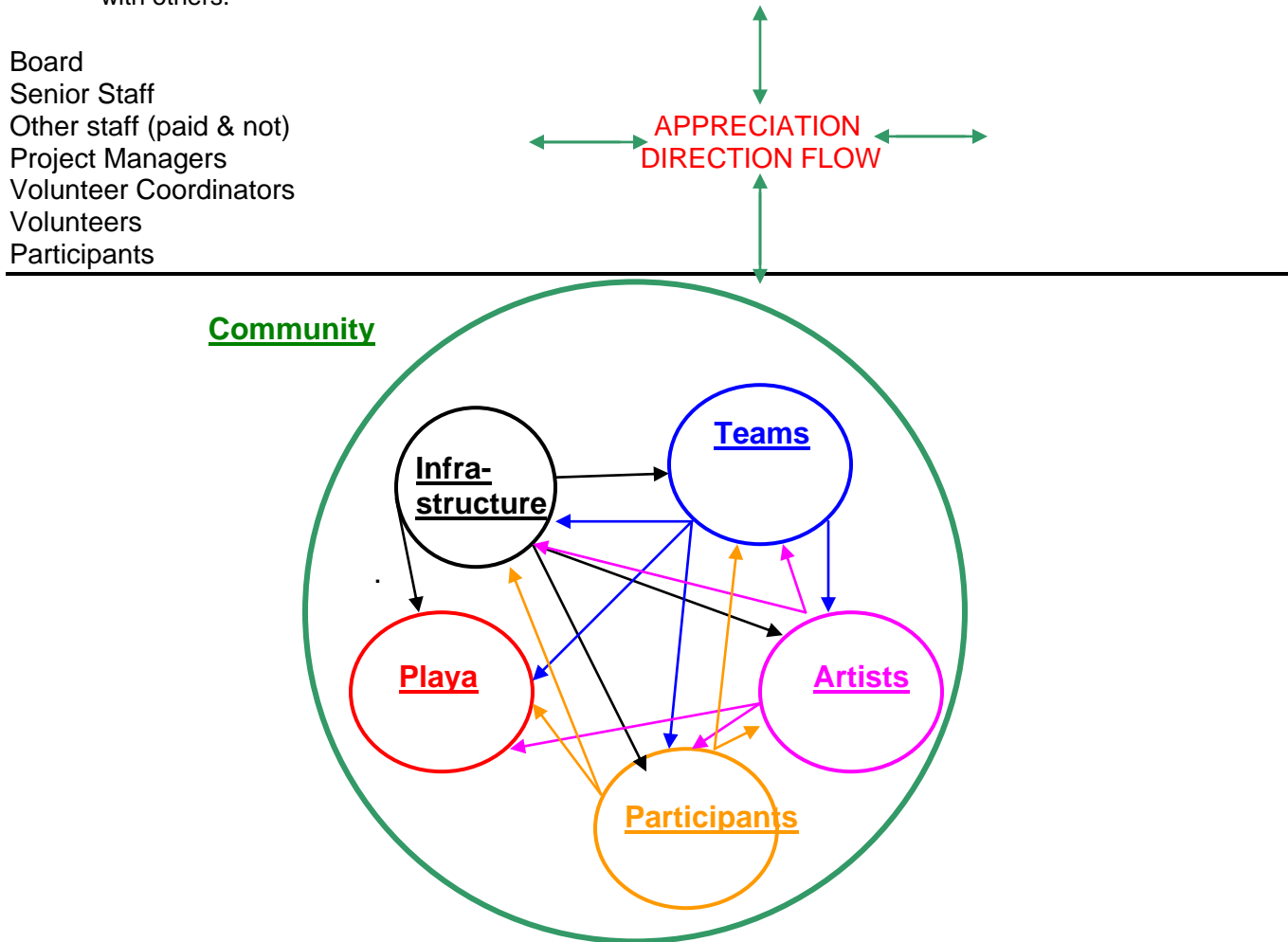
- Only receiving negative feedback
- Feeling that information is being withheld
- Feeling dumped on instead of delegated to
- Implications that they are expendable
- No celebration of successes
- Feeling misunderstood
- Perception of insincere appreciation
- When reinforcement is random
- When rewards are inconsistent
- Feeling taken for granted

What are the impacts and possible costs of people feeling unappreciated?

- Volunteers may walk off the job and/or not come back again, leaving someone else to pick up the pieces, possibly staff or other volunteers, or projects may not get completed. This takes the time of other team members who could have been working on other projects.
- People may become apathetic and unmotivated, causing their contributions to decrease in quality and quantity.
- Artists may become uninspired and may stop making art for Burning Man.
- Participants may not come back to Burning Man, they may discourage their friends from attending, or they may choose to not get connected to their regional group. Or perhaps they do come back, but they are pissed so they leave trash and are disrespectful to the community.
- Surveys show that a lack of appreciation and recognition is a primary reason why people quit their jobs. In the corporate world, it is estimated that it costs approximately \$30,000 to hire an employee, between the administrative overhead, time spent by other employees during interview process, trainings required, etc. A similar effect occurs for Burning Man.

Who should be giving appreciation and who should be receiving it?

- Burning Man’s culture necessitates the multi-directional flow of appreciation.
- Appreciation should flow down through all levels including the BM staff (paid or not), managers, volunteers, and to the ticket-buying participant.
- Appreciation should flow up through all levels as well.
- Appreciation should also flow equally throughout the BM infrastructure, among BM teams, to artists, participants, and to the playa alike.
- Basically appreciation should flow everywhere to everyone and be a regular part of our daily interactions with others.



Now that we have an understanding of appreciation, reasons why someone may feel unappreciated, possible impacts on our community as a result, and the flow of appreciation throughout our community, it's time learn how to cultivate a culture of appreciation.

HOW IS A CULTURE OF APPRECIATION CREATED AND MAINTAINED?

A number of infrastructure improvements have contributed significantly and will continue to foster an appreciative culture. The creation of job descriptions, establishment of clearer reporting structures, expansion of communication efforts, public forums, and investment in management training are great steps towards recognizing the needs of individuals throughout our organization and community, but, as managers, leaders, and individuals, the rest is up to us.

As the previous diagrams illustrate, in order to foster a culture of appreciation, appreciation must flow in all directions and between all members of our community. Given the complex relationships and roles and shifting dynamics, there is no single approach to appreciation. Instead, individuals must choose tools, methods, and mindsets for each situation and relationship to let others they interact with know they are appreciated, and remember to do it on a daily basis.

The following categories of recommendations, reminders and suggestions contain some of the ways that each of us can build an ethos for a culture of appreciation:

- **Foster the big picture**
- **Create and maintain effective infrastructure**
- **Adopt an appreciative management style**
- **Initiate check-ins**
- **Manage workloads**
- **Reward and recognize contributions**
- **Invest in people**

Foster the big picture:

- Acknowledge, remember and remind team members we are *all* important to the creation, survival and evolution of the Burning Man Project (each person, department, and team).
- As much as you can, be aware of the parts that others play.
- Promote the ethos that the Burning Man community cannot function effectively without any of its parts (teams) - all teams and individuals make up the whole.
- Increase and promote understanding and awareness of other departments and the role they play in the big picture.
- Appreciate and support the people you work with by respecting their deadlines.
- Introduce yourself to people on other teams unrelated to your department and find out what they do, and encourage team members to do the same.
- Start from a place of valuing people's contribution (give them the benefit of the doubt!) even if you may not understand their role or they haven't been involved for as long.
- Wherever possible, share "big picture" information with your department or team so they feel part of the bigger vision. Explore setting up infrastructure or systems to do this (see next category).
- Organize and encourage interdepartmental outings and activities to encourage appreciation of other teams (take your team on a "field trip").
- Create a Big Picture, Latest News, Appreciation Newsletter that reaches all team members – highlighting achievements, efforts, newbies, oldbies, and more.

Create and maintain effective infrastructure:

- Create a clear organizational structure within your department or team.
- Clearly define reporting structures, oversight and accountability.
- Create infrastructure to systematically share information – discuss and design this with your team.
- Actively share information with team members and the people you manage so they have what they need to do their job effectively and see the bigger vision.

Adopt an appreciative management style:

- Foster a sense of responsibility/accountability, autonomy and empowerment on your team (through delegation, positive reinforcement, training, and mentorship).
- Delegate tasks when possible (try to avoid micro-management and directing). Empower your team by allowing them to own their tasks, with your support. Continue to develop your own delegation skills through training or research. (Training material about delegation is available from the Volunteer Resource Team,

and on the web.)

- Be supportive and positive in your communications (one on one and publicly).
- Address difficult issues privately (not in a group setting).
- Be mindful of your communication style when discussing a difficult issue. Keep your voice calm and your emotions checked. Use active listening and offer constructive feedback rather than criticism. Try to understand the other person's point of view.
- Personalize your praise and feedback – it feels better than generic appreciation. Go out of your way to mention particular things that someone did or the specialized way they did them. Let them know you notice their individuality (special-ness, particular skills, dedication, etc).
- Weave appreciation in to your daily interactions: add appreciation pieces to your job description and other job descriptions you create.
- Develop a system/method to show appreciation that works best for your team or staff. Be consistent in its application: make appreciation a regular part of your work, keep records, don't leave anybody out, and follow up.
- Include an appreciation section (agenda item) in meetings.
- Include an appreciation section in staff reports.
- At the same time, be aware of the pitfalls of giving public appreciation and acknowledgement (at public events, for example). It's easy to leave someone out without knowing it, which can cause them to feel unappreciated and resentful.
- Remember that as a leader your role is to inspire and motivate as well as to supervise your team – empower and help them to shine, and everyone benefits.

Initiate check-ins:

- Initiate regular check-ins with people that do work for you and/or with you. Identify topics in advance if possible.
- Choose or develop questions that work best with your team. (remember different people hear things differently). Check-in questions may include.
 - How's it going?
 - Are there any issues that I should know about?
 - Have you encountered any roadblocks and how can I help?
 - Do you have any ideas you'd like to bounce off me?
 - Do you have what you need to succeed?
 - Are there other tasks or parts of the organization that interest you?
 - Would you like to discuss anything else?
- Actively listen to what the person has to say and follow up as needed.
- Ask for feedback, ideas, and ways to enable.
- Let people know that you value their ideas and welcome input (even if not ultimately acted on).

Manage workloads:

- Try to be aware of the number, complexity and size of tasks on the plates of the people you manage or work with.
- Remember that people may be doing work for other teams and managers, and that work may not already be on your radar.
- Help prioritize tasks when assigned and reassess priorities, deadlines and projects as needed
- Recognize and respect people's bandwidth and help them to not over commit.
- If someone finds that they have more tasks than they can handle, work together to come up with a solution.

Reward and recognize contributions:

- Recognize that value of work and personal sacrifices are often greater than any compensation we are able to provide, if any at all. Acknowledge this at an individual level. Let them know it is appreciated and their contributions are valued.
- Develop a wish list with the individuals on your team and work together to find ways to make them feel appreciated.
- Have thank you celebrations when tasks are completed or when people are overworked and need a break.
- Offer recognition and rewards with consistency at the individual and team level and across departments.
- Offer creative rewards and recognition to team members.

Invest in people:

- Remember that with your support, your teammates are valuable resources for the future of Burning Man – proactively educate and develop them.
- Take the time to really listen to what people would like to do and give them opportunities to try new things.
- People are the most valuable asset you may ever find. Train them and treat them as if they are priceless! The payback will be huge.
- Increase your own skills as a manager. Continue learning how to delegate, actively listen and communicate effectively.
- Mentor people you believe in and teach them what you know – cultivate their skills and efforts.
- Create internal training programs. Bring in outside training and development as appropriate.
- Make limited funding available to individuals who want to expand their skills (using books, classes, seminars, etc).
- Create growth paths and work with and support your people to find the journey that is right for them.

Great! How do we get started?

A number of the recommendations and reminders listed above describe a mindset which should be adopted by every member of our organization, especially those managing staff, volunteers, artists and theme camps. This starts with you. Each of us can probably find a few items in the lists above that we already do really well and we should keep doing those. In addition, each of us can probably find some areas where we can do better. Identify a few areas you would like to improve on, and develop some methods or use some of the suggestions above to let the people around you know that you appreciate them. Pretty soon, these items will become a vital part of our day-to-day interactions.