

# Managing Volunteers During COVID-19

Volunteer management is a busy and varied role at the best of times, but it is even more important during times of emergency. The requirements of your role may change a lot during these periods but the health, safety and welfare of you and your volunteers is of the utmost importance above all else.

Depending on the nature of your volunteer program, you may have to curtail activities, or increase others. You may even need to provide a whole new program that you haven't delivered before. Here are some suggestions of things you can do now:

## 1 Balance or re-balance your workload.

If you are working from home, make sure you plan some downtime and where possible get some physical exercise outdoors while practicing social distancing - it is important to be able to switch off. Update your phone message or email signature to tell people your revised working hours.

## 2 Let your volunteers know they are supported and appreciated.

Communication is key, even if it's just to say "we don't have much for volunteers to do right now" or "we are changing the way we do things; it'll take us a little time to adjust and we'll get back to you". Let your volunteers know what is happening.

## 3 Prioritize health above all else.

You may not have collected personal data from your volunteers in the past in relation to their being in one of the "at risk" groups for COVID-19, but you need to ask that question now. This may seem intrusive, but remember the health of us all is everyone's primary concern.

## 4 Review your volunteer program risk assessment.

It's unlikely that you have had to consider a pandemic when assessing risk for your volunteer program. Now is the time to reassess all elements of your work and include risks of working during a pandemic.

## 5 Have a contingency plan in place.

We all know that Volunteer Managers can be a "one man/woman" show, so make sure you have a contingency plan in place, in case you need to self-isolate or restrict your movements. Educate co-workers about how to run your volunteer program in your absence.

## 6 Do not work/volunteer if you are ill.

If you are sick and showing any of symptoms of Coronavirus (COVID-19), you should withdraw immediately, following all guidelines to protect yourself and others. Go to: [CDC CORONAVIRUS GUIDELINES](#).

## 7 Do not let anyone volunteer when ill.

If a volunteer is feeling unwell make sure that they can disengage promptly without concern or guilt. Sometimes volunteers feel guilty that they are letting the organization down. Make sure that they know their health and wellbeing, and that of the people you serve, is your number one concern.

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## 8 Get your information from reliable sources.

Coronavirus (COVID-19) can be stressful and worrisome, so encourage your volunteers to follow only recognized news channels, there is a lot of misleading information floating around on Social Media. Check these websites for the most reliable updates on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) - [CDC CORONAVIRUS GUIDELINES](#) or [MS DEPT OF HEALTH](#).

## 9 Encourage Communication

Encourage your volunteers to reach out to you if they have a question or concern about their volunteering, as one volunteer's concern could be the concern of 20 volunteers.

## 10 Follow CDC guidelines around social distancing.

If volunteering is to continue you need to adopt a social distancing/no handshake policy at your organization. Volunteers are usually friendly people so encourage waving or verbally greeting people instead. Remember: everyone should stay at a distance of at least 6 feet apart.

## 11 Implement proper hygiene.

Provide facilities for volunteer hand-sanitizing and hand-washing, and provide clear signage to encourage this.

## 12 Volunteer and client safety should be your primary concern.

If continuing interaction between volunteers and vulnerable persons, take all recommended precautions, including but not limited to: PPE, gloves, eye and face masks, frequent hand-washing, and use of sanitizer.

## 13 Explore virtual volunteering.

If your facility has closed and volunteers can no longer volunteer on site, explore the possibility of remote volunteering. Volunteers could help with phone/text/email outreach to clients or other volunteers; or they may be able to help with social media outreach or administrative work.

## 14 Think about which of your services is a priority.

Not all volunteers will be able to continue working with you. You may need to move and educate volunteers from one area to another to maintain capacity to deliver your priority services.

## 15 Keep volunteers mentally healthy.

Volunteering during a pandemic can be stressful for everyone, ensure that volunteers are taking shorter shifts and longer breaks, and encourage them to not push themselves.

## 16 Think about training.

If you have to train or orient volunteers, think about how you are going to do this. Are you able to ensure social distancing in a training setting or do you need to offer virtual training instead?

**Contact your local Hub to find out about valuable resources for your organization.**

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