



Supporting Volunteers During a Pandemic

A pandemic requires community organisations to rethink how volunteers can safely contribute while ensuring their wellbeing.

A pandemic – like the one the world experienced with Covid-19 - brings disruption, social restrictions, and cancellations that can significantly impact community organisations.

For some organisations, this means fewer services, lower attendance, and a drop in fundraising. Others may see an overwhelming increase in demand. In both cases, volunteers remain a crucial resource. Ensuring their safety—physically, mentally, and emotionally—while keeping them engaged requires careful planning and adaptability.

Be Prepared

Pandemic planning is now a standard part of risk management for community organisations. Include Volunteer Engagement in your response plan by:

- Identifying essential volunteer roles,
- Scaling back non-critical activities,
- Offering remote volunteering where possible.

Prioritise Health & Safety

The wellbeing of your volunteers should be a top priority. Keep volunteers safe with proactive steps:

- Set up handwashing and sanitising stations,
- Provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) like masks and gloves,
- Encourage social distancing,
- Offer remote work where feasible.

Stay informed by regularly checking public health guidelines to ensure your organisation follows the latest advice on preventing disease spread.

Be Adaptable

Adapting volunteer roles ensures that community organisations remain resilient during a crisis. By offering flexible, meaningful opportunities, you keep volunteers engaged while continuing to support the people who need it most.

It is important to help volunteers understand their options, and feel supported. Some volunteer roles can be moved online, while other in-person roles can be adjusted with PPE and distancing. Support high-risk volunteers with low-contact tasks like phone calls, letter writing, or social media outreach. New roles like wellbeing check-ins, virtual tutoring or community liaison volunteers, can also help keep volunteers engaged.

Keep Communication Open

Regular contact is key to ensuring volunteers remain active, valued and informed in changing circumstances. Consider using online platforms to hold virtual meetings, training sessions, and team check-ins. These can keep volunteers connected and engaged, even if they're taking a break from active volunteering.

Remember to consider alternative communication methods - not all volunteers have internet access. Ensure inclusivity by providing phone updates, printed materials, or other offline engagement options.

For those volunteers who may not be tech-savvy, provide training and tech support to help them engage digitally, where possible.

Stay Flexible

As situations change, so do volunteer needs. Encourage regular and ongoing feedback to:

- Identify challenges,
- Improve processes,
- Adjust roles when needed.

By keeping volunteers engaged, informed, and supported, you maintain a strong sense of community—even in difficult times.