

COVID-19 planning: Tips for Non Profits and Volunteer Engagement Leaders

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Tips for nonprofits and volunteer engagement leaders as you prepare your organisation's volunteers for COVID-19.

1. Find out if your organisation has a **BCP** (Business Continuity Plan). This is the type of situation for which that plan was made. Read it, analyse it, and see if volunteers are included in it. If so, this will give you a starting point. If not, advocate to leadership that information on volunteers be added ASAP.

2. Communicate with the volunteers involved in your organisation. **Communication is key**, even if it's *"things are changing quickly and we will have more information soon."* Guidance you can share right away includes:

- *Stay home if you are sick. Individuals who arrive on site with symptoms will be sent home.* Outline a clear system for getting in touch with you/the organisation when cancelling a shift.
- *Please take all necessary precautions if you are immunocompromised, or live with/care for someone who is immunocompromised. We support your decisions, including and up to a decision to temporarily suspend your own volunteering during this uncertain time.* Again, outline a clear system for communicating with you/the organisation.
- *You may want to consider implementing a no handshakes, hugs or hongi policy at our organisation while COVID-19 remains a threat. If so, ask that people do not hongi, hug or shake hands with staff, volunteers or clients. Recommend waving or verbally greeting people instead.*
- Please *thoroughly and frequently wash your hands*, and follow other guidance provided by the **Ministry of Health** around disease containment.
- Offer additional information on if and how your organisation's services will be impacted as it becomes available.

3. Prioritise volunteer and client safety. If continuing interaction between volunteers and vulnerable clients, take all **recommended precautions**, including gloves, masks, frequent hand-washing, etc.

4. Where possible, include volunteers in decision-making around policies affecting them. Having volunteers at the table will ensure that their concerns are heard and addressed.

5. Consider if and how volunteers can work remotely. As many workplaces consider temporary office closures, it's important to think about how this could affect your volunteers and if there is work they can complete for your organisation while the office is closed. You also need to think through what tools/information/supplies they may need to complete this work and the process for submitting it or getting questions answered.

6. Plan for a volunteer workforce shortage.

- a. Survey volunteers to determine their availability to continue volunteering 1) currently, 2) if schools were to close, 3) if quarantined (only if remote volunteering is possible). For volunteers who have high availability, ask if they would be willing to increase their volunteerism temporarily to help fill gaps (given that they are healthy). Track responses and keep a database/spreadsheet of volunteers who anticipate availability in certain situations.
- b. Work with organisational leaders to prioritise programming/services delivered by volunteers and determine where the volunteer workforce should be focused if there is a significant decrease in availability. For example, programmes providing food for those experiencing poverty will be higher priority than advocacy or education programmes that could be postponed.

7. Postpone large-scale volunteer events or trainings in the next few months. Social distancing by avoiding crowds and events helps “flatten the curve” of the virus and will help keep cases within the capacity of our hospital system.

8. Understand that COVID-19 and the response effects people in multiple ways. Those who are elderly or immunocompromised are at increased threat for serious complications. People living in poverty are less equipped to prepare for a quarantine because they may not have disposable income to purchase bulk food and supplies. People in the Asian community are experiencing racism due to the virus. People who are underinsured or have no insurance are at greater risk of severe financial implications if they get sick. Those who have limited sick leave are afraid of what might happen if they take several weeks off of work. This list is nowhere near comprehensive, but should demonstrate that the people around you (including your organisation’s volunteers) may be affected by COVID-19 in multiple ways, some of which may not be known to you. Encouraging people to be cautious and take care of themselves is not only kind and safe, but also promotes equity.

This list is far from comprehensive, but is meant to give you a starting point as you look at your COVID-19 response and how it will affect your organisation and volunteer programme. Volunteering Auckland is currently assessing our own upcoming events and volunteer engagement plans and will be communicating updates as decisions are made. We will continue to closely monitor the situation and will provide information and share resources to help us all better understand how to move forward.

Adapted with thanks to [Energizeinc.com](https://energizeinc.com) and the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration, 2020