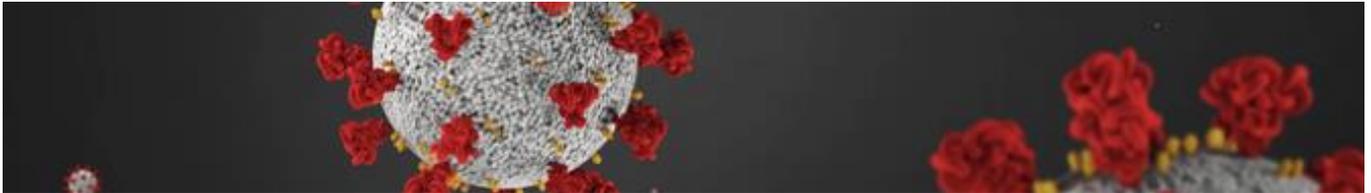




STAYING CONNECTED WITH YOUR VOLUNTEERS during Coronavirus (COVID-19)



How to communicate with your volunteers

In these challenging times, lots of volunteer involving organisations are finding themselves facing a prospect no-one relishes, and people don't often plan for - the task of closing or suspending their volunteer program or even their organisation.

As every volunteer manager knows, maintaining effective channels of communication with volunteers is essential to the success a thriving volunteer program.

To keep your volunteers engaged with your organisation beyond COVID-19, it's important to let them know what your organisation's needs are, express appreciation for their efforts, and make sure they understand how important their contributions really are.

Right now during the Covid-19 pandemic, getting that message across may be way down your organisational to-do list.

It's important that the message we send our volunteers about their volunteering during the pandemic is clear, has empathy and provides your volunteer with information about what the organisation is doing during this period.

Here are some tips on ensuring that you stay connected to your volunteers

1. Be open and honest with your volunteers and workforce about what's happening

As soon as a decision has been made regarding the suspension of your volunteer program, communicate with the everyone concerned. Be available to answer questions and concerns, and keep everyone informed of timelines and other arrangements. Answering a question with 'we don't know yet' is better than letting rumours and speculation run riot.

2. You want your volunteers to come back once restrictions of COVID-19 have lifted.

You can't just send your volunteers an email in 6 or 9 months' time asking them to report for duty.

If you are expecting them to come back you need to keep communicating with them, perhaps every month, even just to let them know that you are thinking about them.



Some information could include:

- sending volunteers regular updates on what the organisation is doing during the pandemic
- providing volunteers with links to COVID-19 resources
- communicating how your organisation will incorporate social distancing
- using multiple communication channels (emails, texts, social)
- being transparent as possible (this is a scary time for everyone).

3. Get your staff involved with communicating about the suspension of your volunteer program

Ask your CEO or senior manager to prepare a message to your volunteers about how important your volunteers are and that the organisation is thinking of them and missing them during this time – a short video is a perfect way to convey your organisation's message -be personal and talk about the value of volunteering to your organisation.

4. Understand that people may be upset

Although you've had time to plan and absorb the news, bear in mind that the announcement may come as a shock to some. Volunteers often have a long association with an organisation and feel a high level of commitment. You might need to be available to answer questions, and to listen to the concerns of volunteers. Make sure you provide a means for them to contact you with any concerns they have.

5. Think about 'rehoming' volunteering

Are there projects that your volunteers can undertake safely? Can you ask other organisations if they are in need of more volunteers and offer this as an alternative to your volunteers for the duration of the pandemic? Perhaps some of your services still need to be delivered and will continue? How will you incorporate health and safety measures into your program that protects your volunteers and staff? (See factsheet Your volunteer program during Covid-19)

6. Diversify

Is it possible for some of the volunteering to be done virtually? Are there projects that you never have time to complete, such as research or statistics that could now be done remotely? Virtual volunteering, informal volunteering, micro volunteering, episodic volunteering – all of these come to the fore in a time of crisis. Now is the time to start looking about how you can engage these different forms of volunteering to build up a sustainable volunteer program during COVID-19.

(see factsheet Diversifying your volunteer program)

7. Remember to celebrate

Do you celebrate volunteers' birthdays, special events, national holidays, National Volunteering Week? You can still do those things with an email, a personal thank you or a phone call. It's important that we still to engage and celebrate with our volunteers so they know that they are not forgotten and we are thinking of them!