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Leading volunteering in South Australia and the Northern Territory
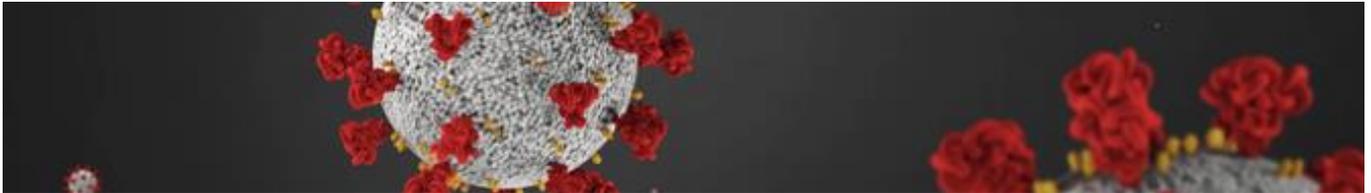
YOUR VOLUNTEER PROGRAM
during Coronavirus (COVID-19)

As COVID-19 virus spreads throughout Australia, there are many unknowns for not-for-profit organisations.

Your organisation is likely already experiencing disruptions to your usual way of doing business and will, undoubtedly, experience far more in the weeks and months to follow with the ongoing pandemic.

Your volunteers remain a vital resource during these unprecedented times. It is important to have a strategy on how to utilise their skills whilst also protecting them physically, mentally, and emotionally.

1. Communicate with your volunteers

Regular communication is key, even if it's "things are changing quickly and we will have more information soon."

Guidance you can share right now includes:

- Communicate that anyone from your workforce is unwell (volunteers and employees) they must stay at home. If a workforce member, who is unwell comes into the office, ensure that they go home and seek medical attention if needed. Ensure that you have a clear procedure for when volunteers can't make their rostered shift.
- Support your volunteer's decisions. This includes if they temporarily suspend their own volunteering. Ensure you outline clearly the procedure of how your volunteer can continue to communicate with you.
- If the organisation decides to suspend volunteer activities, commit to staying in regular contact with volunteers to keep them updated on the latest developments.

- You may have some volunteers that also require support. Try to establish ways where they can continue to have the social connection they may have received through volunteering.

2. Share the latest information from trusted authorities

- Use all your communication channels to provide clear information from trusted sources.
- Offer additional information on if and how your organisation's services will be impacted as it becomes available.

3. Promote social distance and strict hygiene practices

- Encourage employees and volunteers to keep a social distance of 1.5 metres from one another.
- Promote handshake free meetings – people can wave and verbally greet each other instead. Hold virtual meetings where possible.
- Encourage volunteers to thoroughly and frequently wash their hands, and follow other guidance provided by the Government and world health authorities around disease containment.

4. Prioritise volunteer and client safety

If continuing interaction between volunteers and vulnerable people is essential, ensure that the recommended precautions are taken including wearing gloves and masks, as well as frequent hand-washing, etc.

5. Include volunteers in decision-making

Include volunteers in policy discussions affecting them. Having volunteers at the table will ensure that their concerns are heard and addressed.

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6. 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. Is there any work they can undertake for your organisation while the office is closed. You also need to think through what tools, resources, information and supplies they may need to complete this work.

7. Plan for a volunteer 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).

Track responses and keep a database/spreadsheet of volunteers who anticipate availability in certain situations.

b) Determine where to prioritise services delivered by volunteers and determine where volunteers should be focused if there is a significant decrease in availability.

c) Volunteers should not replace full or part-time positions or be used in any position that would normally be undertaken by employees.

8. Spontaneous emergency volunteering – Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Volunteering SA&NT have been activated by the Government of South Australia to take registrations and refer spontaneous emergency volunteers to volunteer involving organisations during the pandemic. Please see website to register.

9. If you need volunteers

If you are a volunteer involving organisation and need volunteers, please contact Volunteering SA&NT.

10. Ensure that you follow all Government guidelines

11. Look after physical and mental health and wellbeing of your volunteers

Encouraging people to be cautious and take care of themselves. If your team is working from home encourage them to be physically active during the day and to stay in touch with their colleagues through email, phone and social media (as appropriate).

Support employees and volunteers to look after their mental wellbeing. Remind them to take time to switch off from all things COVID-19 and focus on things they can control. Ensure that your volunteers know that they can access your Employee Assist Program if they need extra support during this time (if that is included in your current volunteering policy).

Stay up to date with timely and relevant information

Volunteering SA&NT Coronavirus (COVID-19) information

Volunteer Pro

NT Government

SA Health

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Risk Assessment

World Health Organisation

Australian Department of Health