

Re-starting Your Volunteer Program

COVID-19 resource

It is time to plan for when things start turning back to normal – whatever normal will be.

From a volunteering perspective, there are some important issues for which you should start preparing for.

This guide is intended to assist Volunteering-involving Organisations to consider which programs may be recommended and how to safely re-engage volunteers.

While you might have your own governance process to guide your staff and volunteers, the COVID-19 situation is unique. The following seven steps may help guide your decision-making process if you are looking to safely return to the active delivery of programs and volunteers.

Step 1

Stay up-to date with the Victorian Government's restrictions and guidelines

Stay up-to date with the latest information about the spread of COVID-19 and the necessary steps you can take to stop the spread. Most up-to date information can be found on the [Department of Health and Human Services](#) website. Access advice and resources from [Safe Work Australia](#) on how to maintain a safe workplace.

Step 2

Assess your volunteering program status and the impact COVID-19 has had on your operations

One way to assess the impact of COVID-19 on your program is by using a Volunteering Program Status Snapshot checklist and an Individual Volunteer Program Assessment checklist. Consider the following:

What changes have been made to your services?

- They have ceased - e.g. stopped sporting fixtures, closed community centres or suspended home visits
- They have been modified e.g. only staffed by one or two volunteers at a time or delivered online
- There are now formal or informal groups active in a similar area

Has there been any loss of capacity?

- Financial - donations, grants, events, other fund-raising
- Staff
- Volunteers, governance, strategic partnerships
- Loss of in-kind support from partners - such as access to sporting grounds, club rooms or mobile vans

What restrictions remain in place that affect your operations?

Volunteering Program Status Snapshot Checklist

Name of Volunteer Program	Status
	Suspended Currently continuing in a modified format Currently continuing in the same format Notes:
	Suspended Currently continuing in a modified format Currently continuing in the same format Notes:
	Suspended Currently continuing in a modified format Currently continuing in the same format Notes:
	Suspended Currently continuing in a modified format Currently continuing in the same format Notes:

Individual Volunteer Program Assessment Checklist

Volunteer Program Name	
Status	Suspended Currently continuing in a modified format Currently continuing in the same format
CHECKLIST	
Ensure the safety of your volunteers, staff and clients	
	Can this program be delivered within government guidelines (for example in the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, as restrictions were lifted there were still specific guidelines about how a services could be delivered such as social distancing, click here to see the COVID-19 specifics.
	Given volunteers support many sectors across Australia, have you undertaken an industry specific risk assessment of the program to ensure

	you are taking all reasonable steps to protect the health and safety of your staff, volunteers and clients? (See an industry specific risk assessments)
	Do you have a WHS plan to specifically address the pandemic? The QLD Government has produced a great framework for COVID safe businesses
Invigorate your volunteer program	
	For each element of your volunteer program consider what you should let go? E.g. what activities have your volunteers not missed? Can these be let go or done differently?
	Have you consulted with your clients and volunteers about how your volunteer program could best be delivered in a post pandemic environment?
	Have you considered how the delivering of training and support, induction etc could be more fluid to meet volunteers needs? E.g. could it be online and delivered in a flexible format for volunteers?
	Should some of the modifications that were applied throughout the pandemic, such as working online or from home continue?
	Can you change the expectations and requirements of the volunteering roles to be more flexible, short term and fluid (research indicates that emerging volunteers are looking for more flexible roles so this may help you attract more volunteers)?
Apply best practice volunteer management	
	Once you have determined your new look volunteer program, apply the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement to ensure you are practicing best practice volunteer management.
	Ensure you are meeting your legal obligations through applying Justice Connects NFP Law National Volunteer Guide .

Step 3

Determine your priorities

What activities are the most important to re-establish? Do you have the resources to sustain these activities if restrictions continue?

Consider what might be impacted if there are further changes to restrictions, either a relaxation of current restrictions or introduction to more severe restrictions.

Step 4

Assess your risk using a COVID-19 risk register

As many of us are thinking of going back to work it is important to consider all possible risks to your volunteers when making the case to your organisation to reopen your volunteer

program. A risk register lists possible risks to volunteers when your program re-opens and puts reasonable mitigating steps in place.

This is a good way to show your board or manager and reassure them that you have considered all possibilities.

When completing the risk register it is important to bear in mind several factors which may impact how you modify your program:

- Physical environment (outdoors, indoors)
- Physical modifications that can be added (e.g. Perspex screen, social distancing floor markers)

- Physical goods in transit (will you need to quarantine materials coming in and out of your program)
- Any Personal Protective Equipment needs for your volunteers
- How you will meet contact tracing requirements should a COVID19 outbreak occur
- Whether you will limit volunteers who are at increased risk due to age or other pre-existing immune conditions
- Whether you will change your policy to require other conditions for volunteering (e.g. flu shot, temperature checks, downloading the [COVIDsafe app](#))
- Whether you need additional training or induction modifications to ensure volunteers are across the changes

- If you are unsure of how to begin, consider doing a walk through your service as a volunteer or consumer and act as if you have COVID19. Consider what you might touch, and how you might mitigate risk of infection.
- How you will communicate these changes

We have provided two examples that you can modify to fit to your program to help you get started.

Example 1

The below example looks at possible risks at a local council and measures that can be taken to minimise exposure.

Volunteer Activity	Physical location	Modifications made to physical location	Steps taken to comply with social distancing	Steps taken to comply with contact tracing requirements	Additional medical or safety checks	Additional PPE	Training required	Communication required
Communal rubbish clearing day at local park	Outside	None	Participants to bring own tools if possible Communal tools will be wiped down after use	Sign consent form about contact tracing	None	None	Signs displayed to remind people to wash hands frequently	In email

Community transport driver	In car	Minibus from council if available Perspex barrier between front and back seats in pool cars	Passengers to sit in back seat of car	Sign consent for contact tracing Shift spaces to minimize risk to community members if a transport driver is diagnosed with coronavirus	Proof of flu shot now required	Gloves and Mask	Training on correct use of gloves and mask in induction Drivers receive a weekly community safety briefing	Email and in person prior to shift
-----------------------------------	--------	--	---------------------------------------	--	--------------------------------	-----------------	---	------------------------------------

Example 2

This example looks at risks inherent in a [retail shop environment](#) and evaluates their severity and likelihood and what measures can be put in place to control them.

It is worth noting that in some programs the greatest risk to volunteers will be getting to and from their volunteering shift on public transport. Considering your reimbursement policy and how that covers volunteers, transport and/or parking may be an integral part of your risk assessment and minimization.

Step 5

Re-design your volunteering programs

Think of new ways you can be innovative with your volunteer programs. Here are some ideas:

- Consider re-designing all your activities and programs for remote delivery
- Eliminate programs that do not meet [social distancing standards](#) or cannot be delivered safely
- Undertake a risk-assessment on programs involving person-to-person contact

- Consider the issue of engaging volunteers who are [at higher risk](#) of contracting coronavirus
- Use the [risk hierarchy principles](#) to design strong controls and reduce risk
- Update policies and procedures
- Address volunteer privacy issues, such as dealing with health information of volunteer
- Ensure processes are clear
- Prepare to start programs: source information on COVID-19 awareness, develop training, re-design position descriptions and determine how many volunteers you need
- Ensure access to all volunteers. E.g. [health information in other languages](#)
- Encourage volunteers to download the [COVIDSafe](#) app
- Implement physical changes to your operations

Step 6

Re-integrate and recruit volunteers safely

As restrictions ease, you will have the opportunity to welcome your volunteers back. It is important to recognise that everyone will feel differently about this. Volunteer-involving

Organisations must support their volunteers to ensure they have a psychologically healthy and safe environment. Consider using the

Welcoming Volunteers Back Safely and the Recruitment Checklists.

Welcoming Volunteers Back Safely Checklist

	Have you reached out to each volunteer individually to understand their plans, how they are feeling and their intentions on whether they are returning?
	Have you developed a return to work plan for each volunteer based on their intentions, feelings and the risk assessments you have undertaken on the volunteering program?
	Have you communicated the return to work plan with each volunteer and gained their feedback?
	Are you regularly, openly and clearly communicating with all volunteers and staff about their return to work plans and expectations?
	Have you undertaken workforce planning now that you understand who will be returning? Will you have gaps in your service delivery if some volunteers decide not to return (see section Need More Volunteers for tips on recruiting volunteers)?
	Have you communicated with your volunteers and staff about the safety precautions you are putting in place to ensure that they and the clients you serve will be able to return to the workplace safely?
	Have you thought of all of the workplace psychological health considerations with volunteers and staff returning post pandemic (during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic Worksafe VIC released steps to manage risks to psychological health for organisations to implement)?
	Is your management team leading the way in promoting a healthy work environment to ensure volunteers and staff feel supported and welcome (see article from Beyond Blue here) . Do you volunteers have access to an EAP program? If not, can you expand your existing workplace program to cover volunteers?
	Do you have a communication plan in place to ensure that you are supporting and checking in with volunteers and staff in an ongoing capacity including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on how their work is contributing to and assisting the community • How they are feeling • If there is any further support they may need
	Have you re-inducted and trained all of your volunteers into the volunteering program and communicated any changes that may have been made including all health and safety training they may need to undertake their role safely?

Recruitment Checklist

	Connect with Volunteering Victoria for advice on how you can tailor your recruitment.
	Be specific in describing what you are asking someone to do, make sure this is reflected in the title of the role.

	Describe the outcome and results of the volunteering role as well as the activities they will undertake. People generally want to volunteer to make a difference so highlight what this is.
	Have a broad and specific recruitment strategy. E.g. Advertising on VIKTOR/VIRA recruitment platforms advertising the position with online special interest groups or the location of the volunteering roles Facebook groups.
	Use your people to get the word around, ask your volunteers and staff if they know anyone that would be suitable and ask them to advertise it in their networks.
	Sell the position! People are volunteering in their precious spare time. Make sure it sounds as if someone would want to do this.
	Answer questions before they are asked by including comprehensive information on the role for people through the advertisement process.
	Consider how flexible the role could be including short term options, can some it be done from home at any time? Promote these flexible benefits.
	Promote all of the benefits of the role and of volunteering generally.
	Consider if the pandemic has created any workforce solutions. For example, during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, sadly many people lost their jobs. This however provided an additional pool of people with time and skills to consider targeting for volunteer recruitment.

Step 7

Commence delivery of your priority programs or activities

- Ensure understanding and access to and compliance with cleaning, hygiene, social distancing, and PPE requirements
- Make accommodations to your program for any changes arising in demand, resources availability or interface with other groups or Volunteer-involving Organisations
- Check in with volunteers to support their physical and psychology well-being