

# RESPONDING TO A PANDEMIC:

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR  
VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS



VolunteeringACT  
an inclusive Canberra



First published in 2020 by Volunteering Queensland Inc. and reproduced by VolunteeringACT

**Enquiries are welcome at:**

VolunteeringACT  
Level 2, 202 City Walk, Canberra City 2601  
(02) 6251 4060  
policy@volunteeringact.org.au  
emergencyvolunteering.com.au  
volunteeringact.org.au

**Copyright**

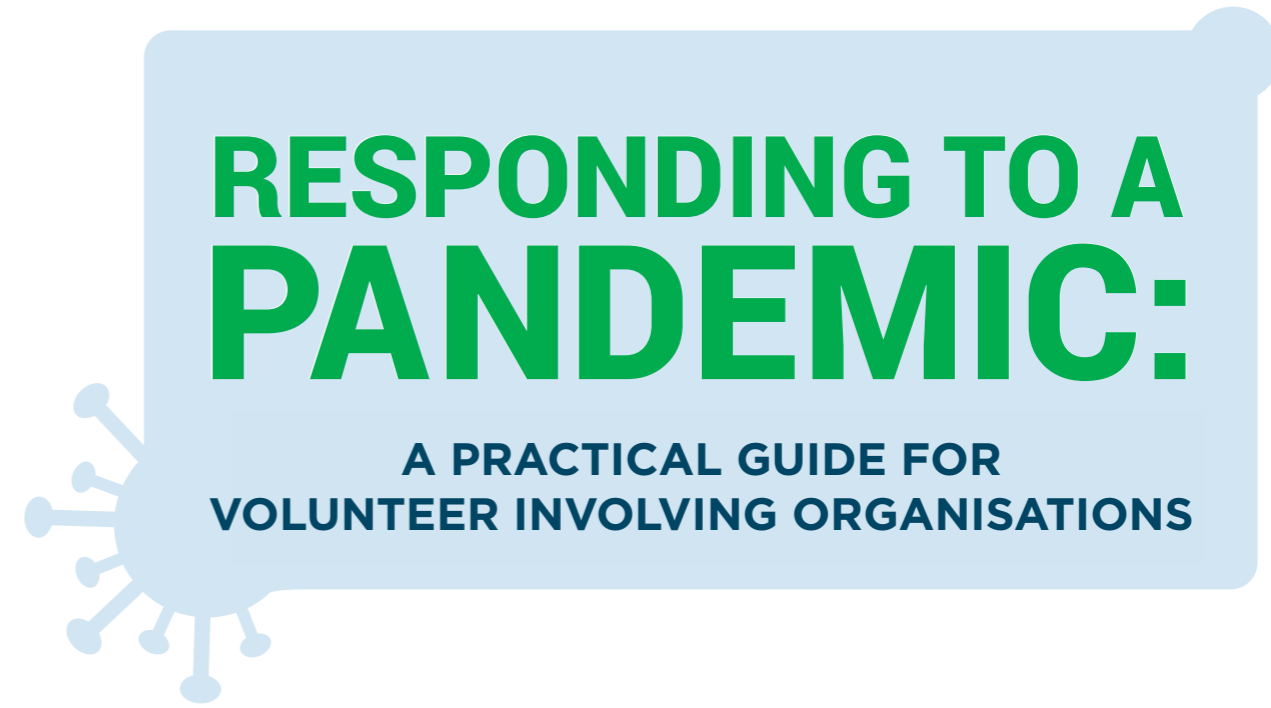
The dissemination and exchange of information provided in this publication is encouraged. Where this publication includes material whose copyright is owned by third parties, all reasonable efforts have been made to clearly label material where the copyright is owned by a third party, and ensure that the copyright owner has consented to this material being presented in this publication. Wherever a third party holds copyright in material presented in this publication, the copyright remains with that party. Their permission is required to use that material.

**Disclaimer**

Care has been exercised in the compilation and drafting of this publication. This Guide is provided solely for the benefit of volunteer involving organisations by way of general information and is designed for discretionary use only. It does not replace the requirement for your organisation to obtain specific operational, legal, insurance, or other advice. In no event shall the author or publisher be liable for any damages whatsoever, whether in an action of contract, negligence or other tortious action, arising out of or in connection with the use of or reliance on any of the information in this publication.

**Acknowledgement**

The Responding to a Pandemic: A Practical Guide for Volunteer Involving Organisations project is a joint initiative of Volunteering Queensland and the Queensland Government, which was coordinated by Rikki Anderson from raprojects. We thank Volunteering Queensland for the opportunity to contribute to this guide and acknowledge our fellow State, Territory and National Peak Bodies for Volunteering for their collaboration.



**This guide provides practical guidance and assistance to volunteer involving organisations when responding to a pandemic.**

During a pandemic, volunteer involving organisations will be faced with a number of changes, this guide provides practical checklists and guidance on key things to consider including:

- ✓ Safeguarding your organisations against the pandemic
- ✓ Determining if a volunteer program should continue and if so how to do it safely
- ✓ Maintaining volunteer engagement in a pandemic
- ✓ Building a volunteer program to respond to a pandemic
- ✓ Planning for the future in a post pandemic environment

# CONTENTS

<b>Safeguarding your organisation's volunteering programs against a pandemic</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>What do you need to do to protect staff, volunteers and the people you serve?</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Stop the Spread Checklist</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Business Continuity and Risk Management Considerations Checklist</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Is your organisation's volunteer program ready for the impact of a pandemic?</b>	
<b>A checklist of questions to work through</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Work, Health and Safety (WHS)</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Insurance</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Determining if a volunteering program should continue during a pandemic</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Considerations that were made during the OVID-19 pandemic on whether to continue a volunteering program and how to do so safely</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Can my volunteering program continue during the COVID-19 pandemic?</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Work, Health and Safety (WHS) Checklist</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Maintaining volunteer engagement during a pandemic</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Keeping volunteers engaged while they work remotely in their usual role</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Keeping volunteers engaged if they can't work remotely in their usual role</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Redeployment</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Pausing a volunteer's role</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Checklist for volunteering effectively from home</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Building a volunteering program to respond to situations created by a pandemic</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Demand for essential services increase and more volunteers are required</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>A government prompted and coordinated initiative</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Informal volunteering during a pandemic</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Planning for the future in a post pandemic environment</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Checklist of things to consider when transitioning to the new business as usual after a pandemic</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>How VolunteeringACT can help</b> .....	<b>29</b>



## Safeguarding your organisation's volunteering programs against a pandemic

**This section works through suggestions on how to protect your volunteers, prepare your volunteering program and touches on wider organisational things to consider such a business continuity, risk management, work, health and safety (WHS), and insurance.**

### What do you need to do to protect staff, volunteers and the people you serve?

#### • Share the latest information from trusted authorities

- Use all your communication channels to provide clear information from [ACT Health](#).
- Utilise posters and emails to promote hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

#### • Promote physical distancing

- Always encourage staff and volunteers to keep a physical distance of at least 1.5 metres from one another.
- Promote handshake free meetings – staff and volunteers can wave and verbally great each other instead. Hold virtual meetings when possible.
- If staff and volunteers are required to work from the office or another site, ensure you promote physical distancing. Consider things such as desk placement, the number of team members who can be in one space at a time , and how people will share common equipment and what personal protective equipment and cleaning protocols are in place.

#### • Set strict expectations for unwell staff and volunteers

- Communicate clearly the need for all unwell staff and volunteers to stay at home. If a team member who is unwell comes into the office, ensure they go home immediately and seek medical attention if needed.

#### • Offer handwashing facilities

- Handwashing facilities should be available and well supplied. Provide soap, hand sanitiser, paper towels and cleaning products around your buildings for staff, volunteers, clients and visitors. ACT Health has published clear, printable instructions on [handwashing techniques](#) which can be displayed around your workplace.

#### • Schedule cleaning regimes

- Frequently clean key areas including keyboards, telephones, workstations, door handles, and common areas.

#### • Support staff and volunteers to work from home

- Staff and volunteers should when directed by state or federal government be working from home wherever possible. Consideration should be given to policies, procedures, communication channels, infrastructure, equipment, and processes needed to allow staff and volunteers to work remotely. These could include secure, remote access to your files, video conferencing and telephone facilities, agreed work plans, and guidance on working from home safely.

## • Protect vulnerable groups

- ♦ If your organisation works with people with weakened immune systems, older people, those with disabilities or those with long-term health conditions like diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease, it's important that you plan to limit their risk to being exposed.
- ♦ Consider enabling staff and volunteers who have vulnerabilities and are understandably concerned about their health to take leave or time off or to volunteer or work from home.

## • Cancel or postpone any public events or mass gatherings

- ♦ Comply with local and federal government guidance on mass gatherings for example during the COVID-19 pandemic the direction was for non-essential gatherings should be limited to two people.

## • Hold meetings via video or teleconferencing

- ♦ Utilise video or teleconferencing for internal and external meetings, including board and committee meetings.

## • Review travel risks and arrangements

- ♦ Staff and volunteers should avoid travelling at this time.

## • Look after mental health

- ♦ Support staff and volunteers to look after their mental wellbeing. Remind them to take time to switch off from all things relating to the pandemic and focus on things they can control.
- ♦ Provide information to staff and volunteers from the [Beyond Blue website](#) or similar reputable sites to ensure they have access to support.
- ♦ Encourage staff to contact their medical practitioner or Lifeline (13 11 14) if they are struggling and need someone to talk to.
- ♦ Clarify whether your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) extends to volunteers and, if so, how volunteers can access the program.

## • Record key contacts

- ♦ Ensure all emergency contact details are up to date and easily accessible.



## Stop the Spread Checklist

Ensure you have the following mechanisms in place so your organisation can do its part in stopping the spread:

✓	CHECKLIST
	Provide handwashing facilities and make sure these are kept clean, properly stocked and in good working order.
	Provide alcohol-based hand sanitiser, paper towels, other recommended personal protective equipment, and cleaning supplies.
	Promote good hygiene practices, such as displaying hand hygiene posters.
	Keep the workplace clean and hygienic. Regularly cleaning high-touch surfaces such as door handles, telephones and workstations as well as common areas helps prevent contamination.
	Encourage volunteers who are sick with respiratory illness to stay home until they are recovered.
	If a volunteer or staff member becomes ill with respiratory symptoms while working at your office, isolate them by placing them in a room or an area away from others and arrange for the person to be sent home or access medical assistance.
	Follow advice from <a href="#">health authorities</a> on physical distancing and public gatherings.



## Business Continuity and Risk Management Considerations Checklist

Use this interactive checklist to note what your organisation is doing under each area to ensure you have all bases covered in preparation for a pandemic.

✓ CHECKLIST
Does your organisation have a business continuity plan? Are your staff, volunteers and clientele included in this plan? <a href="#">Click here</a> for a robust template to guide you through business continuity planning to respond to a pandemic.
<b>Volunteers, staff and clientele</b>
How can your organisation best support your volunteers, staff, clientele and their families to stay safe?
Does your organisation have volunteers, staff and clientele who are vulnerable? What extra precautions do you need to take for their safety?
Has your organisation communicated clear, accurate information to volunteers, staff and clientele on what your plans are, impacts on service delivery, and what actions you and they need to take?
Have you planned for a volunteer and paid staff workforce shortage?
Do you have up to date records to reflect volunteer and staff availability?
What volunteer and staff support does your organisation need to continue to provide essential service delivery?
How can your organisation keep volunteers and staff actively engaged if they are no longer working?

Is there anything your organisation can do to reduce feelings of isolation in your volunteers, staff and also your clientele?

Operations
Does your organisation have appropriate policies and procedures to protect your staff and volunteers? Are these well understood by all staff and volunteers?
Does your organisation have plans that can be actioned quickly if one of your team contracts the pandemic illness, for example the COVID-19 virus? Does your organisation have a contingency plan for the closedown of your workplace due to mass illness amongst staff and volunteers or a requirement to self-isolate?
What steps will your organisation take to protect vulnerable clientele or service users?
Do travel restrictions impact your organisation's work?
Does your organisation have the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) to carry out its work safely? What will the impact be on your organisation's service delivery? What essential services are provided by your organisation that need to keep running? Can your organisation cope with an increase in demand from people who rely on your services?
Do your staff and volunteers need to work remotely? Does your organisation have the collaborative tools, information, processes, and supplies to support this? Can your organisation take steps now and regularly in the future to test your remote working systems?
Do your staff and volunteers deliver critical transport services? How will your organisation continue to deliver these services without putting staff, volunteers and clientele at risk?
Has your organisation communicated with stakeholders about what service interruptions will be likely, and what contingency planning you have put in place to minimise disruptions?

Have you informed all relevant parties about the changes to business that your organisation is implementing? This may include volunteers, staff, clientele accessing your services, people participating in your programs, funding bodies, program partners, sponsors, donors, or the general public.

How will your organisation restore operations smoothly when the pandemic has ended?

### Events

What are the implications of cancelling or postponing events and activities planned by your organisation?

Can your organisation's events and activities be held virtually, or will they need to be cancelled or postponed?

### Financial

Has your organisation considered and addressed immediate and longer-term budget implications of a pandemic?

Can your organisation budget for increased contingency or deferred costs or losses over the next financial year?

How can your organisation buffer any reduction in income?

### Social Impact

Which of your organisation's services may ramp up during this time? This could include support provided to people experiencing disadvantage such as those who may be less equipped to prepare for self-isolation or additional hygiene requirements.

How can your organisation show support to staff, volunteers, clientele and community members or groups who may be experiencing racism or discrimination due to pandemic circumstances?

## Is your organisation's volunteer program ready for the impact of this pandemic?

### A checklist of questions to work through

✓	CHECKLIST
	Does your organisation have a risk management plan that governs your volunteer, staff and clientele involvement?
	Does your organisation have separate risk management plans for each of your business and volunteering programs?
	Has your organisation checked in with your insurer about what a pandemic means for your organisation's volunteers, staff, clientele and business?
	Has your organisation ensured the Board of Directors has been adequately briefed and is continuously updated on the risks associated with business continuity, and staff, volunteer and clientele involvement during this time, and what implications this might have on service delivery, models of business and sustainability?
	Has your organisation considered how to adapt your staff and volunteering roles to reduce or remove face-to-face contact? See the <a href="#">Determining if a volunteering program should continue</a> section for guidance.
	Has your organisation considered what existing roles could be performed remotely?
	Has your organisation considered new staff and volunteering from home opportunities that may emerge throughout the pandemic that your workforce could be transitioned into?
	If your organisation moves to remote volunteering (see <a href="#">Checklist for effectively volunteering from home</a> ), have you considered how to ensure your volunteers and staff are compliant with work, health and safety requirements when working from home? For work, health and safety guidelines and a home office checklist <a href="#">click here</a> .
	Has your organisation checked with your insurer about what requirements must be put in place to ensure staff and volunteers working remotely are covered by insurance?
	Has your organisation considered how it will or if it is able to reimburse volunteers working from home for out-of-pocket expenses such as the cost of electricity, telephones, or internet connection?
	Has your organisation communicated with volunteers that volunteering is a choice, is optional, and every effort will be made to accommodate those who wish to adapt or cease their volunteering role to reduce risk?
	Has your organisation considered how to maintain a positive workplace culture during a time of anxiety and uncertainty?
	Is your organisation regularly checking in with your staff and volunteers, including those volunteers who have put their volunteering on hold at this time?
	Has your organisation familiarised themselves with the <a href="#">National Standards for Volunteer Involvement</a> to ensure they are being implemented at all times throughout this pandemic?
	If your organisation still has staff and volunteers attending the office or another site have you considered how you will track staff and volunteer movement in case a pandemic incident arises and needs to be tracked?

Now is also a good time to review the national [code of practice](#) for volunteer involving organisations. Your attention is drawn to the section where organisations agree to ‘not place volunteer staff in roles that were previously held by paid staff or have been identified as paid jobs.’ While it is understandable that volunteer involving organisations may find themselves short-staffed due to a pandemic, it is recommended best practice to seek advice from [Fair Work](#) and [Queensland Unions](#) when you are looking at roles for volunteers.

## Work, Health and Safety (WHS)

Volunteers are considered workers under work, health and safety legislation and have the exact same rights and responsibilities as employees. Your organisation should apply the same considerations to your volunteers as your paid employees. The federal government released valuable information for employers regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, which can be accessed [here](#).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Worksafe Australia released a number of resources to assist organisations to safely deliver services including information about work health and safety for your industry and COVID-19. For more information [click here](#).

You are strongly encouraged to consider how staff and volunteers working in face-to-face roles, where physical contact is unavoidable, can be supported to do so in a way that is safe for both the staff members or volunteer and the service user. See [Determining if a volunteering program should continue](#) for guidance on this.

When considering moving staff and volunteer roles to be based from home, ensure you consider the work, health and safety obligations around this. For guidelines and a home office checklist [click here](#).

It is recommended that you obtain independent insurance and legal advice regarding your staff and volunteers and their work programs during this time.

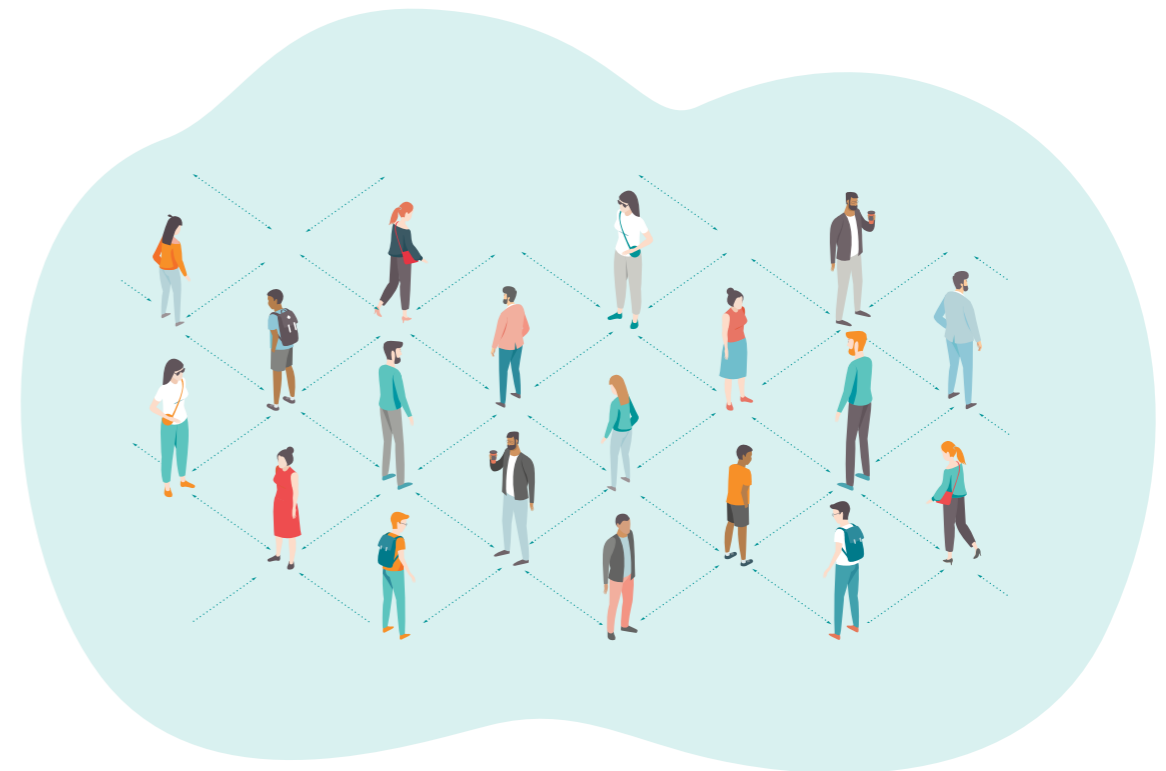
## Insurance

It is recommended that your organisation seeks advice from your insurer about the implications and limitations of the pandemic in relation to your organisation, your volunteer and paid workforce and your clientele if you choose to continue involving staff and volunteers at this time.

Volunteers are generally not covered by worker’s compensation and therefore your organisation needs to have specific volunteer insurance to cover them for injury in the workplace. It is critical to note that volunteer insurance does not cover volunteers for illness, so your organisation should be exercising exceptional risk management regarding volunteers.

It is also important to note that insurance policies typically do not cover pandemics and do not cover staff or volunteers who contract the pandemic illness or a medical condition as a result of contracting the pandemic illness. This means that the health and safety of staff and volunteers needs to be carefully considered. There may also be further insurance considerations associated with staff and volunteers working remotely, for example cybersecurity concerns with the use of personal or work-owned devices.

Your organisation is strongly encouraged to communicate with your staff and volunteers about the limitations of your insurance policies (and that no insurance may be applicable) and give volunteers the option to pause or modify their involvement or in the case of staff to take eligible leave or leave without pay if they are concerned about vulnerability. Your volunteers and staff are important. Your volunteers will likely value the opportunity to stay connected with your organisation and may choose to re-engage in the future if they step down from volunteering during the pandemic.



## Determining if a volunteering program should continue during a pandemic

**During a pandemic it is important to review the information coming from trusted authorities such as the Australian and ACT Government to determine if a volunteering program is able to continue and how to do this safely.**

Important things to consider when making this determination include:

- What response phase of the pandemic is your local area and community currently in?
- What advice has been released from trusted authorities about the types of services that can continue and the types that need to be ceased?
- If your service can continue, you have a duty of care to your volunteers, and a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of your volunteers to the fullest extent possible. For example, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic could be regarded as being a foreseeable risk from which it is a requirement that community groups take reasonable steps to protect volunteers. How will you ensure the health and safety of your volunteers?
- If your service can continue, what reasonable precautions are you putting in place to ensure the safety of the people interacting with your volunteers? (Note: In each Australian jurisdiction, legislation sets out special protection for volunteers from personal liability for anything done, or not done, in good faith when performing work for a community organisation. Accordingly, where a volunteer exposes another person, such as a client or service user, to infection or harm, your organisation may be responsible.<sup>1</sup>)
- Which parts of the population are most at risk from the pandemic? How will your volunteer program be affected if volunteers are unable to volunteer due to being considered at high risk of the pandemic?



Important things to consider when making this determination include:

- What response phase of the pandemic is your local area and community currently in?
- What advice has been released from trusted authorities about the types of services that can continue and the types that need to be ceased?
- If your service can continue, you have a duty of care to your volunteers, and a responsibility to ensure the health and safety of your volunteers to the fullest extent possible. For example, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic could be regarded as being a foreseeable risk from which it is a requirement that community groups take reasonable steps to protect volunteers. How will you ensure the health and safety of your volunteers?
- If your service can continue, what reasonable precautions are you putting in place to ensure the safety of the people interacting with your volunteers? (Note: In each Australian jurisdiction, legislation sets out special protection for volunteers from personal liability for anything done, or not done, in good faith when performing work for a community organisation. Accordingly, where a volunteer exposes another person, such as a client or service user, to infection or harm, your organisation may be responsible.<sup>1</sup>)
- Which parts of the population are most at risk from the pandemic? How will your volunteer program be affected if volunteers are unable to volunteer due to being considered at high risk of the pandemic?

## Considerations that were made during the COVID-19 pandemic on whether to continue a volunteering program and how to do so safely

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteer involving organisations were faced with a range of determinations to work through to determine whether their volunteering program should continue.**

### • Can my volunteering program continue during the COVID-19 pandemic?

<p>Is your volunteering program or activity considered a non-essential gathering?</p> <p><a href="#">Click here</a> to view the list.</p>	<p>Yes / No</p>	<p>If no, you must pause your volunteering program or modify by taking all reasonable steps to protect your volunteers, staff, clientele and other service users, for example offering an online service.</p> <p>If no, you need to consider how your volunteering program will continue to safely operate and deliver its essential services paying close regard to risk, and all work, health and safety obligations. This could either be in its current format or through a modified version by taking all reasonable steps to protect your volunteers, staff, clientele and other service users.</p>
<p>View State and Territory Government guidelines and orders restricting gathering and movement <a href="#">here</a>.</p>		

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nfplaw.org.au/covid19/people-involved>



## • Work, Health And Safety (WHS) Checklist

What reasonable precautions can your organisation take to manage the health and safety of your staff and volunteers? [Click here](#) and refer to Section 3 to see a full list from Justice Connect Not For Profit Law (NFP Law).

What is the demographic of your volunteers and staff? Are any deemed at risk of the pandemic? ([click here](#) to see the list). Consider whether it is safe for your volunteers and staff to continue and how to modify their roles to mitigate risk.

If your service can continue, what reasonable precautions are you putting in place to ensure the safety of all people interacting with your volunteers and staff? (Note: In each Australian jurisdiction, legislation sets out special protection for volunteers from personal liability for anything done, or not done, in good faith when performing work for a community organisation. Accordingly, where a volunteer exposes another person, such as a client or service-user, to infection or harm, your organisation may be responsible.<sup>2</sup>)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nfplaw.org.au/covid19/people-involved>

When considering continuing your volunteering program, look at ways that you can modify the program to reduce the risk for your volunteers, staff and clientele through applying the following methodology:

Modification	Moving your volunteer program to a non-contact role from home	Moving your volunteer program to a remote contact role	Continuing your volunteer program in a closer contact role
	E.g. Wellbeing check-up phone calls and virtual volunteering	E.g. Delivery of goods to community members or other organisations	E.g. Cancer patient transport
Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insurance</li> <li>Work, health and safety</li> <li>Reimbursement of out of pocket expenses for volunteers</li> <li>Training and support for volunteers and staff in the transition</li> <li>Reward and recognition for volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insurance</li> <li>Work, health and safety</li> <li>Reimbursement of out of pocket expenses for volunteers</li> <li>Training and support for volunteers and staff in the transition</li> <li>Reward and recognition for volunteers</li> <li>Adhere to physical distancing and hand hygiene advice</li> <li>Strictly NO entering homes of clientele -goods to be left on doorstep</li> <li>Use personal protective equipment (PPE)* if volunteer and staff roles require this</li> <li>Volunteers and staff are fully trained and inducted specifically regarding health and safety risks and effective use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by the volunteer involving organisation</li> </ul> <p>Organisations should carefully consider the demographic of volunteers and staff to ensure those who are vulnerable to the pandemic are not nominated for these roles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insurance</li> <li>Work, health and safety</li> <li>Reimbursement of out of pocket expenses for volunteers</li> <li>Training and support for volunteers and staff in the transition</li> <li>Reward and recognition for volunteers</li> <li>Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)* for volunteers, staff and clientele</li> <li>Volunteers and staff are fully trained and inducted specifically regarding health and safety risks and effective use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by the volunteer involving organisation</li> </ul> <p>Organisations should carefully consider the demographic of volunteers and staff to ensure those who are vulnerable to the pandemic are not nominated for these roles.</p>

\* Ensure personal protective equipment (PPE) is used correctly through following the [Australian Government guidelines](#).



**HELPFUL TIP:** when considering how to safely modify your volunteering program, seek input from volunteers, staff and clientele to broaden the horizons.



## Maintaining volunteer engagement during a pandemic

**It is important to maintain engagement with your volunteers through these times. Your volunteers have committed their time, skill and energy to your organisation or cause, and they know your organisation well. They will be vital to your organisation over the period of the pandemic and as things eventually return to pre-pandemic or 'new normal' operations. Your volunteers will likely have formed strong social connections with other volunteers and staff in your organisation, and these connections are important to maintain.**

### Keeping volunteers engaged while they work remotely in their usual role

If you are fortunate that your volunteering roles can be undertaken remotely during a pandemic, you need to ensure that you continue to connect with your volunteers and keep them engaged without the usual face-to-face contact. All of the principles of good volunteer management continue to apply, and we encourage you to consider the following:

- Include your volunteers, staff and clientele in the decision-making process on how to modify and move volunteer roles to function remotely. Your volunteers, staff and clientele know their needs best and may have creative ideas on how to continue a modified version of your program.
- Include volunteers in all staff communications (unless there are particular reasons not to, such as the sharing of confidential information).
- Enable communications to take place by email, phone, teleconference or videoconference, and ensure your volunteers and staff both have the required resources and technology to participate.
- Assess whether your volunteers and staff need any additional training to help them work remotely, for example training in new technology platforms.
- Ensure that volunteers and staff each know their lines of communication, who to report to, how to report in and when to report, for example, by email or phone each time they 'clock on'.
- Ensure that volunteers and staff know who they can talk to, and how to contact them, if they are experiencing issues or challenges with working remotely.

Many people volunteer for social connection and working remotely can severely impact this aspect of their volunteering experience. There are many ways you can keep your volunteers engaged socially – just be sure to find platforms and methods that work for your organisation and for your volunteers and staff. These might include emails, videoconference, online chat channels or apps, for example WhatsApp, for non-work related conversations. Be sure to adhere to privacy principles if volunteers and staff are using personal emails or accounts. You also need to respect that some volunteers and staff may not wish to be involved in online social activities.

One of the main motivations for volunteering is to give back to the community. It is important that you continue to communicate to your volunteers and staff the impact that your organisation and their contribution is having. Share specific examples of how the contribution of volunteers and staff working remotely is making a positive difference. Even if you are managing to maintain 'business as usual' services, you are doing so under extreme and often unprecedented circumstances while adhering to health and safety advice around physical distancing, thereby supporting your workforce, clientele and the broader community to stay safe and healthy!



## Keeping volunteers engaged if they can't work remotely in their usual role

If you have had to pause your volunteer program you may consider the following options in keeping volunteers engaged.

### • Redeployment

It is worth considering whether your volunteers and staff could be deployed into different roles that could be conducted remotely. To do this, you will need to determine your business priorities, potential new ways of working, and whether there are any roles to support your immediate priorities that are appropriate for volunteers or staff to fill. If there are, you might need to speak to your volunteers and staff to understand their skills, willingness and motivations. Some volunteers and staff may not wish to be redeployed into different roles, but others may be agile and seeking ways in which they can continue to help your organisation at a challenging time. As always, when considering a volunteer role, ensure it is appropriate for a volunteer and that a new position description is drafted and agreed on with the volunteer before they take on a new role.

During a time of redeployment consistent, clear communication can be key, especially communication that looks out for their mental wellbeing, [Beyond Blue](#) and similar organisations have numerous resources, tools and tips you can share.

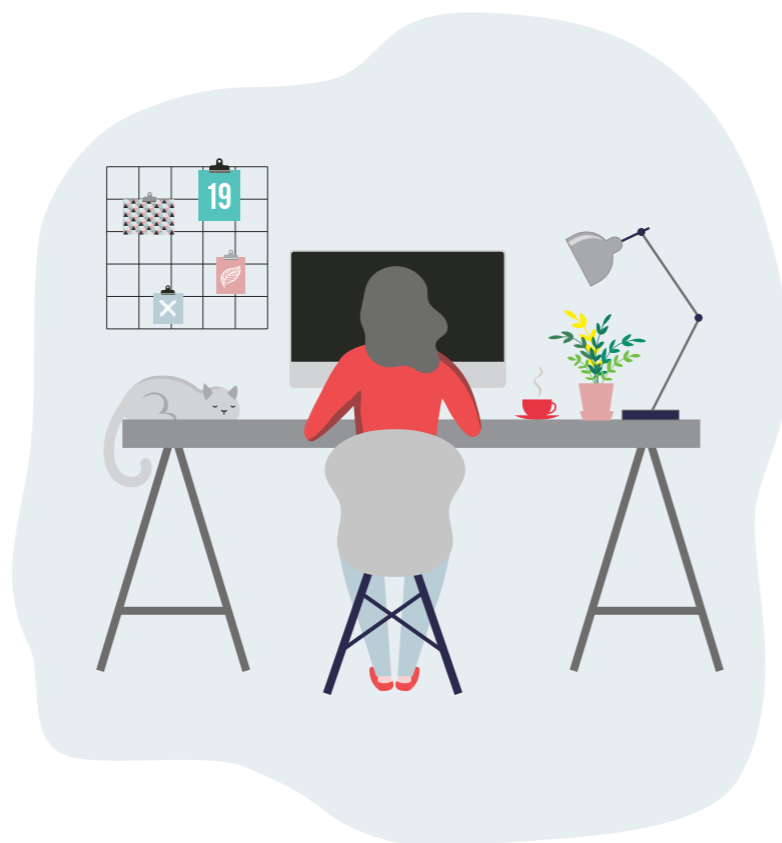
### • Pausing a volunteer's role

If you need to pause the role of your volunteers (or your volunteers choose to take a break), there are still ways to keep them engaged with your organisation.

Ask your volunteers whether they wish to be contacted regularly, and their preferred method of communication (phone call, videolink or email). Regular communication with your volunteers is vital to check in with how they are and to let them know what your organisation is doing and the impact it is having. If your organisation is no longer providing any services, you can still communicate your plans and needs for when you think your organisation will recommence services, and how important your volunteers are to those plans.

If your volunteers have previously connected with each other socially, encourage them to find a way to continue those relationships (over the phone, via apps and social media sites or online). Again, be aware of privacy considerations and do not share volunteers' personal information without consent.

Time off from their volunteering role might be a great opportunity for your volunteers to do some online training. During the COVID-29 pandemic many training and development options were freely offered. With your support, your volunteers could identify skills or information that could be useful and sign up for a training session or program. Time spent in training and



development related to their volunteering role could also be logged as volunteer hours for your organisation. Along with these more formal training options, there are also a wide range of books or podcasts that could provide useful information or insights for your volunteers. You might just need to invest some time in identifying options that are relevant for your organisation and workforce.

When checking in with your volunteers, also take the time to check on their health and wellbeing. If your organisation has an employee assistance program that is available to volunteers, make sure your volunteers know how to access it.

## Checklist for volunteering effectively from home

If a volunteering role has been modified to be undertaken remotely from home, ensure:

✓	CHECKLIST
	The volunteer understands that volunteering is a choice and they are under no obligation to continue.
	The role is documented through a position description and the volunteer fully understands the role they will be undertaking.
	The volunteer has a safe workspace. Ask them to undertake a <a href="#">home office assessment checklist</a> .
	You have considered reimbursement for out of pocket expenses, work, health and safety, risk, and insurance obligations.
	The volunteer has access to the appropriate technology to undertake the role. If not, consider how you can supply this.
	The volunteer has been provided with training to undertake the role including how to access the necessary technology platforms.
	The volunteer has clear boundaries between volunteering and daily life. Ask them to set aside specific times and days to volunteer and communicate that there are no expectations to go above and beyond this. You want to ensure you avoid burnout during these uncertain times.
	You communicate all necessary policies and procedures including working online and maintaining privacy and confidentiality.
	You communicate the importance of their work. Sometimes working virtually can feel like it has less impact, so it is important to communicate the impact of a volunteer's work back to them.
	Ask the volunteer to check in regularly with updates on progress and any challenges they are having.

Always ensure the [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) is being implemented at all times.



## Building a volunteering program to respond to situations created by a pandemic

There are a few different scenarios where you may need to recruit additional volunteers to support situations created by a pandemic.

- Demand for essential services increases and more volunteers are required.
- A government prompted and coordinated initiative that requires volunteers.
- Informal volunteering or emergent groups self-activate and present themselves.

### Demand for essential services increase and more volunteers are required

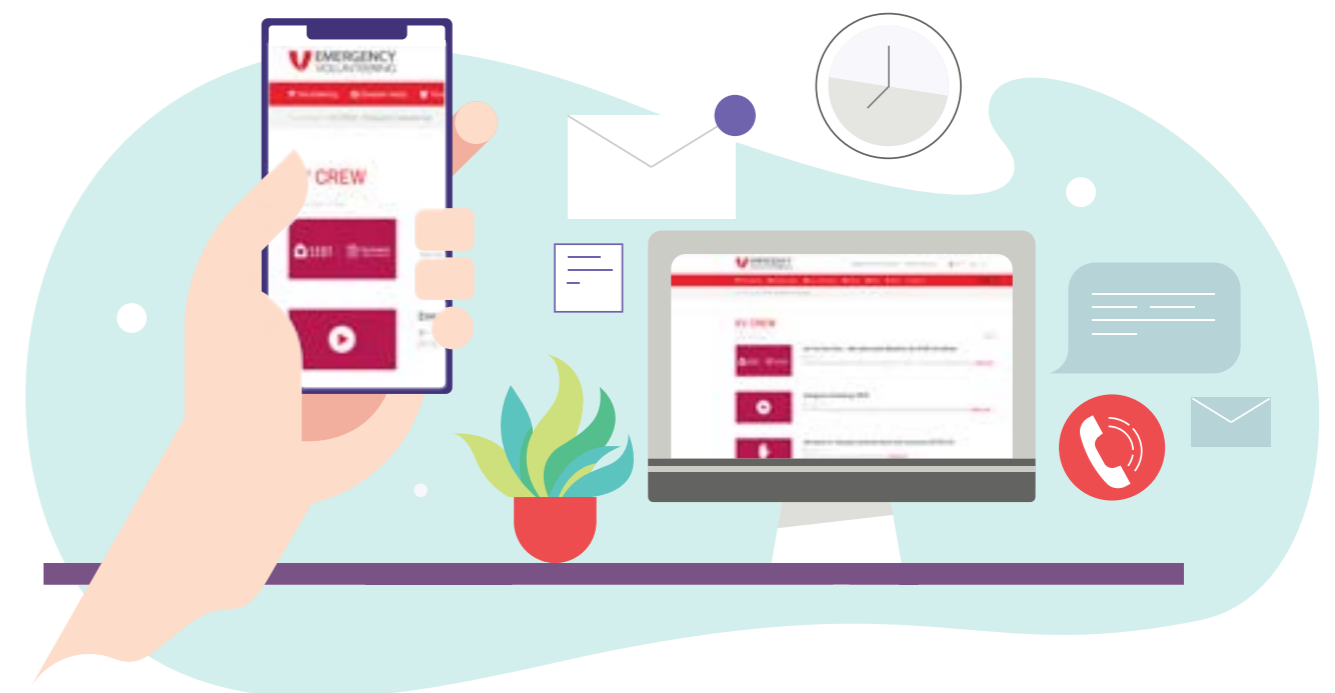
During a pandemic, organisations may experience an increase in demand for services, resulting in needing more volunteers. Another reason organisations may need more volunteers is that they may be unable to involve their current volunteers as a result of those volunteers being in a vulnerable group and it therefore becoming unsafe for them to continue volunteering.

If you require more volunteers to respond to a pandemic VolunteeringACT can assist you through its dedicated Emergency Volunteering CREW program (EV CREW).

EV CREW is a coordinated registration, referral and management service where volunteers are matched with formally recognised disaster response and community organisations that require and request volunteer support to enhance their workforce and recovery efforts.

EV CREW hosts more than 90,000 registered volunteers who have expressed interest in volunteering at times of disaster and emergency. EV CREW operates across a number of Australian states and territories.

VolunteeringACT can assist you to match your volunteer needs and roles with willing and able people who are registered on EV CREW to build your volunteer workforce to respond to a pandemic.



## Informal Volunteering During a Pandemic

During a crisis, it's only natural that people want to support those in need. Some people will 'help out' their neighbour or 'lend a hand' to an isolated family member. Others will form groups on social media platforms such as Facebook or convene informal groups to come together to support vulnerable members of their community.

This is known as informal volunteering - as opposed to formal volunteering, which is volunteering with an established community organisation, group or club.

These self-organising groups are a positive development and can make an invaluable contribution to their local communities at times of a pandemic by providing support and connection at a local level. There are however some risks that need to be considered. Whether it is formal or informal, the organisers of any volunteering activity have a duty of care to volunteers and to the people they serve.

First and foremost, it is important to keep both volunteers and the community safe and avoid the spread of a pandemic virus. It's important that self-activating groups provide opportunities for volunteers to access information on the pandemic, on how to stay safe and keep others safe, and to constantly reinforce these messages to volunteers.

Self-activating groups should follow [Australian Government](#) guidelines and instructions on how best to avoid the spread of a pandemic. They should also adhere to all federal, state and territory requirements of physical distancing, hand washing and personal protective equipment (PPE).

### • Self-activating groups should consider the following

- ♦ **New volunteers:** You will need to carefully think about how you will manage and support often large groups of people, especially those who may not have volunteered before. Be aware that sometimes people express an interest but then are ultimately unable to help.
- ♦ **Manage expectations:** Volunteers will have good intentions and be enthusiastic about helping others. However, in pandemic environments there are obvious limitations such as age, health, location, and varied needs. There may also be more volunteers than required initially but think medium to long term. People will likely drop in and out and may not always be reliable, especially as their personal circumstances change as a result of the pandemic.
- ♦ **Be clear:** Ensure the volunteer understands the job at hand, including any risks, and is respectful of privacy and safety of those your group is helping. A brief position description will also provide clarity when deciding who is or isn't suitable for a volunteering role. Be clear with volunteers that as an informal self-organising group there is no volunteer insurance in place.
- ♦ **Consider people's literacy levels:** The messages or information you provide to volunteers about the role or to community members about the current situation should be appropriate, accurate and easy to understand.

### • Four important challenges and considerations for self-activating groups

- ♦ **Authorisation** - for mobility of volunteers in a restricted travel or full lock-down situation. Groups may need to check in with and gain approval from authorities to be out and about helping others in need.
- ♦ **Safety and security** - personal and other's safety and security needs to be carefully considered to ensure no harm.
- ♦ **Insurance** - self-activating groups are not covered by volunteer insurance. There is currently no solution to this and volunteers need to be aware of this important consideration.
- ♦ **Information** - provision of information such as what the needs and roles are, safety and security matters, regulations, communication channels, and any logistical or technical issues, is important. This can be done via websites, social media sites, newsletters, letter drops, or tele and video links.

Further advice and information can be sourced by contacting VolunteeringACT's EV CREW team at [emergencyvol@volunteeringact.org.au](mailto:emergencyvol@volunteeringact.org.au) or at [emergencyvolunteering.com.au](http://emergencyvolunteering.com.au)





## Planning for the future in a post-pandemic environment

**As pandemics are brought under control, volunteer organisations need to begin planning for the future so that once the pandemic has passed, they can begin to transition to their new ‘business as usual’.**

### Checklist of things to consider when transitioning to the new business as usual after a pandemic

There will be a range of considerations your organisation will need to work through during this time in relation to your volunteer program, consider the following:

✓ CHECKLIST
<p>How has your organisation, its business and its paid and volunteer workforce been impacted as a result of the pandemic? A critical assessment and updating of the following may be needed - your strategy, business and business continuity plans, mission statement, operating models, risk management framework, financial position, stakeholder relationships, digital presence, technology capabilities, and workforce requirements.</p>
<p>Have your volunteering programs changed in response to the pandemic?</p>
<p>What will your volunteering programs need to look like moving forward? Are there learnings that will alter or enhance your volunteering programs or the services your organisation can offer?</p>
<p>What volunteering programs were modified or paused? How can you re-shape them to meet community need in a post-pandemic environment?</p>

Has the health and wellbeing of your volunteers been impacted by the effects of social isolation, social distancing or illness associated with the pandemic? Consider implementing medium and long term recovery strategies to mitigate these effects as your organisation and volunteers emerge from a concerning and challenging pandemic time.

If volunteers were stood down or re-deployed reconnect with them and, where appropriate, ask them if they would like to return to their original role (if it still exists) or take on new role with your organisation.

Did your organisation have a volunteering program that commenced or grew in order to meet service needs resulting from the pandemic? Consider re-deployment opportunities for any volunteers who took on roles during the pandemic that are now no longer required.

Should flexible or work from home arrangements be utilised more regularly across the organisation?

Does your organisation have the right mix of full-time, part-time and casual employees, volunteers and contractors, especially in light of changes to your operating model following a pandemic?

Can reliance and spend on external consultants or contractors be reduced and the required expertise be sourced or developed inhouse from existing employees, volunteers or community partners?

Consult with funding bodies, sponsors, and investors to determine contractual obligations and consider if previous key performance indicators, timelines, milestones, outputs or outcomes are still achievable or need to be revised.

Do you have enough and the right volunteers to re-commence operations? VolunteeringACT can help you with recruitment at any time at [volunteeringact.org.au](https://volunteeringact.org.au).

Has your organisation familiarised itself with the [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) as a helpful guide to support you to re-build your volunteer programs?

## How VolunteeringACT can help

VolunteeringACT can help you to rebuild your volunteering program by:

- Providing best practice advice, support, resources and information sharing.
- Auditing, designing and implementing a volunteer program that maximises the contribution of your volunteer workforce.
- Helping with recruitment of suitable volunteers to support your organisation to achieve its purpose.
- Training staff and volunteers to ensure your volunteering programs are efficient, effective and impactful.
- Supporting development of volunteer policies, procedures, manuals.
- Strengthening robust volunteer management practices including recruitment, screening, induction, training, retention, reward and recognition.
- Designing bespoke programs to support inclusive volunteering.

VolunteeringACT can be contacted at: [volunteeringact.org.au](https://volunteeringact.org.au)



