

Volunteer Continuity Planning



A guide on volunteer
management during a crisis and
planning for effective recovery

June 2020

In the spirit of



CONTENTS



WHY AND HOW TO VIEW VOLUNTEERS DURING A CRISIS

WHY VOLUNTEERS?

Volunteers can be a valuable resource when provided with proper training, supervision and opportunities to develop their skills, as well as when their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. They can also bring in resources that are not typically available to SSAs but necessary during crisis.

Agencies which are more ready and open to leveraging volunteers have great potential in responding and recovering well from crisis, if managed effectively.

HOW TO START?

While responding and navigating through a crisis, there are key volunteer management areas that should be considered pre, during and post crisis period.

This document attempts to provide 5 priorities for agency leaders to consider in evaluating their current response, assess potential changes in volunteer supply and demand, and to be prepared for post crisis situation.

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A. OVERVIEW



WHAT IS VOLUNTEER CONTINUITY PLAN (VCP)?

In a [Covid-19 Outbreak survey](#) conducted in Feb 2020, Mercer, a global consultancy firm, revealed that 51% of companies globally have no Business Continuity Plan (BCP) in place to combat the COVID-19 outbreak.

Business Continuity Planning (BCP) is the process of creating systems of prevention and recovery to deal with potential threats to an organisation. It aims to minimise disruption to operations and help businesses recover quickly so they can function optimally.

As part of BCP, Volunteer Continuity Plan (VCP) is unique to agencies which involve volunteers in delivering their services. It aims to help agencies minimise disruption of services and achieve a quick recovery through effective management of volunteers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE VCP

- Identify focus areas for agencies to consider pre, during and post crisis
- Provide a checklist for agencies to evaluate their state of crisis readiness
- Identify volunteer related post-crisis trends for strategic planning



NOTE: This document provides a basic guide for agencies' VCP efforts. NCSS will be working with Social Service Agencies (SSAs) to develop a comprehensive VCP implementation plan in the upcoming months. For more details, pls contact Volunteer_Resource@ncss.gov.sg.

TO NOTE

This document was curated from online resources and academic references related to COVID-19, Business Continuity Planning and Volunteer Management. It serves as a basic guide for social service agencies' VCP efforts **in response to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.** The recommendations covered are non-exhaustive and can be adapted to various crisis situations. Non-profit organisations may also find the VCP useful.



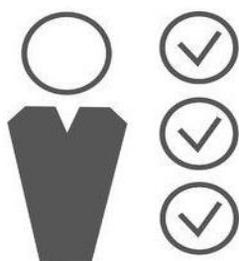
B. VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT DURING CRISIS

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

The **Volunteer Management Framework (VMF)** from the [Volunteer Management Toolkit 2.0](#), provides a holistic structure for agencies to optimise the management of their volunteers. During a crisis, this framework can be used as a guide for agencies to review the critical functions that can be continued or adapted for volunteer involvement. Agencies can consider these areas to focus on:



VMF AREAS	CRISIS FOCUS AREAS
1. Getting organisation volunteer-ready	Managing volunteer as key resource & stakeholder during crisis
2. Conducting a needs assessment	Reviewing and redesigning volunteer roles for safe and meaningful volunteer involvement
3. Recruiting and selecting volunteers	Recruiting and screening volunteers during crisis
4. On-boarding and training volunteers	Equipping & briefing volunteers for crisis situations and compliance
5. Supporting and recognising volunteers	Engaging and communicating timely plans and suggestions
6. Reviewing volunteer management	Addressing gaps expediently and preparing for future needs



AM I PREPARED?

Having a crisis management plan in place will help to prepare how agencies should respond to an unplanned event or crisis situation. This involves identifying critical resources, adjusting strategies and practices to continue operations and adapt to the evolving issues presented during a crisis.

For advisories and updates on the crisis situation, agencies should obtain information only from credible government and communicate relevant information to volunteers to ensure compliance. In planning for a VCP, it is also crucial to review the infrastructure such as having the relevant technology equipment, policy, SOP to effectively implement the plan.

Agencies may consider the VCP template ([Refer to Pg 13](#)) that illustrates how agencies can have a better understanding on the key volunteer management functions and the follow up needed during a crisis.

C. VOLUNTEER CONTINUITY PLANNING

5 PRIORITY AREAS FOR VCP

Given the unpredictability of any potential recurrent outbreaks, agencies should continually review and update the VCP throughout the crisis period.

Here are 5 key areas that leaders should consider in preparing their agency to respond and prepare for recovery:



The 5 areas above can be arranged according to the Pre, During and Post Crisis stage, as shown in the diagram below:



1. IMPACT ASSESSMENT & SCENARIO PLANNING

1.1 ASSESS IMPACT OF VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY SUSPENSION

In times of uncertainty, the agency's support in volunteer management is crucial in retaining and building trust among existing volunteers. Hence, it is important to identify all programmes that will be crucial and within the capacity and capability of the agency, assess how the volunteers can continue to be involved and brief them on any changes to their roles. Volunteers should also be informed about their next steps and also how agencies plan to continue to serve the service users during the crisis.



PLANNING AHEAD

The agency should also take the opportunity to evaluate the impact of volunteers in providing the services or overall operations, for example, analysing the number of regular volunteers and total manhours and how it contributes to the agency. It is useful to have conversations with staff to understand the qualitative impact of volunteers, especially on service users.

1.2 PLAN FOR VARYING MANPOWER SCENARIOS

Due to the evolving nature of crisis, there may be adjustments in the agency's operations and practices which leads to manpower constraints. Agencies should also plan for a phased recovery period, allowing staff to ease back into their work when they return to office. With adequate planning, there will be minimal disruptions and allow volunteers to continue their involvement in the programmes safely by modifying current roles or even piloting new [virtual roles](#).

DIFFERENT DEMAND FOR VOLUNTEERS

During and post-crisis, new needs may arise. Agencies can plan how volunteers may potentially contribute by designing new roles or redesigning existing ones. A holistic needs assessment across the agency will help facilitate manpower planning, volunteer recruitment, redeployment and matching.



NEW SUPPLY OF VOLUNTEERS

During crisis situations, the social service sector generally receives more interest and enquiries from individuals and corporates who are keen to contribute. Agencies with clearly identified volunteer roles would ready to involve these volunteers, as well as retain them even after the crisis.

2. RISK ASSESSMENT & SAFETY COMPLIANCE

2.1 REVIEW RISK OF NEW AND EXISTING VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY

The safety and well-being of volunteers, as much as their staff and service users should be one of the key priorities of the agency during a crisis. Using the **Volunteer Activity Risk Assessment Matrix** ([Refer to Pg 13](#)), the agency could assess the volunteer roles/programmes to ensure safety and compliance with the precautionary measures and advisories e.g. planning for reduced or excess manpower, social distancing, prolonged contact, hygiene, attendance taking etc.

PLANNING AHEAD

For resumption of volunteer activity, agencies should consider the demographics of their volunteers and service users.

Depending on the circumstances of the volunteers and situation, different groups of volunteers may be able to return to volunteer. Additional safety precautions should be in place to cater to service users who are more vulnerable. For example, if volunteers are predominantly seniors, students or corporates, agencies may have to recruit more volunteers from other age groups or profile types to meet these needs.

Agencies may also consider how roles can be re-designed for new or existing volunteers to optimise capacity and capability. In times of social distancing, [virtual volunteering](#) is a very viable option to consider.

2.2 PRIORITISE SAFETY AND COMPLIANCE

In compliance with [government advisories](#), key adjustments include, but not limited to:

- 1. TRACKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY** is critical even during recovery period. Consider regular check-ins with volunteers and service users to minimise non-compliance and hence reduce risk to service users.
- 2. SPLIT TEAM ARRANGEMENT** should be planned for volunteers too, depending on the level of social interaction during volunteer activities. Agencies will need to reorganize staff and centre arrangement, and hence correspondingly, the volunteer needs will also change.
- 3. VOLUNTEER PROTECTION AND INSURANCE** such as Employer Liability, Personal/Group Accident, Disability and Public Liability insurance should be considered. While agencies take effort to minimise and mitigate potential risks, indemnity should be applied where appropriate and properly communicated with volunteers.

Stay updated on funding support offered by the government or other community partners such as [The Courage Fund](#), [The Invictus Fund](#), [The Majority Trust Fund](#).

3. COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

3.1 UPDATE VOLUNTEERS ON AGENCY'S PLANS

Volunteer Managers (VMs) and Programme Managers (PMs), are usually the point of contact with the volunteers. They play a critical role in ensuring that volunteers are well-informed and aware of relevant guidelines so that essential services and aid can continue with minimal disruption.

VM ROLE'S DURING CRISIS

1. Communicate key messages to all volunteers in database
2. Collate data of volunteers for essential services and aid
3. Check in with PMs on volunteer sentiment during crisis
4. Communicate with management on the recommendation to continue involving volunteers for essential services and aid
5. Key crisis escalation personnel, from volunteers to management

PM'S ROLE DURING CRISIS

1. Provide specific guidelines if volunteer role needs to be adapted to continue providing essential services and aid
2. Answer volunteers' questions as their main contact person



3.2 TRAINING AND ENGAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

With many events and onsite activities cancelled, VMs can consider engaging volunteers in the following ways:

OFFER VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING ROLES such as pen pals, virtual facilitators, etc.

CURATE BITE-SIZE TRAINING RESOURCES to upskill or further equip volunteers for existing or new needs. Find out their interest, or share more about other programmes your agency offers for volunteers keen to try new areas.

SHARE INSPIRING VOLUNTEER STORIES to encourage and liven the situation. While gathering feedback, agencies can collect stories and acknowledge the hard work of the volunteers. These stories can also serve as learning guides for new volunteers.



3. COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

PLANNING AHEAD

Ongoing communication and engagement with internal and external stakeholders during and post-recovery keeps everyone informed of the situation and ensures that all are aware of the agencies' plan and prepares them for the next step.

Here are some examples of how agencies can secure support in reshaping the agency's volunteer-related strategies for recovery:



BOARD MEMBERS

In view of new needs and constraints agencies have to operate within, volunteer resource optimisation is a viable strategy to plan and get buy-in from board members.

STAFF

Encourage open two-way communications on concerns faced and also equip them with crisis and volunteer management competencies. VMs can also use this chance to get buy-in from PMs on potential volunteer pilot initiatives.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Share your new needs, source out new resources and brainstorm more sustainable ways to collaborate with partners e.g. volunteer training, recruitment, and other development opportunities.



CORPORATE PARTNERS

Understand their new concerns and offer alternative ways of meet your new and existing needs, and their CSR goals. Propose pilot volunteer initiatives they can contribute. [See Pg 12 for more details.](#)

SERVICE USERS

Assure them about the services and support that your agency will continue to render during this period. Seek their consent to pilot new initiatives while encouraging them to also contribute feedback and ideas.

VOLUNTEERS

Understand their commitment preferences during the crisis. This is an opportunity to seek out volunteers who may be keen to pilot new ideas with the agency, and also facilitate manpower planning.

4. STAFF ENGAGEMENT & INTERNAL RESOURCING

To prepare for increased demands on social services, agencies can consider a more strategic approach to volunteerism and community involvement to complement their professional services provided by trained staff. Volunteers, if deployed and trained adequately, can be great assets in supplementing the work of full-time headcounts.

4.1 ENGAGE STAFF AND GET BUY-IN

For a more efficient and effective VCP implementation, agencies can consider setting up a volunteer experience workgroup with board and senior management representatives, comprising staff across the different programmes involving volunteers. After the VCP has been implemented, the workgroup may focus on experimenting with new volunteer roles and engagement approaches during the post-crisis recovery period.

The Management team should also address any staff concerns as well as providing them with the necessary training to equip them with volunteer management competencies, such as on-the-job volunteer training, feedback and recognition for volunteers. This helps staff to work more confidently with volunteers, and also take greater care of their volunteer experience.

4.2 SOURCE AND GATHER INTERNAL RESOURCES

Volunteers can contribute most effectively when deployed at the right time, at the right place, with the right support. For effective implementation of VM plans, agency leaders should plan for the following resources during programme design. Some examples of resources needed are:



MANPOWER

(Consider these work tasks when planning staff job scope)

1. Curating volunteer roles
2. In-house training and supervising volunteers, especially during first few sessions
3. Getting volunteer feedback

BUDGET

1. Training courses, engagement and recognition of volunteers
2. Software subscriptions eg. For volunteer attendance/tracking
3. Equipment eg. Office handphone for volunteer queries
4. Insurance protection, especially for regular service-based volunteers

5. ASSESSMENT OF CRISIS RESPONSE & RECOVERY PREPARATION

5.1 ASSESS CRISIS RESPONSE READINESS

A VCP is most useful and effective if it is regularly reviewed and updated. Agencies keen to assess and understand their crisis response can consider a simple assessment checklist ([Refer to Pg 13](#)), especially during peace time. This allows agencies to identify gaps and improve existing processes for better resilience.

Agencies that are heavily dependent on volunteers may also consider putting together a Crisis Response Team to facilitate timely mobilisation and deployment of volunteers during a crisis.



5.2 RESHAPE STRATEGY FOR VOLUNTEER CONTINUITY

As it is uncertain how long precautionary measures will last, agencies have to rethink many aspects of their operations strategically. Some of the common issues include uncertainty in donations and funding, changes in volunteer preferences, and how volunteers are involved in activities such as home-based, centre-based services, physical fundraising events and corporate volunteering.

Here are some ideas on how volunteers can be more sustainably and strategically involved in delivering your agency's vision.

VIRTUAL AND BLENDED VOLUNTEERISM

Agencies may consider engaging youths and working professionals virtually. Blending virtual and face-to-face activities can allow volunteers to engage service users more frequently too.

FAMILY & FRIENDS VOLUNTEERISM

With more flexible working arrangements, volunteering can now be a stronger strategy for corporates to keep work teams bonded and effective; for others, it could be designed as a regular family and friends bonding activity.

RESHAPING VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

BUILDING A BROAD BASE OF VOLUNTEERS

Agencies may consider growing a broader base of volunteers that may meet new needs that arise. such as technology know-how, system support, virtual fundraising, content creation, and even delivery.

INVESTING IN VM STRUCTURE

Agencies can work closely with government partners to understand the supporting initiatives to improve their long term volunteer management capacity and capability. Check out the newly updated [VM Toolkit 2.0](#) now!.

D. CORPORATE PARTNERS ENGAGEMENT

WHY CORPORATES?

Corporate volunteer partners are key stakeholders to engage during a crisis, especially those within your immediate community. They often have the ability to mobilise more resources to support more critical causes. In fact, many of them are also looking for ways to contribute, specific to the crisis situations. Hence, make it a win-win situation when you communicate your agency plans with them!

3 KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Share proactively to stand out from the crowd
2. Understand their needs & share authentically
3. Clear articulation of volunteering opportunities, its needs and impact

5 TIPS WHEN ENGAGING YOUR CORPORATE PARTNERS

1. **Thank them** for their interest in your cause.
2. **Share the impact** of the crisis on your services and operations and how your agency has responded (and innovated).
3. **Provide clear and practical options** for them to support your work - donations and volunteering opportunities.
4. **Explore new ways** of collaboration e.g. how they can be your connector to their clients, suppliers etc.
5. **Offer resources** that they may benefit from e.g. Resources on mental wellbeing; counselling support etc.



ENGAGING DIFFERENT CORPORATE TYPES

EXISTING CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS & DONORS

- If their volunteering events are cancelled, offer suitable alternate options
- For existing service-based volunteers, explore alternative activity for continuous engagement (e.g. virtually)
- Go prepared and transparent with your needs and wants (budgets and requests) for more productive partnership

NEW CORPORATE ENQUIRIES

- Understand their objectives and share possible options
- Do not overwhelm corporates who may be less experienced in corporate volunteerism

CORPORATES WHO STEP UP

- Do shine the spotlight on those who step up during tough times! Share authentically to invite others to step up too

E. TEMPLATE, CONCLUSION & OTHER RESOURCES

TEMPLATE & CHECKLIST

This VCP template can be used with this guide to have a better understanding of your agency's volunteer management efforts in a crisis. It contains 3 templates for VCP, Volunteer Activity Risk Assessment Matrix and also a self-assessment VM crisis response checklist.



VCP Template

CONCLUSION

The crisis has left an indelible mark on every individual, agency and organisation. Agencies that are resilient and agile in reshaping their strategy would be able to serve their service users more effectively and efficiently, truly meeting the vision of empowering every individual towards independence.

OTHER RESOURCES

NCSS supports the sector's volunteer management efforts with these initiatives:

Learning resources for volunteer managers

- VM Toolkit 2.0 – With improved Corporate Engagement Guide (updated Jun 2020)
- Volunteer Management System – Selection & Implementation Roadmap – Guide to selecting and implementing a VMS for your agency
- Volunteer Engagement Tool – Understanding your volunteer satisfaction to improve volunteer retention
- Volunteer Management Network Series – Community for peer-learning & good practices
- E-learning modules on Volunteer Management Framework – Equip VMs, programme staff and Volunteer Leaders with VM knowledge
- Friends of the Caring Community (FOCC) – Online-community on Workplace @ Facebook for Volunteer Management practitioners

Funded projects for agencies

- Service-based Volunteerism 5.0 Consultancy – Innovating VM, VCP and Job Redesign

The above resources and more can be found at ncss.gov.sg/volunteer

Please contact Volunteer_Resource@ncss.gov.sg to join NCSS online community or for any other enquiries.

F. REFERENCES

COVID-19 RELATED INFORMATION

- Gov.sg: gov.sg/features/covid-19
- MOH: moh.gov.sg/covid-19
- MSF: <https://www.msf.gov.sg/media-room/Pages/COVID-19-advisory.aspx>
- MCCY: <https://www.mccy.gov.sg/about-us/news-and-resources>
- NCSS: ncss.gov.sg/covid-19
- Enterprise Singapore: <https://enterprisesg.gov.sg/covid-19>

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

- Volunteer Management Toolkit 2.0, NCSS: ncss.gov.sg/volunteer
- VM101: COVID-19 Edition, NCSS: <https://www.ncss.gov.sg/NCSS/media/NCSS-Advisories/VM101-Covid-19-Edition.pdf>
- Engage Volunteers during crisis, VolPro: <https://volpro.net/online-volunteers/>
- Develop a volunteer budget, VolPro: <https://volpro.net/volunteer-program-budget/>

OTHERS

- NVPC Stay home Giving guide for volunteers: www.cityofgood.sg/resources/stay-home-giving-guide/
- Covid-19 Business Continuity Plan, Ernst & Young: https://www.ey.com/en_gl/transactions/companies-can-reshape-results-and-plan-for-covid-19-recovery
- Pandemic Business Continuity Planning, Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety: <https://www.ccohs.ca/publications/PDF/businesscontinuity.pdf>

