Likely Asked Questions (LAQ) for Volunteer Continuity Plan (VCP)

This LAQ was compiled to guide readers in developing the own VCP for their agency and should be read as a complementary piece to the [VCP Guide](#) to provide additional tips and insights. This document also includes questions raised by participants in the two virtual VCP engagement sessions organised by NCSS on 24 January 2022 and 22 April 2022. Speakers from Singapore Children's Society, SHINE Children & Youth Services as well as Ernst & Young shared their insights and experience with the VCP.

Find the recordings of key segments of the sessions at the below links:

VCP Engagement Session #1 | 24 January 2022: [Let's Chat between NCSS, SCS and EY](#), [Walkthrough of the VCP Guide](#), [Question & Answer](#)

VCP Engagement Session #2 | 22 April 2022: [Highlights of the VCP Guide](#), [SSA Spotlight: Sharing by SHINE](#), [Question & Answer](#)

To clarify more questions on developing the VCP or to connect with another agency who created a VCP for their agency, email NCSS at Volunteer_Resource@ncss.gov.sg.

S/N	Type of Question	Question	Response
1	About the VCP	What is the difference between a BCP, VCP and crisis management plan?	The objective of a Volunteer Continuity Plan (VCP) is to establish continuous support from volunteers for essential services and programmes during a crisis. This would involve reviewing volunteer management practices and putting in place mitigation strategies. The VCP is complementary to the Business Continuity Plan (BCP), which is a proactive process for the agency to anticipate potential threats or disruptions. The BCP is developed to enable the agency to react quickly and efficiently to minimise business interruptions. A core objective is to protect and preserve operations and profitability. This is also aligned to a crisis management plan, whereby its objective is to manage the impact of specific crises that could lead to service disruption or affect the agency's reputation or safety. The VCP can be part of the BCP, or be a separate plan aligned to it. To ensure alignment, the VCP should take reference from the BCP, especially in terms of shortlisting critical services and programmes. The VCP team can also review the plan with a specific scenario and volunteer persona in mind to ensure that the mitigation or communication strategies within the VCP do not conflict with that of the BCP. Review the VCP and BCP regularly in tandem, so that the updates would be aligned.

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2	About the VCP	When should agencies consider developing a VCP?	As agencies transit out of the pandemic into normalisation, it is a good time to review the agency's crisis response during the pandemic and reflect on how the crisis management strategies have worked out or how some processes should be tightened. Documenting these strategies and processes will enable each agency to be better prepared in the event of any future disruption. As this VCP Guide was launched in 2021 (during the pandemic), there are several other agencies who created their own VCP based on the steps shown in the Guide. Hear from Singapore Children's Society on their decision to create a VCP here. Find out more from SHINE Children & Youth Services on how they personalised their very own VCP here.
3	About the VCP	Is the VCP recommended for all types of agencies?	Yes, particularly if the agency utilises volunteers because volunteer activities will be affected during a crisis. The VCP provides a step-by-step guide on how volunteers can continue supporting critical services and programmes that is crucial for an agency during a crisis. It is important to plan ahead, identify the areas to prioritise and resources needed to execute it. If the agency's regular volunteers prefer not to volunteer virtually, the VCP team can work with the volunteer management team to consider other sources of volunteers which the agency can tap on as part of outreach and volunteer recruitment. During peace time, the agency may consider diversifying sources of volunteers so that the agency is not reliant on any one source during a crisis. For example, it was difficult to deploy senior volunteers during the pandemic as they were in a vulnerable and at-risk group. Having different pool of volunteers (for example, corporate volunteers and youth volunteers) can help with continuity of the services and programmes. The agency can also utilise the VCP to plan ahead for communication during a crisis, including how to inform, recruit and engage their volunteers. Read more about it in the VCP Guide, **Step 5: Prepare Communication Engagement Plan**, pages 24 to 26.
4	About the VCP	How do agencies document the VCP?	The VCP Workbook provides the templates required to document the agency's volunteer continuity planning process and activities. When the VCP is complete, the agency's senior management and VCP team should be able

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			to access this document easily such through the agency's shared drive. By completing the workbook, the agency would have developed a VCP. It is also possible to adapt the VCP workbook to create more personalised templates for each agency. Listen to how SHINE Children & Youth Services personalised their agency's VCP here.
5	About the VCP	Is there any funding available to help agencies create a VCP?	Yes, there are funding options. Agencies can consider the **NCSS Community Capability Trust (CCT)** for funding on the volunteer management pillar under the Open Pot. For example, agencies may utilise CCT to engage consultants to develop their VCP alongside other volunteer management strategies. Find out more about CCT here. Funding for a consultancy is not a pre-requisite for a successful VCP as the Guide and the Workbook are comprehensive enough to guide agencies who want to put in a place a VCP. It would also be more cost effective to do it in-house since much of the stakeholder engagement and change management will ultimately be taken on by the agency's VCP team. Agencies may also want to consider enlisting the help of skills-based volunteers to assist with creating the VCP, as they would be able to contribute from both their professional experience as well as their volunteering experience.
6	Phase 1: Plan and Prepare	What are some tips for the agencies who are considering a VCP?	At the start of the pandemic, many agencies had to pause their services, programmes or volunteering activities for months as they navigated the uncertainty of the pandemic as well as the uncertainty of how it would affect the services and programmes. This created a loss in meaningful opportunities to engage both service users and volunteers. However, by investing time and effort to the VCP journey early, there will be a long tail positive impact for the agency. Having a VCP has helped agencies in terms of focusing their efforts and volunteering engagement opportunities during the pandemic. Here are some tips to reduce the difficulties of beginning the VCP journey: • Leverage on the agency's existing BCP (if available) to decide on common areas such as list of critical services, risk mitigation strategies and communication templates.

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			• Use the **Distribution and Responsibility List** and **Communication and Engagement** templates in the VCP Workbook to guide planning for the information needed and decisions involving other colleagues. • Request for specific information from colleagues instead of sending them the whole template to complete on their own. • Get the buy-in of senior management so that they can make the information gathering and engagement processes smoother for the VCP team.
7	Phase 1: Plan and Prepare	How can agencies get started on the VCP?	Read through the VCP Guide to have a structured understanding of the steps needed for the agency to create a robust plan. Consolidate information on critical services and programmes in VCP Workbook. The Workbook also contains examples of how to fill in the respective sheets for easy reference. To make it easier for the VCP team, identify the critical services and programmes from the existing BCP, if any. Start with 1 or 2 critical services and run through the 9 steps in the VCP Guide for those services. Then, the VCP team can go back and check in with all the other programme staff to add on more services and programmes into the VCP. If there is no BCP for the agency, VCP team can work with other agency staff to identify services and programmes which are highly dependent on volunteers. The VCP team can also attempt to put into concrete terms how to decide what makes a programme critical, and what makes other programmes less critical. After prioritising programmes accordingly, the VCP team should put down workflows, even if they do not look perfect or complete. An imperfect decision would be better than no decision at all, as it creates something tangible for the team to work on subsequently. It is also important to ensure that there is alignment to existing policies and workflows. Some teams may find it challenging to craft mitigations in a vacuum, or when they are unfamiliar with programmes and services in the agency. Therefore, it is important to have a VCP team that includes a mix of team members. Refer to **Step 3: Set Up Your VCP Team**, pages 12 to 13 for more information.

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8	Phase 1: Plan and Prepare	Do agencies need to utilise an additional workbook for each additional type of crisis planned for?	Yes, the agency should utilise more than one workbook if the agency is planning for very different crisis scenarios. The agency should consider the need to prepare different mitigation strategies for different crisis scenarios based on how critical the service or programme's continuity is and how vulnerable the volunteer involvement is during the crisis. Some other realistic crises to plan for could be weather related events (for example, haze) or technology disruption (for example, cyber-attacks) depending on how volunteerism in the agency is dependent on technology platforms. Content in the VCP **Phase 1: Plan & Prepare** may be similar across different scenarios, but one may consider different mitigation and communication strategies for **Phase 2: Mitigate & Respond.** For example, mitigation strategies may differ for cyber-attacks where agencies would need to reassess virtual volunteerism as compared to haze where agencies may have to increase virtual volunteerism. On the other hand, mitigation strategies could be identical for different scenarios such as haze and Covid-19 which would both require an increase in virtual volunteering. The goal of the VCP is to give staff and volunteers the confidence to manage unforeseen scenarios, and to ensure good experience for all as far as possible during a crisis. Thus, only develop plans that the agency assesses as practical and relevant.
9	Phase 2: Respond and Mitigate	What are some success factors that agencies can take note of and should strive for when creating a personalised VCP?	The key success factors can be categorised in terms of organisational factors, individual factors and external sources of support. Organisational factors: • **Supportive staff who understand the spirit of the VCP.** Senior management and staff buy in is very important. Speak the language of agency colleagues and share with them how the VCP helps to bring everyone on board to better care for the service users, or better meet the agency's organisational needs.

- **Having skilled volunteers on board.** Do not underestimate the impact of bringing volunteers on board the VCP planning and implementation, especially with skills-based volunteers or volunteers who have prior experience in risk management. Volunteers can also help to provide a second opinion of the mitigation strategies from the volunteer's perspective.
- **Existing risk register or BCP which considers the various levels of risks.** It would be very helpful to take reference on the scenarios, critical services and risks that were already considered, even if these existing documents did not include volunteers.
- **Build on to existing forms, application or deployment processes.** Where possible, build onto existing procedures instead of crafting something completely new and unfamiliar. Having structured policies and procedures in place that govern most of the Volunteer Management processes would make work easier in certain aspects of the VCP.

Individual factors:

- **Bandwidth.** Start work on the VCP preferably before a crisis hits. Start on the VCP as soon as possible while the learning points from the pandemic are still fresh in the minds of the agency, before the relative importance of planning for a crisis gets overwhelmed by other day-to-day work.
- **Determination to pursue volunteer partnerships.** In a crisis, it may be difficult to further engage volunteers to continue volunteering due to uncertainty, fear or inconvenience. It is important to have members who are determined to pursue the volunteer partnerships on the VCP team and who are willing to work with volunteers to ensure the partnership continues.
- **Adaptability in the face of a changing environment.** Operationalising any guidelines to the level of specificity required for quick action requires the VCP team to understand the reasoning and intent behind the guidelines and be ready to be adaptable when managing volunteers across different centres with different considerations. For example, precautionary measures for volunteers at a student care centre and at the senior day care centre would be different as the seniors were at greater risk during the pandemic. It thus requires the VCP team to be aware of the types of volunteering and services provided by the agency.

			• **Positive language.** Stakeholders would not like to hear that their volunteering or their services or programmes are "non-essential" in a crisis. Reframe these ideas more positively, such as "primary vs secondary" and "service-user facing vs non-service user facing". • **Strong communication skills.** It is important to communicate instructions and guidelines (which may incorporate government advisories and agency workflows and processes) in a simple and actionable manner. The VCP team can identify some of the key principles that remain constant throughout crisis, and develop a flowchart to guide the next steps for their stakeholders. Listen to how SHINE Children & Youth Services created their agency's flowchart here. External sources of support: • **VCP Guide and Workbook.** The VCP Guide and Workbook were co-developed with many agencies, and they provide step by step pointers to distil the learning and experience from many agencies into a resource for the sector. Utilise the Guide and Workbook as a foundation and personalise the VCP with matrices, workflows and formats that better suit the agency. • **Consultancy support.** Tap on the NCSS Community Capability Trust (CCT) for funding on the volunteer management pillar under the Open Pot to engage consultants to develop the agency's VCP alongside other volunteer management strategies. Find out more about CCT here.
10	Phase 2: Respond and Mitigate	What should agencies take note of when communicating the VCP to volunteers and staff?	Effective communication with stakeholders can help them to understand the objectives and importance of volunteers' contributions to services and programmes. During peace time, senior management and staff involved as part of the VCP team should be familiar with the VCP, its importance and the process of activation. During the crisis, the VCP team may first identify the most immediate stakeholders to communicate with, such as staff delivering critical services and volunteers who are staffing essential volunteer roles.

			Subsequently, communicate the crisis response to them by acknowledging the crisis, sharing the next steps and key dates to take note of. It is important that the communication and engagement strategy also focuses on supporting volunteers' well-being. Read more about it in the VCP Guide, **Step 5: Prepare Communication Engagement Plan**, pages 24 to 26. Some agencies have also considered including crisis management and the agency's VCP as part of the training for all new staff, so that all staff are onboarded on the types of programmes, volunteers and service users, as well as risks and mitigation strategies involved. Depending on how the VCP is communicated, it can also help to position the agency's volunteer programmes in the right direction, showing all stakeholders that the volunteer programme is committed to resourcing the organisation, supporting frontliners and service users even during a crisis.
11	Phase 3: Recover and Review	How do agencies know if the VCP works?	The agency can create a robust VCP by bringing together experience and perspectives from various stakeholders and capturing it in the VCP Workbook. There are a few ways this can be done with during the initial planning and in the review process: In the process of developing the VCP, it is important to **do a validation with programme and service staff.** It is important to discuss with colleagues across different services and programmes, especially those working on the critical programmes and those working with volunteers. This would help the VCP team to understand whether what they have planned would make sense for them and other stakeholders as well. Desktop implementation is one of the ways that the VCP team can review to further strengthen their initial proposals while engaging colleagues and stakeholders in the agency to learn together: **Pilot test specific mitigation response strategies.** The VCP team can try out the mitigation strategies with the agency's volunteers even in times of normalcy. For example, bring the volunteers through hybrid volunteering with half of them trying the virtual volunteering and half of them on the ground in person, and seek their feedback

			afterwards. Let the volunteers have the experience of different arrangements and use the feedback to further refine the recommendations in the VCP. **Do a simulated run-through of the scenario with colleagues in the agency.** If the planning is for crisis such as haze, doing one or two dry runs with the involvement of programme staff, volunteer management team as well as volunteers could also be helpful in terms of visualising the plan as well as refining the workflow. Use the **Crisis Response Review** template in the VCP Workbook to guide the consolidation of feedback and follow up actions as the VCP team works to refine the plan.
12	Phase 3: Recover and Review	How regularly should agencies update the VCP?	The VCP should be updated annually so that the VCP is updated and aligned to any organisational changes since the last review. For example, when the range of services and programmes provided by the agency changes, or when the volunteers serving in the organisation have diversified or changed significantly. If the agency has an annual planning exercise or annual review of the Business Continuity Plan (BCP), also take the opportunity to review the VCP during the same period to ensure that these key documents are aligned. Use the **Schedule of Maintenance** template in the VCP Workbook to plan the allocation of work in terms of the steps in the VCP to review as well as the follow up maintenance activities needed.