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RETURNING TO VOLUNTEERING SAFELY

Practical Advice for Volunteer Involving Organisations

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Visit the Volunteer Ireland website for further support and advice on how to adapt and improve your volunteer programme.

Volunteer.ie

INTRODUCTION

Ireland is gradually re-opening our economy and our society. However, it is vital we continue to adhere to the rules for this new way of living to continue to suppress the spread of COVID-19. For many organisations, volunteers are a core part of their programmes. Once it is safe to do so, organisations will want to welcome volunteers back with open arms. However, the safety and well-being of volunteers and those they help is paramount.

The following practical advice should be used as a guide to support volunteer involving organisations to put measures in place that will allow volunteering to resume safely and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Individual organisations can use it to develop their own protocols. Only organisations that can operate safely should allow volunteering to resume. Further details on government supports and the latest Government Roadmap to help businesses are set out at: www.dbei.gov.ie

Volunteer involving organisations restarting their volunteer programme should follow the same Return to Work Safely Protocol relating to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic as businesses and employers. Based on a three-week review process, the Government Roadmap indicates that restrictions will be unlocked in phases. Further details on can be found at: www.gov.ie

This resource has been developed in consultation with the Department of Rural and Community Development, Department of Health, Healthy Ireland, Sport Ireland, volunteer managers, the network of Volunteer Centres, and Community Call partners. It is based on HSE guidance.

1. ORGANISATIONAL GUIDANCE OVERVIEW

The following list sets out guidance for organisations ahead of restarting their volunteer programme during the various phases of the Government Roadmap. Individual organisations should use it to inform their own individual protocol depending on their circumstances.

Organisations should:

01 **Take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of your volunteers. This means ensuring appropriate health, hygiene and safety measures are in place and carrying out additional induction and training processes to those you normally undertake if needed.**

02 **Appoint a lead representative to ensure volunteers are adhering to COVID-19 measures. Your organisation may already have a person charged with this task for employees, and you may wish to nominate the Volunteer Manager as the COVID-19 lead representative for volunteers.**

03 **Ensure volunteers who are in at risk categories are not being placed in roles at high risk of transmission. In this case there are other forms of volunteering to explore such as volunteering from home or virtual volunteering – detailed below.**

04 **Ensure volunteers follow social distancing practices.**

05 **Ensure volunteers follow hygiene basics such as handwashing and covering coughs and sneezes. You should share HSE guidelines on hand washing and coughing etiquette. They can be found at: www.hse.ie**

06 **Minimise, or eliminate if possible, physical interactions between staff, volunteers, and clients. The current recommended distance to be maintained between people is 2 metres.**

07 **Where required, organisations should ensure volunteers are trained to use Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). While correctly using PPE can help prevent some exposures, it should not take the place of other preventative measures as outlined above. Examples of PPE include gloves, goggles and respiratory protection. In the context of COVID-19 risk, organisations should check the HPSC website regularly for updates regarding use of recommended PPE as PPE should only be selected based on the hazard to the volunteer or worker. Further information on PPE is available at: www.hsa.ie**

2. COMMUNICATION

The key to a safe and continued return to volunteering requires strong communication. Before re-entering their role, volunteers should be made aware of the scope of their role; who their point of contact is within the organisation; that they must follow the HSE COVID-19 guidelines; and that they should withdraw from volunteering if they fall ill or come into close contact with someone displaying COVID-19 symptoms.

01 **Before volunteers are invited back, volunteer involving organisations should ask all volunteers to submit a pre-return to volunteering risk assessment. A pre-return to volunteering induction should also be conducted. Templates for both are provided in Appendix 1 and 2 below.**

02 **Before inviting volunteers back into their role, organisations should contact their volunteers to discuss options for returning. Not all volunteers will be ready to return. Organisations could send a questionnaire to each volunteer prior to their return. Questions may include asking if the volunteer feels comfortable returning to their role or if they would like to volunteer within a different capacity. Another question which your organisation might ask is whether the volunteer would like to put their position on hold until they feel ready to discuss their return.**

03 **Stress management and mental well-being should be a central focus of any return to volunteering programme. It is vital to ensure volunteers are advised that they can withdraw from volunteering if they feel ill-equipped to cope.**

04 **Organisations should inform volunteers on the health and safety and social distancing measures being put in place. The organisation will be different to when they last saw it.**

05 **Organisations should make sure that, if a volunteer is feeling unwell, the volunteer knows that they should disengage promptly without concern or guilt.**

06 **If an organisation decides not to restart their volunteer programme, it is important to communicate this clearly with volunteers, explaining the reasons why and thanking them for their contribution.**

07 **Now is an important time to ensure you have clear role descriptions in place for all your volunteer roles. This helps to define the role and provides parameters in terms of boundaries of the role. Volunteer agreements should also be updated. Volunteer Ireland have developed useful factsheets, guides, and templates for organisations to use. They can be found here: www.volunteer.ie**

08 **Organisations should be aware that some volunteers may be feeling anxious about returning to their role. Volunteer involving organisations, like other employers, have a general duty under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to protect volunteers.**

3. RESTARTING YOUR VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

When volunteers return, your organisation should provide re-induction training for all volunteers. This can be a simple step by step guide. It should at a minimum include the latest up to-date advice and guidance on public health; what a volunteer should do if they develop symptoms of COVID-19; details of how the organisation is prepared to address the risk from COVID-19; an outline of the COVID-19 response plan; identification of points of contact from the organisation; and any other specific advice that is relevant.

If you need to train volunteers in infection prevention measures or upskill them in other areas, you should think about the means to doing this. Can you provide training within a social distance setting or can it be delivered virtually? As a minimum you should communicate the basic messages around physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette. Posters on preventing the spread of COVID-19 are available to download and print and can be found on the HSE website here: www.hse.ie

The training should make it clear that if a volunteer is feeling unwell, they can disengage promptly without concern or guilt. Sometimes volunteers feel guilty that they are letting the organisation down. Make sure that they know their health and well-being and that of your service users and fellow volunteers is your number one concern.

Many volunteers may currently be cocooning. In addition to the above advice organisations may wish to find out more on government guidelines surrounding over 70s here: www.gov.ie

How can your organisation implement COVID-19 Prevention and Control Measures to minimise risk to volunteers?

4. GUIDANCE ON RETURNING TO VOLUNTEERING

COVID-19 is forcing organisations to think differently about engaging volunteers. To ensure the health, safety and well-being of volunteers, organisations can explore alternative ways to volunteering. An approach like this may help keep volunteers engaged and keep your volunteering programme sustained by providing different routes to return to volunteering. Different types of volunteering to consider include:

Virtual Volunteering

Virtual volunteering is voluntary work completed, in whole or in part, through technology. It is not a replacement for face to face volunteering, for the organisation or for the volunteers themselves, and a combination of on-site and online volunteering usually works best for everyone. It does, however, allow your organisation to involve more volunteers and thus achieve more of its aims. Organisations might consider offering virtual roles such as:

- **Adapting existing physical roles to become virtual ones - for example face to face befriending becomes a phone or video call.**
- **Creating new virtual roles to meet day to day existing needs such as data analysis or other projects that have been put on hold that may now be handed over to your volunteer to take on whilst keeping them engaged.**

Volunteering from Home

Now more than ever, many people are offering their help during COVID-19. If your organisation cannot engage volunteers physically, you can engage them in their own home. Volunteering from home is not new, but since the COVID-19 emergency began more organisations are thinking about how they can engage volunteers. An example of volunteering from home includes Microvolunteering - bite-sized, on-demand, no commitment actions that benefit a worthy cause. Your organisation might ask volunteers to volunteer remotely for roles in areas such as administration, befriending or digital support. Organisations can also visit the national volunteering database I-VOL for ideas on what other organisations are doing to engage volunteers from home.

Skilled Volunteering

Skilled volunteering is essentially lending volunteers' expertise to benefit an organisation. Skilled volunteering can have a hugely positive impact on the organisation. It also boosts volunteers' professional experience, improves employability and extends their professional network. Your organisation might consider recruiting skilled volunteers to:

- **Help develop your website.**
- **Help write funding applications, for example in response to the many new grants that are arising in response to COVID-19 from both government and the private sector.**

Formal Volunteering

Formal volunteering relates to people giving their time and help through groups, clubs or volunteer involving organisations. Formal volunteering often involves a regular time commitment. There is usually a Volunteer Manager who will oversee and support volunteers in their role. Often formal volunteering will involve being recruited by a volunteer involving organisation and then vtrained to complete specific tasks. For some organisations that have not previously had a formal volunteering structure, this might be required in order to facilitate safe volunteering.

An organisation may restart volunteer training for formal roles and may do so practicing social distancing and health and safety guidelines.

Informal Volunteering

While many people will volunteer with an organisation, others will volunteer as individuals or in small informal community groups. This is especially true during times of crisis when communities come together to look after our most vulnerable members. As per Government guidelines, home visits can now resume to those over 70. This may involve befriending visits or helping neighbours with tasks such as gardening. Any group or organisations facilitating informal volunteering should consider their legal obligations such as safeguarding and Garda vetting – guidance on this is available from Volunteer Ireland here: www.volunteer.ie

5. THINKING AHEAD

To support your volunteer programme in returning to the new normal after COVID-19 we have provided a sample action plan in Appendix 3. It contains some outcomes, activities and key performance indicators that might benefit you and your volunteers. The action plan includes looking at streamlining your organisation's recruitment and selection process; identifying and developing new virtual, flexible, short-term, bite-size or task-based roles; surveying your volunteers to assess their skills and qualifications; conducting risk assessments on roles in relation to COVID-19 related guidelines and more.

If your action plan includes the recruitment of new volunteers consider posting your volunteer roles on I-VOL, the national volunteering database, thousands of people across Ireland have registered an interest in volunteering through I-VOL. It may give you access to a new pool of volunteer recruits.

Your local volunteer centre can provide tailored support and guidance on reengaging your volunteers; developing new volunteer roles; and recruiting volunteers. Contact details for Volunteer Centres across Ireland are here: volunteer.ie

Appendix 1
Pre-Return to Volunteer COVID-19 Risk Assessment

This risk assessment template may be used as a guide and should be completed by volunteers at least 3 days in advance of returning to volunteer.

Download the editable version of this Risk Assesment here: www.volunteer.ie

Pre-Return to Volunteer COVID-19 Risk Assessment

If the answer is Yes to any of the below questions, volunteers are advised to seek medical advice before returning to volunteer.

Name of Volunteer: _____ **Date:** _____

Name of Volunteer Manager: _____

Question	Yes	No
1. Do you have symptoms of cough, fever (high temperature – 38 degrees Celsius or above), shortness of breath or breathing difficulties, loss or change to your sense of smell or taste now or in the past 14 days?		
2. Have you travelled anywhere outside of Ireland in the last 14 days?		
3. Have you been diagnosed with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 infection in the last 14 days?		
4. Are you a close contact of a person who is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 in the past 14 days (i.e. less than 2m for more than 15 minutes accumulative in 1 day)?		
5. Have you been advised by a doctor to self-isolate at this time?		
6. Have you been advised by a doctor to cocoon at this time?		
7. Have you been advised by your doctor that you are in an at-risk group? If yes, please liaise with Volunteer Manager.		

I confirm, to the best of my knowledge, that I have no symptoms of COVID-19 and am not self-isolating or awaiting results of a COVID-19 test. Please note: The organisation is collecting this sensitive personal data for the purposes of maintaining safety within the workplace in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The legal basis for collecting this data is based on vital public health interests and maintaining occupational health and will be held securely in line with our retention policy.

Signed: _____

Appendix 2
Return to Volunteer / Induction Meeting COVID-19

Download the editable version of this Return to Volunteer / Induction Meeting COVID-19 here: www.volunteer.ie

Return to Volunteer / Induction Meeting COVID-19

Name of Volunteer: _____ **Date:** _____

Name of Volunteer Manager: _____

Wellbeing & Health and Safety	Comments
1. General update: How are they doing, how did the pandemic affect them?	
2. How are they feeling about returning to the volunteer programme?	
3. Discuss their self-care and how they are/can protect their well-being.	
4. Discuss current situation in relation to sick leave policy (if relevant).	
5. Discuss local response plan/new measures to address risk of COVID-19 (including current advice on PPE, social distancing).	
6. Discuss changes to health and safety practice and levels of responsibility, including what to do if a volunteer becomes unwell.	
7. Discuss if there are any other circumstances relating to COVID-19, not included, which they need to disclose/ ask to allow their safe return to volunteer.	

Appendix 3
Volunteer Programme COVID-19 Sample Action Plan

This Sample Volunteer Programme Action Plan has been developed to illustrate the types of outcomes, outputs and activities that may be relevant in long standing volunteer programmes both now and post-COVID-19. We hope it will be helpful in providing areas of work that may need attention at this time and can guide you when presenting a plan of action for your volunteer programme to your organisation's management and Board members.

You may find the activities outlined below are more or less relevant to your organisation at this time. Ultimately it is up to you to decide when and how you might put these items in place and what works best for your volunteer programme and your organisation.

In developing your Action Plan there are a couple of key questions to be asked: How can your organisation's volunteer programme stay relevant and valid now and in the coming months? Are there new ways volunteers can be engaged to ensure the volunteer programme remains an integral part of the overall organisation e.g. virtual, flexible, short-term, task-based and micro-volunteering? What types of upskilling needs to be completed at this time? What core policies, documents, processes, and procedures can be reviewed, updated and developed to ensure your organisation's volunteer programme is meeting best practice guidelines and standards?

Download the editable version of this Action here: www.volunteer.ie

Outcome	Outputs/Activities	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
1. Develop and update new and pre-COVID-19 volunteer roles to respond to emergency	1.1 Identify new volunteer roles	3 x new virtual roles identified e.g. virtual group chats, 1-1 online befriending, capturing oral histories, virtual skills, classes, workouts for clients led by or with volunteer engagement 3 new short-term, flexible, task-based volunteer roles identified
	1.2 Identify and update pre-COVID-19 volunteer roles to meet relevant national guidelines in relation to COVID-19	3 x pre-COVID-19 volunteer roles identified and updated to comply with national guidelines
	1.3 Conduct volunteer survey to identify current volunteers' professional skills, experience, qualifications, certifications and other interests	Survey developed and sent to x 100 volunteers Survey responses x 50 volunteers Survey analysed and report completed recommending x 3 volunteers and x 3 new volunteer roles (short-term, flexible or virtual) unique to volunteer skills, experience, qualifications and certifications identified via survey. Sample skills, roles and experience might include: training and development; expertise in policy development, risk analysis or GDPR; building remote working systems; communications and updating webpages and marketing materials. Volunteers may also have other areas of interest, soft skills or work and life experience that may be relevant and applicable to developing new roles
	1.4 Conduct volunteer role risk assessments	Conduct minimum x 9 volunteer role risk assessments (including GDPR and H&S) on new and updated volunteer roles Control measures implemented to reduce risks for all new and updated roles

*Please note: the numbers used are for example only and are not based on an existing volunteer programme

Outcome	Outputs/Activities	Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
	1.5 Recruitment of volunteers for new and amended volunteer roles	Re-evaluate and streamline current recruitment and screening process to reduce any unnecessary steps and administration 50 x current volunteers re-engaged in new roles 30 x new volunteers recruited to fill new and updated roles
	1.6 Development and delivery of training to volunteers in new and updated roles	Identify key areas of training to be delivered in relation to COVID-19 Identify key training and certifications that can be taken online and at home by volunteers 30 x new volunteers trained 50 x current volunteers upskilled and re-trained
2. Professional development of Volunteer Manager and upskilling of volunteers	2.1 Attendance at VI's weekly coffee morning for Volunteer Managers	Attend x 2 coffee mornings a month
	2.2 Attendance at VI's COVID-19 webinars for Volunteer Managers	Attend x 2 webinars a month
	2.3 Identify training areas and courses relevant to responding to the current COVID-19 emergency	Volunteer Manager to identify and upskill in at least two of the following areas in relation to COVID-19 e.g. Garda Vetting, GDPR, Health & Safety, Risk assessment Volunteer Manager to identify and attend free online training in at least two of the following areas e.g. Counselling, social media, visual design using Adobe Photoshop, Excel Volunteer Manager to research Health & Safety Authority website to identify relevant materials and courses for attendance in relation to COVID-19 for volunteers Volunteer Manager and all volunteers to complete the following online certified training e.g. 1 x WHO training – Standard precautions: Hand hygiene 1 x WHO training – How to put on and remove personal protective equipment 1 x WHO training – Health and safety briefing for respiratory diseases

Further Support

Volunteer Ireland provides a range of supports for volunteer managers including:

Guides & Resources
Training & Webinars
Networking Opportunities

volunteer.ie