



Status of the Volunteering Sector:

Post-COVID Recovery and Resilience

May 2021

Volunteering New Zealand

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OUR WORK

This report provides an update on the status of the volunteering sector as at May 2021.

Our work draws on data collected via stakeholder feedback, a focus group with Volunteer Centres and our own research. This report captures the challenges and opportunities faced by the volunteering sector as we move through the post-Covid-19 recovery period.

This report outlines our key findings and offers a series of recommendations for the sector's recovery and improved resilience and preparedness for the future.

OUR FINDINGS

Some older volunteers stopped volunteering: Some organisations that relied on older volunteers are still waiting for their volunteers to come back after COVID-19. With the lockdown restrictions and different alert levels some older volunteers got nervous and stopped volunteering. Some of them have returned to volunteering and some have not because they don't want to have close contact with people.

First-time post-COVID-19 volunteers: Some people learned about the importance of volunteering during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. They realized they needed to do more and help their communities more. This resulted in a wave of new volunteers to enter the volunteering landscape in order to assist their communities. Traditionally, many first-time volunteers have been newly retired individuals or older people. This seems to be changing with more people across different age groups becoming first-time volunteers.

Funding is biggest challenge: community organisations do not know what funding will be available in the short and midterm, what criteria will the funders be looking at, and how the funding streams will change.

Regional differences have become bolder: the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted some of regional differences in the sector. For instance, those regions which have traditionally relied on older volunteers or international students face challenges in recruiting enough volunteers.

Older volunteers have more life commitments: with increasing prevalence of double income families more and more grandchildren need to be looked after by grandparents. This change of culture has resulted in many older volunteers having less free time for volunteering.

Lack of funding means no budget for volunteers' well-being: some organisations have absolutely no money left from their budget so they cannot do anything to improve the well-being/welfare of their volunteers.

Shifting away from longer-term commitments: more and more volunteers see long-term commitments as a barrier to volunteering. It seems the demand for short-term, project-based, and episodic volunteering is growing, especially for younger volunteers.

General lack of volunteers in some regions: there seems to be a reluctance for people in some regions to volunteer. Hence, the number of volunteers has dropped considerably in these regions.

Changing demographics of the local communities: since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, some people seem to be moving out of the larger cities and settling down in smaller cities and regions. This will inevitably change the demographic of local communities and hence, it will have an impact on volunteering.

The Community and Voluntary Sector is under pressure: besides lack of funding and volunteers, various organisations in the sector are under pressure:

- Some organisations have seen an increased demand in their services which risks putting a strain on their staff and resources. For instance, Age Concern has seen an increase in older people being isolated and vulnerable and therefore, more demand for companion volunteers.
- Some organisations have seen an increase number of volunteers. For instance, Native plant nurseries seeing increased numbers of people helping out due to unemployment and a higher level of desire to connect to the community. The higher number of volunteers means more work for volunteer managers that are already overworked and under pressure.
- Food banks and community groups providing meals or support for community members are all seeing a huge increase in demand for their services and therefore, their resources are stretched.

Lack of resources for volunteer managers: There is an increase in appetite for connecting with communities so volunteer involving organisations have good potential to capture this interest. However, lack of resourcing and lack of funding prevent volunteer managers from carrying out their role effectively and supporting higher numbers of volunteers.

Increased use of technology and online activities: as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organisations adopted new technologies and increased their online/remote capabilities and activities in order to attract more volunteers. Volunteers too seem to be more willing to engage with the new technologies/information and online ways of volunteering.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Volunteering New Zealand recommends that:

- a) A national volunteering strategy is created to guide the sector
- b) Additional funding is allocated to assist the sector with the post-COVID-19 recovery
- c) Plans are put in place to retain first-time post-COVID-19 volunteers
- d) More diverse demographics and communities are encouraged to engage in volunteering
- e) Strategies are implemented to prepare the sector for new and different ways of engaging with volunteers
- f) The sector requires more collaboration, not only amongst Volunteer Centres but also with other stakeholders and volunteer involving organisations. Collaboration will result in better outcomes for the post-COVID-19 recovery
- g) The sector should be prepared for future changes in the volunteering landscape
- h) The sector should be assisted to adopt and implement technological infrastructure
- i) The government commits to promoting and valuing volunteering and volunteers