Volunteering New Zealand sector feedback update 1 May

What is this report?

Volunteering New Zealand has captured the status and the contribution of volunteering sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. This report summarises the key points extracted from volunteer-involving organisations weekly updates. The collected information helps VNZ to understand the impacts of this event on the sector. The resulting insight will be useful for the volunteering sector, stakeholders, government, and experts in order to portray the response of the volunteering sector to the pandemic, elaborate on the lessons learned from it, and to conduct future analysis, preparation, and action.

The impact on organisations

As expected, the pandemic/lockdown did have a significant impact on the operations of volunteer-involving organisations. It disrupted their business as usual and subjected them to unprecedented circumstances, challenges, opportunities, and issues. Here are the main points raised by organisations:

Issues and challenges communicated by volunteer-involving organisations

- With the announcement of moving to Level 3 it means there is a need to find further people to assist in covering rosters as many of the current spontaneous volunteers are returning to work.
- Most volunteer involving organizations cannot resume their business as usual operations until alert level 2.
- Concerns around specific volunteering roles – such as tour guides – that are lost/significantly impacted by the outbreak
- Expected further decrease in the volunteer's pool as students resume their studies, and more businesses start their operation under lower alert levels
- Reliance of the volunteering sector on older volunteers, and issues resulting from restrictions for 70+ and 60+ volunteers
- Reduced number of volunteers seeking to assist with lockdown volunteering
- Volunteering opportunities are significantly reduced
- Concerns about the long-term impacts of the pandemic on volunteers' lifestyle and attitudes toward volunteering
- Lack of available technology education and support for the elderly

- Mid- and long-term planning and projects have been postponed (expansion of activities, exploring new funding mechanisms, and etc.)
- Technology and IT support for volunteers

Actions taken by volunteer-involving organisations

- National bi-weekly zoom conferences where Volunteer Centres checking out in their response, receiving new ideas, and supporting each other
- Notice from Civil Defence that they are likely to require more volunteers for deliveries of food parcels under Level 3 and 2 as people start returning to work
- Continue to collaborate with CDEMG requests
- Continue networks and seminars relating to volunteering and business management over this period
- Documenting and releasing volunteering arrangements under differing levels
- Publishing reminders of volunteering best practice during these times
- Planning for Level 3, 2, and 1 alert for volunteer recruitment centres, volunteers, and member organisations.
- Developing a recovery, return to work, and communication strategy
- Preparing and distributing workplan documents for different alert levels.
- Identifying possible scenarios and getting ready for them
- Developing IT and online capabilities
- Assisting volunteers with setting up their online connection and arrangements
- Focusing on the health and well-being of volunteers and providing them with more support and resources at such stressful and uncertain times
- Keeping volunteers informed about the requirements of volunteering under different alert levels
- Making use of technology to conduct volunteering activities in an online/remote format
- Restructuring and reformatting existing roles, parameters, and activities to align with the new volunteering environment
- Communicating and sharing volunteering news and stories to a wider audience
- Developing facilities required for remote operation including the training
- Increasing the level of support and appreciation of volunteer work
- Establishing new communication channels (and improving the existing ones) to coordinate volunteers with volunteering activities
- Contacting and offering volunteer assistance for organisations that provide essential services
- Identifying and contacting volunteers who are 70+ or otherwise vulnerable
- Holding virtual catch up meetings for volunteers and volunteer managers
- Creating E-learning modules to keep volunteers engaged

- Increased level of communication with other actors in the sector to ensure access to the most up-to-date, relevant, and reliable information

Opportunities for volunteer-involving organizations

- Developing the requirements and adapting to online/remote working arrangements
- Online meetings are more accessible for all organisations to attend, especially those organisations that could not physically attend those meetings previously
- Moving from paper-based practices towards electronic and paperless systems
- Developing best practices for volunteering during pandemics and emergencies
- Identifying those volunteer activities that have been continued with no or minimum disruption
- Producing a knowledge base on volunteering and volunteer management during pandemics
- Conducting surveys to capture valuable insights about the sector's status, preparedness, initiatives, and etc.
- Critical opportunity to register and engage volunteers who are specifically interested in volunteering during emergencies (some organisations have reported a significant increase in volunteers registered for emergency volunteering)