

Volunteering New Zealand sector feedback update 17 April

What is this report?

Volunteering New Zealand has captured the status and the contribution of the 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 understand the impacts of this event on the sector. The resulting insights 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

- Most BAU is completely suspended
- Reliance of the volunteering sector on older volunteers, and issues resulting from restrictions for 70+ and 60+ volunteers
- Increased levels of stress and anxiety among volunteers
- Reduced numbers of volunteers/volunteer managers due to stress and uncertain circumstances around volunteering
- Volunteering opportunities reduced significantly, many volunteering roles have been dissolved temporarily or permanently
- Mid and long-term planning and projects have been postponed (expansion of activities, exploring new funding mechanisms, etc)
- Changing of the funding environment has caused uncertainty around organisations' viability, funding, and fundraising for the foreseeable future
- Lack of guidelines, best practices, resources, and equipment for safe volunteering
- Lack of a national or central framework/database for registering/recruiting/deploying volunteers
- Technology and IT support for volunteers

- The necessity of minimum reimbursements for volunteering expenses (at least the travel costs)
- Lack of established frameworks to effectively manage volunteers' performance, safety, and wellbeing during the pandemic/lockdown
- Ongoing issues in volunteer engagement: online competition/noise, declining energy/motivation
- Planning and coordination for postponed and cancelled events and projects in terms of logistics, funding, etc
- Eligibility criteria for the government wage subsidy support render many volunteer involving organisations not eligible, due to the nature and the mechanisms for fundraising and collecting the revenue.

Actions

- Putting more focus on the health and wellbeing of volunteers and providing them with more support and resources at such stressful and uncertain times
- Establishing and improving communication channels with Civil Defence Emergency Management Group to coordinate volunteering activities
- National bi-weekly zoom conferences checking out where all areas are up to in their response, receiving new ideas, supporting each other
- Developing facilities required for remote operations, including training
- Some organisations have set up a variety of online activities for their communities (for instance bake-along, live baking classes for kids, weekly movie nights, and weekly story time)
- Advising local communities on ways to do things online and a range of online activities
- Decide what activities are able to continue during the lockdown, and what things need to be put on hold/postponed
- Volunteering events have been postponed for several months
- Increased use of social media to reach volunteers and to make connections with communities
- Increasing capacity to support impacted areas (for instance, supporting retirement villages)
- Increased level of communication with other leaders in the sector to ensure access to most up-to-date, relevant, and reliable information.

Opportunities

- 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.