



## Adapting to COVID -19 New Normal

### Communicate Necessary Information

What information do your volunteers *need* to know? How will you communicate this information to your volunteers?

1. **Send an email update to your volunteers.** This email should communicate your organization's plan for responding to COVID-19 and where your volunteer program fits into this response. Feel free to reference the correspondence outline below.
2. **Keep your volunteers updated.** Maintain regular communication with your volunteers. Situations can change rapidly, and it's important to keep your volunteers in the know.
3. **Share key resources.** Pass on local resources and other information that you think will be useful to your volunteers. Ensure the resources you share come from a trusted source.
4. **Use your website and social media channels.** Your website and social media channels are effective tools for communicating key information. Include a banner on your volunteer page to direct volunteers toward the need-to-know information and FAQs.

### Help Your Volunteers Feel Safe

If you do choose to maintain your volunteer programs while public health recommendations are in effect, ensure your volunteers feel safe with these three tips:

1. Stay home if you are sick. Individuals who arrive on site with symptoms will be sent home. Outline a clear system for getting in touch with you/the organization when cancelling a shift.
2. Implement a no handshake policy at your organization while COVID-19 remains a threat. Please do not shake hands with staff, volunteers or clients. Wave or verbally greet people instead.
3. Frequently wash hands, and follow other guidance provided by the CDC around disease containment.
4. Prepare your volunteer space. Set up hand sanitizer and hand washing stations. Print out and hang up CDC guidelines for effective hand washing and sanitation. Dedicate extra time for cleaning your spaces, and provide personal protection equipment when necessary.



5. Be aware of your vulnerable populations. Support your volunteers who may be more vulnerable to COVID-19, especially older participants. If you think it's in your volunteers' best interest to stay home, make them feel valued and let them know you'll be ready to receive their help when it's safe to do so.
6. Be responsive. Your volunteers probably have lots of questions. Even if you don't have all the answers, you can help your volunteers feel safe by simply responding to their concerns and questions. Carve out extra time in your day to communicate with your volunteers on a personal level.
7. Offer additional information on if and how your organization's services will be impacted as it becomes available.

## Incorporate “Social Distancing” Into Your Volunteer Programs

As you're providing essential services to your community, you may have to adjust your strategy in order to keep you, your coworkers, volunteers, and other community members safe. Here are some ways you can adapt your programs to adhere to virus protection protocol:

- **Determine which volunteer positions are crucial** to your current state of operations and be prepared to either pare back to only those necessary in order to allow volunteers to stay home to help slow the spread of the virus or support volunteers in working remotely wherever possible in the same ways that staff are increasingly being encouraged to work remotely. You can extend your existing remote work policies to volunteers – or develop an all-encompassing policy now.
- **Take advantage of the internet.** Instead of holding volunteer training sessions in person, ask volunteers to join you via an online conferencing service like Skype or Zoom. Upload documents online so that volunteers in self-quarantine can access training and onboarding materials easily.
- **Reinvent the drive-through.** Consider organizing a drive-through station for supply donations and distribution to limit person-to-person contact.
- **Create help-from-home projects.** Develop projects and creative ways your volunteers can support your mission from home. Writing letters, gathering and delivering supplies, even virtual mentoring are just some examples of activities that keep volunteers engaged.
- **Schedule volunteer shifts.** If your programs involve human contact, schedule volunteer opportunities in staggered shifts, and keep the maximum number of participants between 3 and 5 per shift. This will minimize the number of volunteers congregating in a single location at one time.



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- **Adjust volunteer and staff trainings** by postponing trainings or leveraging online and other virtual training options. Offering opportunities for online convenings is not only a great way to keep volunteers' skills up, even if they take a hiatus from active volunteering to protect themselves and others, but it is also a way to connect and engage volunteers which can be vital to overcoming the potential isolation of "social distancing." Remember, moving a planned curriculum from in-person to online is not always a simple transition. Teaching online is inherently different from face-to-face. VQ Volunteer Strategies will share more on this topic in weeks to come.
- **Allow small groups of friends.** Invite volunteers to create small teams with people (like friends and family) they trust to carry out volunteer activities that require more than one volunteer.
- **Include volunteers in decision-making** around policies affecting them. Having volunteers at the table will ensure that their concerns are heard and addressed.
- **Plan for a volunteer workforce shortage.** Survey volunteers to determine their availability to continue volunteering based on various scenarios. For volunteers who have high availability, ask if they would be willing to increase their volunteerism temporarily to help fill gaps. Track responses.

## The Big Picture

- Converting volunteers to donors
- Marathon not a sprint
- Stay focused
- Stay engaged
- Show how volunteers make an impact
- Think virtual
- Keep volunteers connected to your organization