

Return to 'COVID safe' Volunteering

With the recent National Cabinet's release of a three-step framework to 'reopen' Australia and our State Government's plan to 'Rebuild a Stronger Tasmania' many workplaces are starting to think about transitioning back to work as restrictions are gradually removed post pandemic, and so too are volunteer programs of all sizes, as well as volunteers themselves.

Tasmanians have been exceptional in flattening the curve with Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) quick to respond and suspending non-essential volunteer programs.

In order for our continued success, our collective action is required against COVID-19 to ensure Tasmania is 'COVID safe'. It is imperative that we

ensure the transition back to delivering programs and volunteering activity is done safely including physical distancing and good hygiene practices.

This guideline is intended to assist VIOs with some key considerations that effect the return of programs and how to safely mobilise volunteers as they move to reopen under restrictions.

VIOs will have their own governance requirements and processes which guide their volunteering programs. However, the circumstances of COVID-19 are unique and may not be specifically considered in existing policies.

The following steps may help your organisation if you are looking to return to the active delivery of programs and volunteers.

All Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) have an obligation to protect the health and safety of volunteers:

- VIOs should take reasonable steps to protect volunteers' health and safety
- Volunteers should take reasonable care for their own and others' health and safety
- In practice, these are the same considerations that apply to employees.

Taking reasonable steps involves: • Following Government requirements • Undertaking risk assessments •

Implementing controls and • Effective communication and engagement of volunteers.

STEP
1

Familiarise yourself with the most up-to-date requirements and advice from the Australian and [Tasmanian State Governments](#) as a matter of priority.

- Review the COVID-19 [Workplace Guidelines](#) to ensure your workplace or program meets the minimum legal requirements for your sector.
- All workplaces that are reopening will be required to have a [COVID-19 Safety Plan that complies with minimum COVID-19 safety standards](#). Workplaces that have continued to operate should consider completing a safety plan by 15 June 2020. Minimum Standards will be introduced by 15 June 2020.
- Access advice and resources from WorkSafe Tasmania on how to maintain a safe workplace during the pandemic, including this [workplace checklist](#)

STEP
2

Evaluate the impact of any changes you have made to your operations as part of responding to COVID-19.

- Document any changes made to services and any loss of capacity during COVID-19 e.g. stopped sporting fixtures, closed community centres, suspended home visits, only staffed by one or two volunteers at a time or services delivered online etc.
- Outline restrictions that remain in place that affect your operations such as travel bans, restrictions on contact sport or limits to visitors in aged care facilities and schools.
- Review your volunteer personal accident insurance with your broker to understand what is, and what is not, covered including working remotely.

STEP
3

Determine your priorities. What activities are most important to re-establish?

- If there is more than one area of operation, can the return to service delivery be phased?
- Continue to postpone any remaining programs that do not meet social distancing requirements or cannot be delivered safely.
- Do you have the resources to sustain these activities if restrictions remain in place for a further 6 or 12 months? For example, if you cannot take cash or hold large events to cover costs? Factor this into your priority planning.
- Consider impacts if there are further changes to restrictions including further relaxation of current restrictions or a return to, or introduction of more severe restrictions.

STEP 4

Redesigning your volunteering programs. Please consider:

- If possible, ensure programs or activities are suitable for remote delivery e.g. phone or web based.
- Undertake a detailed risk-assessment on programs involving person to person contact, as per the Government guidelines.
- Specifically consider the issues of engaging volunteers or delivering services to people at greater risk (people over 70, people with underlying chronic health issues over 65, Aboriginal people over 50 or people with compromised immune systems).
- Ensure that privacy risks (such as dealing with health information of volunteers and remote working) are addressed.
- For your PPE needs [please see this link here](#)

Prepare to undertake the programs or activities

- Determine how many volunteers you need.
- Write/ tailor position descriptions and adjust agreements to include new safety procedures.
- Source and develop training and orientation material for COVID-19 awareness, hygiene and other requirements. Other resources may include induction and processes on what to do if volunteers come into close contact with the virus.
- Ensure you can access PPE and skilled resources specifically to manage COVID-19 hygiene.
- Explain the new processes and have volunteers sign off that they understand their requirements.
- Ensure that all volunteers who require information in other languages have access to the information they need.
- Consider if volunteers should be encouraged to have a current flu shot.
- Ensure volunteers are aware of the [COVIDSafe App](#). This is an initiative of the Australian Government designed to assist in the notification of people who have come into close contact with the virus.
- Develop processes, reporting and supervision to support activities and safety requirements.
- Implement physical changes to your operations and increase cleaning regimes, install posters, ensure adequate access to handwashing stations, hand sanitiser and PPE (see minimum standards [required here](#)).

STEP 5

Re-engage and recruit volunteers

Identify volunteers who can be re-engaged

- Thank them for their patience and ongoing engagement.
- Stay connected with your volunteers that are not able to be actively engaged - [Read VT resource Staying Connected](#)
- Assess their interest/ willingness to undertake any roles you have redeveloped.
- Let them know it's ok to say no and to return to your organisation at a later stage.

Contact Volunteering Tasmania if you need volunteers

- Register your organisation for our free [EV CREW](#) program or contact Volunteering Tasmania and we will help you find volunteers who have registered to be a part of the COVID-19 community response.
- You can also post your new roles on the VT [Volunteer Connect](#) recruitment platform.

Consider the physical and psychological safety of volunteers

- If working from home, volunteers can complete a working from home questionnaire to assess if the workplace is safe. [View the SafeWork information and checklists here.](#)
- Ensure there is adequate supervision and support for volunteers' mental health and well-being.
- Pay extra attention to volunteers whose role could be stressful or interface with people in need.
- If applicable, consider providing access to mental health support such as Lifeline, Beyond Blue or an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for volunteers.
- Complete training and induction for any new requirements of the role. –
- Ensure that all hygiene, PPE and COVID-19 awareness training is completed.

STEP 6

Commence delivery of your prioritised program of activities

- Ensure understanding, access to, and compliance with cleaning, hygiene, social distancing and PPE requirements.
- Ensure you have a documented Risk Assessment and Safety Plan.
- Welcome back your volunteers and clients and let them all know what is expected of them.
- Check in with volunteers to support their physical and psychological well-being.
- Contact Volunteering Tasmania if you need any more support.

Suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 at work

If the suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 is at work



1. ISOLATE

Isolate the person from others and provide a disposable surgical mask, if available, for the person to wear.



2. INFORM

Ring the national COVID-19 hotline (1800 020 080). Follow the advice of health officials.



3. TRANSPORT

Ensure the person has transport to their home or to a medical facility.



4. CLEAN

Clean the area where the person was working and all places they have been. This may mean evacuating those areas. Use PPE when cleaning.



5. IDENTIFY

Identify who at the workplace had close contact with the infected person in the 24 hours before that infected person started showing symptoms. Send those people home to isolate. Allow employees to raise concerns.



6. CLEAN

Clean the area where the close contact people were working and all common areas they have been. This may mean evacuating those areas. Use PPE when cleaning.



7. REVIEW

Review risk management controls relating to COVID-19 and review whether work may need to change. Keep employees up to date on what is happening.

If the suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 is not at work when diagnosed



1. INFORM

Ring the national COVID-19 hotline (1800 020 080). Follow advice of health officials.



2. IDENTIFY

Identify who at the workplace had close contact with the infected person in the 24 hours before that infected person started showing symptoms. Send those people home to isolate. Allow employees to raise concerns.



3. CLEAN

Clean the area where the infected person and their close contacts were working and all common areas they have been. This may mean evacuating those areas. Use PPE when cleaning.



4. REVIEW

Review risk management controls relating to COVID-19 and review whether work may need to change. Keep employees up to date on what is happening.

Remember:

- > From a WHS perspective, there is not an automatic requirement to close down an entire workplace, particularly if the person infected, or suspected to be infected, has only visited parts of the workplace.
- > Workers assisting the person who has suspected or confirmed with COVID-19 should be provided with appropriate PPE, if available, such as gloves and a mask. They should also follow hand hygiene procedures.
- > Consider whether you have to notify your [WHS regulator](#) - see our [Incident Notification fact sheet](#).
- > Be aware of privacy obligations.
- > Follow the advice of health officials at all times.

Governance

Small volunteering organisations run by a Management Committee or Board must make an informed decision as to whether they believe it is right for the volunteer program to reopen. If they do reopen, they must ensure that it is safe and legal to do so. Please consider the following:

- Check State Government regulations and review the latest easing of restrictions to determine whether your program may be allowed to re-open. If you need clarification on the restriction guidelines contact your relevant COVID-19 information line for assistance. Do not assume what the ease of restrictions means to your program. If you have any doubt, please check, as there are significant fines and penalties in place for breaches of the regulations.
- If your volunteer program operates from a third-party property such as a Church, Community Centre or Government buildings like a museum or library, we recommend that you contact the landlord, council or trustee for more information before opening your program. It is best to do this via email so you have a record of the advice received.
- If the Management Committee or Board decides to restart the program they are required to put in place a risk assessment, safety plan and operational procedures to ensure the safety of staff, volunteers and clients and communicate this information along with the new operating procedures to all stakeholders of the program.

Insurance cover for volunteers during COVID-19.

Each organisation should speak with their individual insurance brokers for any queries relating to volunteer insurance, however the following can be noted:

- Most Not-for-Profits and charities will have *Voluntary Workers Personal Accident* cover. This cover is for accidents only so this will not protect organisations for claims made if a volunteer gets sick. Unfortunately, there is no cover of this nature for volunteers. While there is sickness cover for employees, most tend to have a pandemic exclusion.
- Any insurance coverage available for volunteers that contract COVID-19 in the course of their volunteering with an organisation will most likely be through *Public Liability* insurance. If a third party contracts the virus and it is proven in a court of law that the organisation was negligent in the transmission of that virus, the Public Liability Policy *may* cover this if the wording permits. Many insurers are imposing pandemic exclusions to any new policies being set up, or upon renewal.
- In the instance of COVID-19 the phrase “prevention is better than cure” is paramount. Organisations need to have heightened risk management procedures in place. It is therefore important to abide by the state and federal governments recommendations and restrictions.

More help?

Do you need more help, or someone to talk to about your program? If your volunteering program or organisation needs more support to navigate the changes, recruit volunteers or get general assistance about best practice volunteer management please contact Volunteering Tasmania. We support a wide range of organisations and can assist you too.

Volunteering Tasmania 1800 677 895 or email team@volunteeringtas.org.au

Helpful links & resources

Below are all the full hyperlinks that are being referred to in this document, plus some additional resources you may wish to explore.

Tasmanian Government official website for up-to-date requirements and advice regarding COVID-19

<https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/>

<https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/business-and-employees/covid-19-safe-workplaces-framework>

Volunteering Tasmania has a number of resources and advice for VIOs and volunteers available

<https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/covid-19-information-and-resources/>

You can stay up to date with daily updates from the Federal Department of Health at

www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert

Safe Work Australia has developed COVID-19 safety resources to download and display

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/signage-and-posters-covid-19>

Relevant information and resources regarding cleaning and hygiene are available here

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/general-industry-information/cleaning>

Safe Work Australia has lots of information available on physical distancing in the workplace

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/office/physical-distancing>

WorkSafe Tasmania COVID-19 Checklist

https://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/567723/CHECKLIST-How-to-keep-your-workers-safe-and-limit-the-spread-of-COVID-19.pdf

Not-for-profit Law has a range COVID-19 resources and may be able to answer specific queries for community organisations on legal issues <https://www.nfplaw.org.au/>

Information on PPE requirements are available via these links:

<https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/stimulus-and-support/personal-protective-equipment-temporary-supply-register>

<https://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/topics/Health-and-Safety/hazards-and-solutions-a-z/hazards-and-solutions-a-z-pages/p/personal-protective-equipment>

Information about the COVIDSafe App from the Department of Health can be found here:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app>

Register for EV CREW if your organisation requires more volunteers in the recovery of COVID-19

https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/emergency-volunteering_mv/

Advertise your volunteer roles via Volunteer Connect on the Volunteering Tasmania website

<https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/for-organisations/list-a-role/>

Volunteering Tasmania has exercised all care in the compilation and drafting of this publication. This Guide is provided solely for the benefit of volunteer involving organisations by way of general information and is designed for discretionary use only. It does not replace the requirement for your organisation to obtain specific operational, legal, insurance, or other advice.

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