

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT 101: COVID-19-EDITION

The COVID- 19 situation has brought unprecedented circumstances to businesses and services, including volunteering activities in the social service sector. While volunteering for essential services and aid can continue¹, other volunteer activities have been suspended for more than a month. We understand that it can be challenging for social service agencies to continue engaging volunteers virtually.

Following [MCCY’s advisory on 14 April 2020](#), here are some suggestions on how to continue engaging existing volunteers and recruit new ones without compromising their volunteer experience. We hope the information will provide volunteer management practitioners some recommendations on virtual volunteering, and practical ways of training and engaging volunteers virtually while we overcome the adversities together.

ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS VIRTUALLY

A. VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING

Many SSAs have shifted their strategies and engagement practices in response to the crisis. Virtual volunteering, also known as online volunteering, can be carried out virtually by the respective volunteer and/or service users’ home to continue serving them. Today, where many of us are working full-time jobs, raising families, trying to find time for self-care, this evolution of the volunteer space makes it easier to fit volunteer work into our already-busy schedules. Here are some examples of virtual volunteering roles that you may consider adapting for your SSAs. You may also like to share [NVPC’s guide](#) with your volunteers, where it suggest how volunteers can give back virtually and safely. Most importantly, remember to publish your volunteer opportunities on [Giving.sg](#) and they will be featured on both [SG United](#) portal and the [SG Cares App](#) too.

Virtual role	Role description	Remarks
Engaging service users		
Virtual Facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage service users using the agencies’ online platforms such as Facebook, providing variety and volunteers’ perspective such as Instagram/Facebook Takeover - These can include pre-recorded or regular live activity sessions (e.g. exercise, performances, craft, cooking) for your service users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suitable for existing or new volunteers - Can be done individually or as a group of family, friends or colleagues - It can be screened at Homes and Shelters, and also to service users in their own homes - These can be in a form of a series – types of craft, recipes, exercises - Can also be their own volunteer stories - Content should be <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bite size, easily accessible - Subject to agencies’ clearance - Consider a short series of 3-4 sessions

¹ The definition of ‘essential services’ is as approved by the relevant authorities for the respective sectors. They include: [MSF’s Essential Services for Vulnerable Groups](#), [MTI’s list of Essential Services for Health and Social Services](#), [MOH’s list of Essential Community Care Services](#). For full list of sector-specific advisories, please see [here](#).

Virtual DeeJay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curate playlists on YouTube or Spotify with classic favourites in English, Mandarin and Malay that staff can play in Homes/Shelters, and which caregivers can play at home for their loved ones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low effort and easy to implement - Music lift moods and changes the atmosphere! - Volunteers can consider sending down a speaker to Homes/Shelters to improve the onsite experience! - Recommended to have a series of playlists with different themes
Pen pals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write regular letters to be sent to service users at homes/ directly to service users' homes. Show care for them despite the distance and spread positive cheer through kind words and cheerful pictures! - For children and youth, this is also a chance for them to improve their literary skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider PDPA concern for home addresses if new volunteers are involved - New volunteers can send to Homes/Shelters for letters to be screened - Pen pals with younger children can be thematic e.g. Dreams, My Favourites, Fears etc.
Virtual mentor/tutor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage and encourage children and youths through technology, also provides respite for caregivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More suitable for existing volunteers for security and safety issues - New volunteers must be screened and should be attached virtually to existing mentors; staff sit in first few sessions - Can consider project-based activities – learn a skill together/tuition; start a YouTube/Instagram channel etc.
Translators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Translate/Dub content like videos, stories etc. into mother tongues or dialects. - Convert them to bite size, more readable infographics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suitable for non-sensitive content - Final product to be cleared by communications team
- Engaging community		
Ambassadors/ virtual fundraisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use volunteer's own experiences/stories to rally more awareness and support for your agency. - Spread awareness of your fundraising campaigns on Giving.sg or wish list on SG United 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication team can consider a #hashtag campaign for volunteers/ambassadors: - For existing volunteers to be “appointed as ambassadors” to share their volunteer experiences on their social media platforms - For new volunteers, to spread awareness of agency's work and campaigns - Recommended for corporate partners with big employee base

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING

CHANGE MANAGEMENT	RISK ASSESSMENT
<p>Everyone adapts to changes differently. Consider how your service users, programme managers and volunteers are coping in this situation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritize and focus on those with urgent and critical needs. - Volunteers: ask if they are in good shape to continue (don't assume!) - Service users: Seniors who may need help with technology would also need to get caregivers' support. - Caregivers: check with caregivers first if they have the bandwidth to do the necessary set ups if technology is involved. 	<p>The safety and experience of the volunteers should be the main considerations when carrying out a volunteering activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider a simple pilot with a small group of regular volunteers first to ensure safety for both service user and volunteers. - For bigger group online sessions, consider using passwords for cyber security purposes. - For new volunteers in more client-facing roles, consider the relevant screening needed.
TECHNOLOGY ACCESS	COST OF IMPLEMENTATION
<p>Not everyone has access to technology that allows virtual volunteering/activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agencies may consider putting up their wish list on Giving.sg which will be posted on SG United page - Reach out to corporate partners for potential sponsorship - Support Homes/Shelters on-site staff in set up of projectors or video conferencing equipment. 	<p>New equipment set ups and materials etc. may incur additional operational cost to the SSAs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepare a reasonable budget to be put up to management for their consideration. - Consider resources available for NCSS members - There are time-limited complimentary software resources for non-profit agencies during this crisis period too.

B. E-LEARNING FOR VOLUNTEERS

Equip volunteers with relevant knowledge so that when we past this crisis, our volunteers will be able to contribute in new or more ways.

For training, consider [complimentary e-learning from the Social Service Institute \(SSI\) to upskill the volunteers](#). The courses available provide an introduction for volunteers to learn how to engage with various groups such as seniors, persons with disabilities and youths. Besides the e-learning courses for volunteers, you will also find a wealth of information from the complimentary e-learning from SSI, [“Understanding Singapore’s Social Services – Singapore’s Social Compact”](#). It provides a good overview of the development and principles behind its provision, the 6 key areas and the challenges ahead.

Alternatively, offer them more insight into social issues through free online resources such as online learning courses, limited screenings by local theatres etc. With a better understanding of the social service ecosystem, volunteers may have deeper insights and learnings in their volunteer journey.

COMMUNICATING WITH VOLUNTEERS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

It is important for agencies to continue engaging volunteers and corporate partners during this period to understand how they are dealing with the changes in their own environment. They may also wonder how your agency is continuing your support of your service users.

Regular communication in the form of simple updates/infographics/newsletters would be useful to let them know how your agency is coping. This could also be a good chance to let them know your challenges and needs for them to contribute or see how they can come on board as a partner.

Suggested content for communication with existing volunteers/ corporate partners:

1. Consider the volunteers' well-being and [share practical tips on how to cope with the situation](#)
2. Update on how your service users, staff, management coping with the changes
 - a. 3 things I have learnt
 - b. 3 wishes for this season
 - c. 3 things I hope for
 - d. 3 things I am thankful for
 - e. 3 things I think about the most
3. New challenges that have emerged from this crisis and how your agency has improvised/still finding solutions
4. Additional support and new volunteering opportunities that your agency may require

Keep in mind that your corporate partners are also coping with their own challenges in business continuity and personal lives. Agencies may consider sending a note to maintain the relationship and show some care. At the right juncture, agencies may consider proposing future partnership opportunities as these typically take time to develop:

- Collaborating on organizing future agency events/ company events
- Considering longer term partnerships by blending it with virtual volunteering opportunities (e.g. Mentoring can be done face to face and virtually over a period)

PLANNING AHEAD FOR MORE EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

How do you improve the way you manage your volunteers? Taking reference from the Volunteer Management Framework, here are some areas your agency may consider:

VM Aspect	Suggestions
SSA Readiness	Survey colleagues to understand the impact of suspension of volunteer activity Train staff in volunteer management virtually
Needs assessment	Identify new areas volunteers can be involved, especially virtually through online brainstorming sessions
Volunteer recruitment and engagement	Plan a volunteer recruitment and engagement calendar that
Volunteer impact	Review past volunteering feedback Collate volunteer stories
Volunteer data	Test and evaluate VMS for better Volunteer database management Clean up your volunteer database

REFERENCES

COVID-19 Related Information

- Refer to Gov.sg: [gov.sg/features/covid-19](https://www.gov.sg/features/covid-19) for sector specific advisories
- Refer to MOH: www.moh.gov.sg/covid-19 for updates on COVID-19 Measures
- Refer to NCSS: ncss.gov.sg/covid-19 for members' specific advisories and resources
- Refer to Enterprise Singapore: enterprise.gov.sg/covid-19 for Business Continuity Plan guidelines for SMES for Covid-19

NCSS Volunteer Management resources

- Refer to: ncss.gov.sg/volunteer for Volunteer Management resources such as VM Framework
- Email Volunteer_Resource@ncss.gov.sg to join NCSS online community on Workplace @ Facebook for volunteer management practitioners

Funds available

- Refer to NCSS: ncss.gov.sg/covid-19 for COVID-19 related funds
- Refer to SG United: sgunited.gov.sg/community-efforts/ for other available funds