

# COVID-safe volunteering: a guide for councils



**Tasmania is beginning the recovery from COVID-19 under the State Government's plan to 'Rebuild a Stronger Tasmania'. As restrictions ease, people and organisations are transitioning back to work, and re-engaging with volunteers and volunteer programs. This guide offers advice for Councils to help mobilise their volunteer workforce and enable a successful return to their volunteer programs.**



**Tasmanians have been exceptional at flattening the curve.**

Councils were quick to respond to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in Tasmania; most non-essential volunteer programs were suspended.

To continue to keep Tasmania COVID-safe, we must collectively act to transition safely back to delivering programs and volunteering activity. This includes physical distancing and good hygiene practices.

The circumstances of COVID-19 are unique and may not be specifically considered in existing Council policies. Each Council will need tailored processes to guide their volunteering programs.

**Councils are obligated to protect the health and safety of volunteers**



Councils must take reasonable steps to protect volunteers' health and safety.

Volunteers must take reasonable care for their own and others' health and safety.

In practice, the same considerations provided to paid employees apply for volunteers.

### **Taking reasonable steps involves:**

- following government requirements
- undertaking risk assessments
- implementing controls
- effective communication and engagement with volunteers.

### **Acknowledgements**

Volunteering Tasmania recognises the support and information shared by Volunteering Queensland, Volunteering Western Australia, Volunteering Australia and other state peaks in the development of this resource. Volunteering Tasmania would like to thank and acknowledge our fellow state, territory and national peak bodies for volunteering for their collaboration and valuable contribution and support in creating this document.

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.

## COVID-safe volunteering (cont'd)

The following information will help councils when considering the steps they can take to protect the health and safety of volunteers.



### **Familiarise yourself with the current requirements and advice from the Australian and Tasmanian Governments**

- Review the [Sectors Workplace Guidelines](#) to ensure your workplace and programs meet the minimum legal requirements for COVID-19 safety.
- All workplaces will be required to have a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) that complies with minimum COVID-19 safety standards introduced on 15 June 2020.
- Access advice and resources from Safe Work Australia on how to maintain a safe workplace during the pandemic – including the checklist [What can I do to keep my workers safe at the workplace and limit the spread of COVID-19?](#)



### **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. For example, the closure of community or information centres, services now staffed by just one or two volunteers at a time, services must now be delivered online.
- Outline restrictions that remain in place that affect your operations. For example, travel bans, restrictions on delivery of meals, or limits to visitors in private homes or community sites.
- Review your volunteer personal accident insurance with your broker to understand what is, and is not, covered including working remotely.



### **Determine your priorities. What volunteer 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 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, do existing employees have the capacity to cover volunteer roles?
- Consider the impacts if there are further changes to restrictions, including further relaxation of current restrictions or a return to (or introduction of) more severe restrictions.

## COVID-safe volunteering (cont'd)



### Redesign your volunteering programs

- If possible, ensure programs or activities are suitable for remote delivery. For example, phone- or web-based.
- Undertake a detailed risk assessment on programs involving person-to-person contact, as per 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 are addressed. For example, dealing with health information of volunteers and remote working.

### Prepare to undertake the programs or activities

- Determine how many volunteers you need.
- 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 personal protection equipment (PPE) and skilled resources specifically to manage COVID-19 hygiene. The Tasmanian Government has a [Protective Equipment temporary supply register](#) where you can register and source your PPE needs.
- 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. Other resources may include training, induction and what to do if they come into close contact with someone who has the virus.
- Consider if volunteers should be encouraged to have a current flu shot.
- Ensure volunteers are aware of the [COVIDSafe App](#). This Australian Government initiative is designed to assist in the notification of people who have come into close contact with the virus.
- Develop processes, reporting, 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](#)).

## COVID-safe volunteering (cont'd)



### 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 Volunteering Tasmania resource [Staying Connected](#).
- Assess their interest and willingness to undertake any roles you have redeveloped.
- Let them know it's okay to say no and to return to your council at a later stage.

#### Contact Volunteering Tasmania if you need volunteers

- Register your organisation for our Volunteering Tasmania's free [EV CREW](#) program, or contact us and we'll help you find volunteers who have registered to be a part of the COVID-19 community response.
- Post your new roles on Volunteering Tasmania's [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 [Safework Australia's information and checklists on working from home](#).
- Ensure there is adequate supervision and support for volunteers' mental health and wellbeing.
- Pay extra attention to volunteers whose role could be stressful or interface with people in need.
- If applicable, consider access to mental health support such as Lifeline, Beyond Blue or an employee assistance program (EAP) for volunteers.



### 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 those that access your programs and services 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 more support.

## COVID-safe volunteering (cont'd)



### Governance

**Councils must make an informed decision about re-opening a volunteer program. If you do re-open, then it must be safe and legal to do so.**

- Check state government regulations and the latest restriction guidelines to determine whether your program can re-open. If you need clarification on the guidelines, contact your relevant COVID-19 information line. Don't assume what the guidelines mean to your program; if you have any doubt, check. There are significant fines and penalties for breaches of regulations.
- For volunteer programs that operate from a third-party property, contact the landlord or trustee to check guidelines will be followed before opening your program. Email confirmation is best so that you have a record of the advice received.
- If you decide to restart the program, you are required to have in place risk assessment and safety plans, and operational procedures to ensure the safety of staff, volunteers and clients. You must communicate this information, along with new operating procedures, to all program stakeholders.



### Insurance cover for volunteers

**AON Australia (insurance provider) advises that each organisation speak with their individual insurance brokers for any queries relating to volunteer insurance. In general, the following advice applies:**

- Councils should have some form of voluntary workers' personal accident insurance – either a policy or in the form of group personal accident cover which extends to staff and volunteers. Voluntary workers' personal accident insurance is for accident only and will not cover claims for volunteer sickness; this type of insurance is not available for volunteers. Sickness insurance is available for employees, but most providers tend to have a pandemic exclusion
- Any insurance coverage for volunteers who contract COVID-19 during their volunteering with a council 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 council was negligent in safeguarding against the transmission of that virus, the public liability policy may cover this if the wording permits. Many insurers are imposing pandemic exclusions to new policies, and existing policies upon renewal.
- In the instance of COVID-19, the phrase 'prevention is better than cure' is paramount. Councils need to have heightened risk management procedures in place. **The simplest advice we can provide is abide by the state and federal governments' recommendations and restrictions.**

# COVID-safe volunteering (cont'd)

## Helpful resources

The full hyperlinks referred to in this document can be found below, including some additional resources you may wish to explore.








Organisation	Description	Web address
Australian Government Department of Health	Daily updates and health alerts	<a href="http://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert">www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert</a>
	Information about the COVIDSafe App	<a href="https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app">https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/covidsafe-app</a>
Not-for-profit Law	A range of COVID-19 resources; may be able to answer specific queries for community organisations on legal issues	<a href="https://www.nfplaw.org.au/">https://www.nfplaw.org.au/</a>
Safe Work Australia	VID-19 safety resources to download and display	<a href="https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/collection/covid-19-resource-kit">https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/collection/covid-19-resource-kit</a>
	Information and resources regarding cleaning and hygiene	<a href="https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/general-industryinformation/cleaning">https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/general-industryinformation/cleaning</a>
	COVID-19 Checklist	<a href="https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/workplace_checklist_covid-19_0.pdf">https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/workplace_checklist_covid-19_0.pdf</a>
Tasmanian Government	Up-to-date requirements and advice regarding COVID-19	<a href="https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/">https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/</a>
		<a href="https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/business-and-employees/covid-19-safe-workplaces-framework">https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/business-and-employees/covid-19-safe-workplaces-framework</a>
	Information on PPE requirements	<a href="https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/stimulus-and-support/personal-protective-equipment-temporary-supply-register">https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/stimulus-and-support/personal-protective-equipment-temporary-supply-register</a>
Volunteering Tasmania	Resources and advice for councils, VIOs and volunteers	<a href="https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/covid-19-information-and-resources/">https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/covid-19-information-and-resources/</a>
	Register for EV CREW if your organisation requires more volunteers in the recovery of COVID-19	<a href="https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/emergency-volunteering_mv/">https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/emergency-volunteering_mv/</a>
	Advertise your volunteer roles via Volunteer Connect	<a href="https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/for-organisations/list-a-role/">https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/for-organisations/list-a-role/</a>
WorkSafe Tasmania	COVID-19 Checklist	<a href="https://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/567723/CHECKLIST-How-to-keep-your-workerssafe-and-limit-the-spread-of-COVID-19.pdf">https://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/567723/CHECKLIST-How-to-keep-your-workerssafe-and-limit-the-spread-of-COVID-19.pdf</a>
	Information on PPE requirements	<a href="https://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/topics/Health-and-Safety/hazards-and-solutions-a-z/hazards-and-solutions-a-zpages/p/personal-protective-equipment">https://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/topics/Health-and-Safety/hazards-and-solutions-a-z/hazards-and-solutions-a-zpages/p/personal-protective-equipment</a>

# COVID-safe volunteering (cont'd)





swa.gov.au/coronavirus

## Suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 at work

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



 <p style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>1. ISOLATE</b></p> <p>Isolate the person from others and provide a disposable surgical mask, if available, for the person to wear.</p>	 <p style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>2. INFORM</b></p> <p>Ring the national COVID-19 hotline (1800 020 080). Follow the advice of health officials.</p>	 <p style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>3. TRANSPORT</b></p> <p>Ensure the person has transport to their home or to a medical facility.</p>	 <p style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>4. CLEAN</b></p> <p>Clean the area where the person was working and all places they have been. This may mean evacuating those areas. Use PPE when cleaning.</p>
 <p style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>5. IDENTIFY</b></p> <p>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.</p>	 <p style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>6. CLEAN</b></p> <p>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.</p>	 <p style="background-color: red; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>7. REVIEW</b></p> <p>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.</p>	

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

 <p style="background-color: blue; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>1. INFORM</b></p> <p>Ring the national COVID-19 hotline (1800 020 080). Follow advice of health officials.</p>	 <p style="background-color: blue; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>2. IDENTIFY</b></p> <p>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.</p>	 <p style="background-color: blue; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>3. CLEAN</b></p> <p>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.</p>	 <p style="background-color: blue; color: white; padding: 2px;"><b>4. REVIEW</b></p> <p>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.</p>
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**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.


Click on the image to download this poster

## Need more help?

Volunteering Tasmania's **Safeguarding Project** is focused on supporting councils and their volunteer communities. You can find resources to support councils, VIOs and volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic and into recovery on our website at [www.volunteeringtas.org.au/covid-19-information-and-resources/](http://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/covid-19-information-and-resources/)

## Reach out!

If you'd like to chat about additional resources, please get in touch with us by emailing Amy at [amyb@volunteeringtas.org.au](mailto:amyb@volunteeringtas.org.au).