

COVID-19 consultation report

local government & volunteer sector



The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt acutely on volunteering programs in local government and other volunteer involving organisations (VIOs). Understanding the impact and concerns helps Volunteering Tasmania provide targeted assistance as local government and VIOs recover and re-engage with their volunteers. We consulted our members and local government to better understand their main concerns.

How did we consult?

In March 2020 we conducted a member survey and local government consultations. This provided a snapshot of how volunteer involving VIOs and local government understand and are coming to terms with the adjustments needed to their volunteering programs due to the pandemic.

When restrictions eased, we interviewed VIOs, volunteers and volunteer managers in partnership with three local councils: Clarence, Devonport, Huon Valley. This gave us an understanding of the current situation, the response to COVID-19 and the support needed moving forward.



Themes during the pandemic

Themes common to both VIOs and local government

Theme	Description
Communication	Maintaining strong connections with volunteers who have been stood down. Councils and VIOs were challenged on how to keep volunteers motivated, trained, and prepared to re-enter the volunteering space when safe.
Volunteers returning	Fear of volunteers not returning to the program when the pandemic is over. There will be some volunteers, for various reasons, who will not re-enter the volunteer workforce when restrictions ease.
Wellbeing of volunteers	The impacts of self-isolation on the health and wellbeing of volunteers. The importance of volunteering for social connection and how extended time away could affect people's wellbeing.

COVID-19 consultation report (cont'd)



Themes during the pandemic

Themes specific to local government

Theme	Description
Redeployment	Frameworks and processes needed for the redeployment of council volunteers to reassigned roles that continue to support those disadvantaged and vulnerable in the community.
Online presence	Co-ordinating active volunteers via an online process. Limited access to technology and individual capacity for volunteers to move to online activity.
Volunteer diversity	The need to attract and recruit younger volunteers so that volunteer workforces are not as heavily impacted in future.
Reliance	Acknowledgement of the extensive work volunteers do and the depth of knowledge that volunteers hold regarding their roles, and the need to have this knowledge captured.

Themes specific to VIOs

Theme	Description
Government reporting	The impost and expectations to fulfill service delivery contracts and reporting requirements with minimal volunteers.
Volunteer demand	Concerns about the impacts on workforces and service delivery models and the risk of a reduced need for volunteers as a result.
Volunteer fatigue	With fewer volunteers doing more work in some cases there is a risk of overworking those volunteers who are happy to continue participating.

COVID-19 consultation report (cont'd)



Themes into the recovery

Theme	Description
Volunteering during COVID-19	Volunteers who were able to continue during COVID-19 were happy to do so and felt supported and safe. They acknowledged feeling disconnected from the people they supported and recognised the additional work needed during this time.
Unable to volunteer during COVID-19	There was a sense of isolation and disconnection for those who were unable to participate in their usual community activities. Participants acknowledged the difference regular contact made for them during this period.
Impact of changes	Many larger VIOs and councils were able to provide the support and communication needed during the COVID-19 pandemic and into recovery. However, some smaller organisations weren't able to access information or resources to adapt to the new requirements.
Communication	During the pandemic, VIOs, councils and volunteers experienced information overload, causing confusion and stress. Using targeted correspondence and clear communication was an effective approach.
What worked well	Regular communication with volunteers no longer participating. Providing opportunities for people to continue to connect and contribute including online forums and alternative meeting or connection opportunities.

COVID-19 consultation report (cont'd)



Current situation

Theme	Description
Hesitation to return to volunteering	People expressed a desire and interest to re-engage with volunteering but there is still a sense of risk and concern about returning. This is heightened for those that are considered to be at greater health risk if they contract COVID.
Volunteer Wellbeing	There is still much concern for the wellbeing of volunteers who have disengaged and the best way to reconnect with them. This concern is also extended to those volunteers who continued during the pandemic and may be experiencing burnout and fatigue.
Communication	Using clear and consistent messaging about when volunteering is appropriate and who for, as well as what processes are needed to recommence programs safely and within the guidelines.
Collaboration	Volunteers expressed an interest in being involved and collaborating in the recovery of volunteer programs with their organisations. They see this as a great way to re-engage with volunteering, while providing valuable support.
Sharing	While in the recovery phase there is opportunity to work across the sector and in communities to share best practice, resources, learnings, etc.
Redesigning models	Incorporating flexibility into volunteer programs and adapting models to be more efficient. Designing opportunities that offer more flexibility including short term volunteering, distance volunteering, and promoting and communicating the current roles and support needed.
Support	For councils and VIOs to restart and redesign volunteer programs based on the COVID-19 restrictions.

Want to know more?

Volunteering Tasmania continues to work with the sector and local councils to develop resources to address their concerns. Some resources have already been developed and are on our website [here](#).

If you'd like to find out more about current and future resources, please get in touch with Amy amyb@volunteeringtas.org.au.