

Understanding your volunteer community post COVID-19



Volunteers join programs for many reasons including social connection and to give back to their community. Being unable to volunteer during the pandemic has impacted on volunteers, but to what extent? This resource has tips on how to connect with your volunteer community to understand how they are coping and what you can do to support them through recovery.



Have you reached out to your volunteer community?

We know from consultations and research across Tasmania that at least 90% of volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) were affected by the pandemic and that up to 80% had to close their volunteer programs to some degree.

The safety measures put in place due to COVID-19, and the impacts of the pandemic, meant that volunteers were no longer able to participate in programs and activity.

There has also been concern about the return of volunteers and volunteer programs across the state. Regions rely on volunteers to support communities.

Why consult?



As we move into the recovery phase and look at restarting volunteer programs it is important to really understand the challenges and impacts that VIOs and volunteers experienced in your community during COVID-19, and now into recovery.

By consulting, councils can get a better understanding of what support is needed to re-engage volunteer programs and volunteers and identify potential risks to volunteer programs as we move forward.

Following these steps will help you as a council to support vital volunteer programs and volunteers in your region.

Need more help? Volunteering Tasmania's **Safeguarding Project** is focused on supporting councils and their volunteer communities. As part of the project, we've consulted with three councils regarding their experiences during COVID-19. The summary of findings is available at the link below, where you can also find resources to support councils, VIOs and volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic and into recovery.

See: www.volunteeringtas.org.au/covid-19-informationandresources/

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

Be clear on your purpose. Let people know upfront why you're seeking their contribution.

Explain what you're hoping to do with the information collected. Is it simply to understand your volunteer community? Will you provide additional support based on the findings? Are there opportunities to change programs? Whatever the purpose, have a clear idea about what you can do based on the information collected. It is important to be transparent and manage participants' expectations.

Who to talk to? Consider who you can talk to; think about those that volunteer in your community. Aim to capture a variety of voices.

- Formal and informal volunteers
- People from different programs - both council and other organisations in your community
- People who were stood down and those that continued to volunteer during COVID-19
- Age, gender and CALD diversity
- Long-term and new volunteers
- People from different towns and areas

You don't need to go for quantity; if you can collect quality information from a diverse group you'll gain a broad understanding of the different experiences and challenges during the pandemic, which will provide a good overall picture of the situation.

How to consult. How will you talk to your volunteer community? There are a number of consultation methods that can be used to reach out to volunteers.

- Online surveys
- Social media campaigns
- Phone calls
- One-on-one interviews
- Text or instant messages via apps
- Postcard style questionnaires

People engage in different ways, so it is important to use a variety of methods to ensure accessibility and reach across the community. Be flexible and adapt to the individual's needs; if a person feels comfortable, they'll share a lot more with you.

What to ask? To deeply understand your volunteer community and make your consultation meaningful and useful, consider the following tips.

- ✓ Be considered with your questions; think about what you are trying to learn from your volunteer community
- ✓ Be specific, clear, and conscious in your questions and use plain English
- ✓ Allow space and time for detailed answers.
- ✓ Don't ask leading questions or make assumptions of people's experiences.

Some methods of consultations will be more effective than others. For example, phone conversations vs surveys. Use a combination of both reflective questions and forward-thinking questions and consider unpacking both the issues and solutions. This will help to understand how volunteers experienced COVID-19 and to consider what could be implemented to better prepare and move into recovery.

Leading question example:

- **For volunteers:** 'What has been hard about not volunteering during COVID-19?'
- **For VIOs:** 'What did your volunteers find challenging during COVID-19?'

Open question example:

- **For volunteers and VIOs:** 'What was your experience with volunteering during this time?'
- Follow-up questions can delve into the detail to find the positive or negative impacts.