

SOME GOOD PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS FOR GROUPS INVOLVING VOLUNTEERS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

July 2022 Update: In Northern Ireland we currently have reduced restrictions, meaning there is an opportunity to deploy most volunteer roles. We are still asking volunteer involving organisations to consider the regulations and guidance carefully to see how they might apply to their own volunteer roles.

The message from Government is still that we should make safer choices and follow public health advice. Working from home guidance is in place. Notably, the guidelines continue to state that you can leave home to provide voluntary or charitable services, if you cannot reasonably do so from home. Organisations will need to use a risk assessment process to support their decision making and to manage the risk. It is also essential that organisations engage with volunteers to ensure they feel confident to take part. This should be an opportunity to provide them with all relevant information on social distancing, face coverings, hand hygiene, etc. You should continue to maintain social distancing, as well as good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Volunteers who are [vulnerable](#), including aged over 70, should be especially careful. They should follow social distancing and minimise contact with others. While they can volunteer outside of the home, they should first consider volunteering from home.

- Start with a clear value base of keeping everyone (volunteers and those they are helping) safe while responding to the need.
- Identify what roles volunteers can actually carry out to help and what you need from volunteers in terms of skills, time, practical issues such as transport etc.
- Identify the risks associated with the role and think through how you can minimise them. Please feel free to have a look at our [Risk Assessment Template](#).
- Make sure that you are aware of all current government Covid-19 restrictions and how they might apply to your organisation and the work you are doing. Volunteering can be carried out within government's Covid-19 restrictions, assuming all safety measures are in place. For example, going into a person's house for the provision of care or assistance to a vulnerable person, as part of an agreed volunteer role, is permitted. Make sure you communicate with your volunteers about how the restrictions apply to their volunteering roles. <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>
- Communicate the boundaries and expectations of the role, including do's and don'ts, with the volunteers. If possible, volunteers should be asked to sign that they have seen the 'do's and don'ts'/code of behaviour to encourage good conduct when volunteering.
- Charities need to act within their purposes, so you need to doublecheck that your purposes are wide enough to include any new activity. Contact governance@nicva.org for support.

The Charity Commission NI has now issued [updated guidance](#) which includes information on charitable purposes.

- You should check with your insurance company that you are insured to carry out your new activities.
- Register your volunteering opportunities on [Be Collective](#) and Volunteer Now will promote them for you.
- Put a message out that you are looking for volunteers to carry out these tasks making sure you have thought through how you will manage the response to any calls, especially a large response. Remember your existing volunteers who have already been through your recruitment and training process may be willing to step in quickly to take on new roles!
- Have a conversation with people who come forward about their motivations, what they can do, time they can give, etc. Don't involve a volunteer if you have concerns or hear complaints about their behaviour.
- Get basic details including contact details, test out mobile numbers to check you can access the individuals and that they are who they say they are. You may need to ask them health related questions just to make sure they are not at risk themselves or could put someone else at risk. Getting references can also be helpful in getting additional information about suitability.
- Some roles such as helping a person with their cash, paying bills or carrying out shopping on their behalf because of age, illness or disability, falls into regulated activity and cannot be carried out by anyone who has been barred from working with adults. See <https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2019/09/Disclosure-and-Barring-in-NIhttps://www.volunteernow.co.uk/app/uploads/2019/09/Disclosure-and-Barring-in-NI-ADULTS.pdfADULTS.pdf> .
- Think about how you are going to keep volunteers safe and communicate this to them: provision of protective equipment like gloves, access to sinks to wash hands, guidelines around social distancing, etc. Click [here](#) for further information on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Put in place effective support for volunteers around carrying out their role and their emotional wellbeing. Having a named person to check in with volunteers to find out how things are going and how they are feeling is recommended. Be aware that volunteers may need extra support when dealing with difficult and stressful situations.

There are also some useful training resources including training courses which can be found [here](#). Finally, the Public Health Agency has also produced a guide ([Useful Guide to Mental and Emotional Wellbeing Resources](#)).

- Think about how you are going to keep the vulnerable people receiving help safe and communicate this to them: give volunteers ID; inform people of what to expect from volunteers who may be in contact with them; explain social distancing concept; forbid volunteers who may be unwell from helping out. See [Offers of Help – Keeping Yourself Safe](#) that could be given to those who are receiving your services.
- Organisations need to consider how they can ensure that volunteers are not out of pocket at this time. Some funders are providing small grants for this, so it is worth checking these out. See [Guidelines for Providing Volunteers' Out of Pocket Expenses](#).
- The organisation may provide volunteers who need to travel with proof that they are carrying out legitimate activities on their behalf e.g. ID cards with volunteer's name, their organisation and organisation's contact details; official letter from the organisation; email or WhatsApp/ text message from the charity on the volunteer's phone; branded t-shirts, bibs and car stickers. See [Sample Letter for Volunteers](#) (Word download).
- Provide clear guidelines to volunteers on the following:
 - [Symptoms of COVID-19 and PHA guidelines](#)
 - Wearing ID – ideally with a photo and large readable text.
 - If delivering shopping, are they willing/able to go into the house or do they leave at the door and go? See [Shopping Support Guidelines](#).
 - If preparing food, follow [Good Food Safety Guidelines](https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-safety-for-community-cooking-and-food-banks)<https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-safety-for-community-cooking-and-food-banks>.
 - If making or receiving telephone calls from people who are vulnerable, provide opportunities for training. Here are some examples of [Support and Training](#).
 - Avoiding handling money where possible. See [Guidance on Money Issues](#).
 - Confidentiality.
 - Safeguarding information in particular how to report and record concerns, incidents, or accidents.
 - Clear contact details of person(s) in charge and contingency plans.

See [Keeping Children & Adults Safe Factsheet](#) for safeguarding information during the Coronavirus.

For more information on Keeping Adults Safe, please see [Keeping Adults Safe: A Shared Responsibility](#) and [Keeping Adults Safe: A Shared Responsibility A Resource Pack](#).

Guidance for Groups on Data Protection: <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/news-and-events/blog-community-groups-and-covid-19/events/blog-community-groups-and-covid-19/>

If volunteers are called upon to support someone with sight loss, the following information may be helpful <https://e-activist.com/page/59879/action/1>.

For general government guidance see:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/volunteering-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic>

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-how-to-help-safely--2/coronavirus><https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-how-to-help-safely--2/coronavirus-how-to-help-safely>

Disclaimer

Reasonable precautions have been taken to ensure information in this publication is accurate. However, it is not intended to be legally comprehensive; it is designed to provide guidance in good faith without accepting liability. If relevant, we therefore recommend you take appropriate professional advice before taking any action on the matters covered herein.

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