'How To' Guide

Supporting volunteers as services restart

People | Volunteers

This guidance will be useful for: Community transport operators of all sizes, including Transport Managers, Office Managers, Trustees, and Board Members

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Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has had a huge effect on many areas of society. This has certainly been the case with the community transport sector which has done incredible work to adapt services during lock-down, deliver food and medicine, run essential journeys and keep in regular contact with passengers. Community transport stepped up to support communities all over the UK, often in the face of reduced resources, without fares and with many staff and volunteers having to self-isolate.

At the same time, many community transport organisations have reported a rise in interest and participation from new volunteers during this crisis who have come forward to provide an emergency response as well as from existing volunteers who have offered ongoing support. Support from both new and existed volunteers is always welcomed and valued and it's essential that an increase in volunteers is responsibly managed and supported by your organisation. Accurately matching volunteer capacity to demand while ensuring everyone is safe and abiding by government guidance and advice is a difficult task. In this document, we've outlined a set of key considerations to make while managing your new and existing volunteers.

New Volunteers

Retention of New Volunteers

You may have gained new volunteers during the pandemic who are now returning to their day to day paid work. This doesn't necessarily mean that they have to stop their volunteering. For instance, if they're working flexibly they might still be able to volunteer on a part time basis. They could also make great trustees as they now have insight into your operation. Over the phone befriending is also an effective and flexible means of connecting with service users that could easily be adapted by a volunteer, even if they now have less time on their hands. Talk to your new volunteers to see what they might still be able to do.

If you have more volunteers than capacity

It's a nice problem to have, but if your organisation doesn't have capacity for additional volunteers, it's worth providing anyone enquiring with alternative options that are aligned with that volunteer's skills and interests. Below is a list of country specific organisations that have compiled a set of procedures for redirecting volunteers. Make sure you also keep in touch with them, as opportunities might arise in the future.

- England
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- Wales

Volunteer Safety and Training

For a safe and positive volunteer experience it's important to offer training to new volunteers that aligns with government advice and guidance around staying safe and mitigating against coronavirus. Country specific workplace safety guidance is outlined as follows:

- [Workplace safety guidance from the Welsh Government can be found here](#)
- [Workplace safety guidance from the Scottish Government can be found here](#)
- [Workplace safety guidance from the NI Executive can be found here](#)
- [Workplace safety guidance from the UK Government](#)

Existing Volunteers

Whether they're new volunteers or existing ones, it's humbling when anyone offers help during such unprecedented times. Most importantly the health and safety of your volunteers must be prioritised at all times.

Unfortunately, this occasionally means postponing or redirecting an offer of help from your volunteer to keep them safe. Communication is key: it's important to have a conversation with your volunteer about their individual needs and requirements before accepting their help.

At CTA, we have developed a set of risk assessment and management tools to help you decide whether you have covered all you need to and what else you can do to protect your staff, volunteers and passengers. These tools can be accessed through the member's area of our website at [CTA Risk Assessment Resources](#).

Vulnerable Volunteers

Does your volunteer fall within the vulnerable age group? In accordance with Government guidance people over the age of 70 are considered vulnerable, even if they don't have underlying health conditions. Others considered vulnerable include people who are under 70 with an [underlying health condition](#). If your volunteer falls into either category they must be particularly strict with social distancing measures. You can find information on shielding and protecting those who are vulnerable below:

- [Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are extremely vulnerable UK](#)

- [Guidance on shielding for vulnerable people NI](#)

- [Guidance on shielding for vulnerable people Scotland](#)

- [Guidance on shielding for vulnerable people Wales](#)

Temporary Pause

For safety purposes you might decide to ask more vulnerable volunteers not to return to frontline services until a later phase of the Covid-19 recovery plan. If so, it is key to keep in contact, offering updates and clear timelines.

Long Term

Some volunteers may be too vulnerable to return in the foreseeable future. You might find some volunteers are worried about the new responsibilities involved in enhanced hygiene or distancing protocol. It is important to communicate with volunteers who find themselves in this position and, if appropriate, offer alternative options.

Here are some options to maintain engagement with vulnerable volunteers if it's not safe for them to return to their previous role:

If a volunteer can't offer frontline support, what else could they do?

- Fundraising: Volunteers can speak really well about the benefits of your service. Could they help with fundraising?

- Befriending: Lots of passengers will still be shielding and would appreciate a call.

- Administration: Could they help you with admin from home?

- Other charities: Is there another group that your volunteer could help instead? If anything, this could be a good opportunity to make connections in the community.

Whatever path you suggest, it's crucial that you demonstrate how grateful you are for what they've done for your organisation. Remember that volunteering with you may help them as much as it helps you, so try and keep in contact.

Checklist for managing volunteers during Covid-19

✓ Ensure different types of volunteers have been considered in your organisational risk assessment so you're clear about what is manageable for your organisation in terms of keeping volunteers safe at the moment.

✓ Express gratitude for the volunteer's time and contribution, pointing to specific examples of where they have made a difference to people's lives.

✓ Create an inclusive atmosphere by involving volunteers in decision making processes and staff meetings. This will ensure your volunteer feels valued which contributes to volunteer retention.

✓ Explain you have a responsibility to keep everyone safe. For the most part, decisions made by your organisation during lockdown is based on the latest government guidance. Unfortunately, this may not always favor volunteers who are classed as vulnerable. When it is unsafe for your volunteer to continue with their usual duties explain it is no reflection on them or their dedication to our work but is based on the latest government guidance. Ensure you provide regular updates and maintain two way communication.

✓ Ensure you update volunteers on safety and hygiene protocol. Outlining procedures in writing and making them visible in the workplace is an effective means of communication. If necessary provide training to your volunteers.

Other sources of guidance

For guidance on how to safeguard employees or volunteers returning to work your organisation should refer to Coronavirus (Covid-19): safer transport guidance for operators.

- Guidance for Northern Ireland

- Guidance for Scotland

- Guidance for Wales

NCVO have produced very helpful guidance for charities containing information to help you decide what steps you and your organisation need to take to support your volunteers and staff.