



NCSS
National Council
of Social Service



VOLUNTEER CONTINUITY PLANNING GUIDE

A Guide for Continuity of Volunteer Activities During Service Disruptions



Summary of Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide

This Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide and Workbook are developed to guide Social Service Agencies (SSAs) in the development of a Volunteer Continuity Plan (VCP). The VCP is a document of key actions that enables SSAs to respond quickly and efficiently to manage changes in volunteer activities during service disruptions. This ensures that volunteer partnership is continued, thus minimising disruption of services. **All SSAs should develop and have a VCP in place** to prepare themselves for evolving situations.

What can you find in this Guide?



✓ Step-by-step guide to creating a VCP for your SSA



✓ Workbook of templates with pre-populated examples to support your process of creating a VCP

Who is this Guide for?

All staff who work with volunteers (e.g. volunteer managers, programme staff) can use the VCP they created after reading this Guide to plan for continuity in volunteer partnership in times of crises.

Benefits of using this Guide

Provides a step-by-step approach to developing a comprehensive crisis response strategy, supported by ideas, examples and a Workbook of templates to help you on this journey.

How to use this Guide?

This Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide is meant for use together with the Workbook. Each step of the VCP process is supplemented by templates in the Workbook, accessible via a link at the bottom of the page. By completing the Workbook, you will have developed a VCP!

Framework to developing a VCP

There are **9 sequential steps** in developing the VCP, structured in **3 phases**. Each step focuses on achieving a **key objective** through specific activities which build upon each other.



Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Step 9
Identify Critical Areas	Assess Risk of Volunteer Roles	Set Up Your VCP Team	Prepare Mitigation Strategies	Prepare Communications & Engagement Plan	Activate Your VCP	Plan for Recovery	Review Crisis Response	Test & Maintain
Identify the critical volunteer services, critical volunteer roles and critical volunteer management (VM) functions which must continue during a crisis.	Assess the risk level of volunteer roles in your SSA to gain an understanding of whether they can continue during the crisis.	Assemble a team to oversee the activation of the VCP and delegate roles and responsibilities.	Develop mitigation strategies to ensure critical services and VM functions continues through the crisis.	Prepare communication messages that keep volunteers informed, engaged and which support their well-being.	Upon impact of a crisis, activate the VCP by obtaining the necessary approvals, ensuring the VCP is relevant for the immediate crisis, and activating the mitigation strategies.	Following the crisis, plan resumption of services/programmes involving volunteers to a normal operating state.	Evaluate the effectiveness of the VCP to identify improvement areas based on whether the VCP met stakeholder needs, the strength of the plan and its execution.	Develop a schedule of activities to ensure the VCP is continuously updated so that it can be activated anytime.

Contents

Foreword	1
Introduction to Volunteer Continuity Planning	3
How can this Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide help you?	4
Phase 1: Plan & Prepare	7
Step 1: Identify Critical Areas	8
Step 2: Assess Risk of Volunteer Roles	11
Step 3: Set Up Your VCP Team	12
Phase 2: Mitigate & Respond	15
Step 4: Prepare Mitigation Strategies	16
Step 5: Prepare Communications & Engagement Plan	24
Step 6: Activate Your VCP	27
Phase 3: Recover & Review	29
Step 7: Plan for Recovery	30
Step 8: Review Crisis Response	32
Step 9: Test & Maintain	34
Volunteer Continuity Planning Workbook	36
Glossary	38
Acknowledgements	40
References	41



Foreword



Ms Tan Li San
Chief Executive Officer
National Council of Social Service

An NCSS survey with Volunteer Management Practitioners (VMPs) in July 2020 revealed that 64% of them felt unprepared to manage volunteers during a crisis. Similarly, the top two challenges shared by VMPs at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic were keeping volunteers engaged and how to prepare for different scenarios as the pandemic unfolded.

With the recommendations from the Beyond COVID-19 Taskforce (2021), NCSS developed the Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide to equip all Social Service Agencies (SSAs) in preparing for, responding to and recovering from volunteer supply disruptions due to a crisis.

The Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide was developed based on existing Business Continuity Planning frameworks and tapped on the experience of a selected group of SSAs which coped well with the limitations arising from the pandemic and seized potential opportunities.

Accompanying this Guide is a Workbook with ready-to-use templates and examples to assist VMPs in their crisis planning.

We believe that being prepared for volunteer disruptions is crucial in building trust among volunteers and retaining them. It gives SSAs greater confidence in ensuring that programmes involving volunteers can continue to support service users effectively during crises and strengthen the resilience of our sector.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all SSAs, VMPs and volunteers who have contributed to the development of this Guide. We wish you success in every step of your VM journey.

“
...being prepared for volunteer disruptions is crucial in building trust among volunteers and retaining them.
”

“

A robust Volunteer Continuity Plan (VCP) is important as **it allows us to review our processes regularly and prepare ourselves for evolving situations**, enabling us to engage volunteers who are an important extension of our team even in pandemic situations.

Ms. Ang Boon Min
Chief Executive Officer
Singapore Children’s Society

Given the unpredictability of any potential recurrent outbreaks, it is necessary to have clear plans to deal with business disruptions and protect the vital work PPIS carries out to serve the community.

As a volunteer-involving organisation, volunteers play a key role in the provision of PPIS’ services and programmes. **We want to continue optimising our volunteer management, including reviewing the critical functions that can be continued or adapted for volunteer involvement, in times of crisis.**

Leveraging on volunteers and their skills where needed is an important process of VCP, be it service delivery or engaging them as advocates.

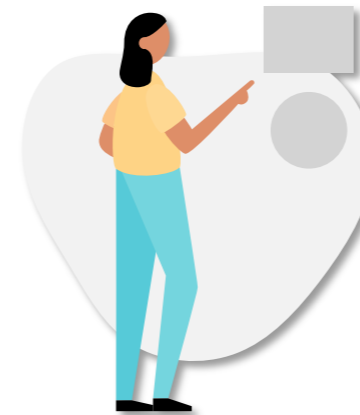
Ms. Tuminah Sapawi
Chief Executive Officer
Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura (PPIS)



Introduction to Volunteer Continuity Planning

What is a Volunteer Continuity Plan?

A Business Continuity Plan (BCP) helps to prepare organisations for crises. It aims to minimise disruption to operations and help businesses recover quickly.



Similarly, a **Volunteer Continuity Plan (VCP)** is a document of key actions (e.g. your Volunteer Continuity Planning Workbook) that enables SSAs to respond quickly and efficiently to manage changes in volunteer activities during service disruptions. It is activated when a crisis causes volunteer supply to be disrupted.

Why is it important to have a VCP?

A VCP enables SSAs to:

1. Respond quickly and efficiently to crises.
2. Minimise disruption of services.
3. Achieve a quick recovery of volunteer activity and critical services.
4. Maximise volunteer retention through crises.

When should you develop and use the VCP?

All SSAs should develop and have a VCP in place so that it is ready for activation at anytime. The VCP should be used before, during and after a crisis:

- **BEFORE** – To gather resources and plan for different crisis scenarios.
- **DURING** – To execute strategies to minimise impact of the crisis.
- **AFTER** – To plan for recovery.
- Given the unpredictability of any potential recurrent outbreaks, SSAs should **continually review and update the VCP throughout the crisis period.**
- Beyond crises, a VCP is most useful if it is **regularly reviewed and updated during peace time** (e.g. on a yearly basis). This allows SSAs to identify gaps and improve existing processes for better resilience.

Who is the VCP for?

All staff who work with volunteers (e.g. volunteer managers, programme staff) can use the VCP to plan for continuity in volunteer partnership in times of crises.



How can this Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide help you?

This **Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide** is meant for use together with the **Volunteer Continuity Planning Workbook**. Together, they will help you with the following:

- Take you through a step-by-step process of developing a VCP.
- Guide you in developing a unique VCP for your SSA.

Each step of the VCP process is supplemented by template(s) in the Workbook. You can fill in the corresponding template(s) as you are going through the Guide. Upon completing the Workbook, **you will have developed a VCP!**

[Click here to download the Volunteer Continuity Planning Workbook](#)



Phase 1: Plan & Prepare

1 Identify Critical Areas

- Identify critical services and volunteer roles
- Identify critical VM functions

Volunteer Services Impact Template

VM Impact Assessment Template

2 Assess Risk of Volunteer Roles

- Assess the risks for the critical volunteer roles identified

Volunteer Role Risk Assessment Template

3 Set Up Your VCP Team

- Who to include in the VCP team?
- Outline the key roles within the VCP team

Distribution & Responsibility List Template

Phase 2: Mitigate & Respond

4 Prepare Mitigation Strategies

- Key mitigations for critical volunteer roles and VM functions

VM Impact Assessment Template

Volunteer Role Risk Assessment Template

5 Prepare Communications & Engagement Plan

- Identify key stakeholders to communicate with
- Communicate crisis response to key stakeholders
- Support volunteers' well-being

Communication & Engagement Template

6 Activate Your VCP

- Obtain approval to activate the VCP
- Ensure VCP is relevant, updated and ready for activation
- Activate the VCP
- Track status of progress

Activating Your VCP Template

Phase 3: Recover & Review

7 Plan for Recovery

- Plan for resumption of volunteer activity
- Re-engage volunteers, corporate & community partners

Recovery Action Plan Template

8 Review Crisis Response

- How to review crisis response?

Crisis Response Review Template

9 Test & Maintain

- Conduct testing and training of VCP
- Conduct review and maintenance of VCP

Schedule of Maintenance Template

“

CampusImpact has always relied strongly on volunteers, but we have been focusing for many years only on equipping volunteers with skills but not on risk-management. This exercise has given us a **much-needed pause to establish foundational practices that will ensure the continuity of our services** delivered by volunteers so that clients will experience stability even in uncertain times.

With the Volunteer Centre (VC) being established in Aug 2020, our responsibility towards deploying volunteers to the rest of the town beyond CampusImpact has grown, and it becomes even more critical for us to identify the potential gaps concerning Volunteer Continuity and effectively plug those gaps.

- The VCP helps the VC be **better prepared if a pandemic or crisis happens** (what actions to take, the possible impact and outcome, which stakeholder to contact or be involved).
- **Strengthens the work efficiency, compliance and assurance** by referring to a VCP at various points in time.
- Helps us to **reflect on our current processes, communication with stakeholders involved and what needs to be implemented** that we have yet to do.
- **Increases trust among stakeholders** as we increase our reliability.

Ms Elysa Chen
Executive Director
CampusImpact

SG Cares Volunteer Centre @ Yishun



PHASE 1: PLAN & PREPARE

Step 1 Identify Critical Areas

- Identify critical services and critical volunteer roles
- Identify critical VM functions

Template:

- Volunteer Services Impact
- VM Impact Assessment

Step 2 Assess Risk of Volunteer Roles

- Assess the risks for the critical volunteer roles identified

Template:

- Volunteer Role Risk Assessment

Step 3 Set Up Your VCP Team

- Who to include in the VCP team?
- Outline the key roles within the VCP team

Template:

- Distribution & Responsibility List



Step 1: Identify Critical Areas

Key Objective:

Identify the critical volunteer services, critical volunteer roles and critical VM functions which must continue during a crisis.

Identify critical services and volunteer roles



Work with management and your SSA's BCP team to **shortlist critical services / programmes** and identify the impact if the service is discontinued.



Within the shortlisted services/programme, identify **critical volunteer roles** that must be continued.

Based on the above points, assess the **maximum acceptable time** – e.g. the longest period of time estimated between the onset of a crisis to the resumption of critical services.

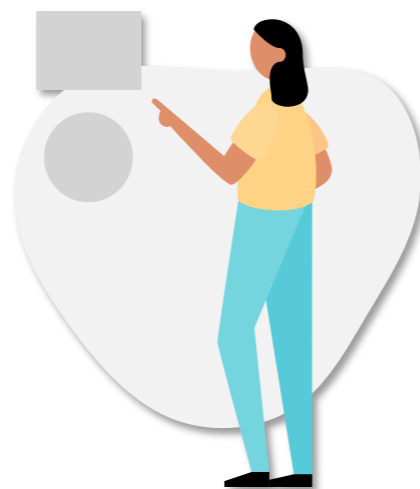
How do you know if a service is considered critical?

- ✓ The service has a **significant impact** on the SSA (e.g. those with a large number of service users, those which serve day-to-day needs of service users / where service users depend on the services for day-to-day needs).
- ✓ There are **contractual or legal obligations** for your SSA to provide the service.
- ✓ There is/are **no other alternative** service(s) available, directly or indirectly.



QUICK TIP!

If your SSA has a **BCP** in place, the critical services / programmes can be referenced from it.



What is maximum acceptable downtime?



Maximum acceptable downtime is how long the service can be discontinued.

To assess this, consider the following:

- ✓ How long before service users become excessively negatively impacted by the loss of the service?
- ✓ How long can the community be without this service?
- ✓ How long before the loss of service compromises your SSA's financial or legal obligations?



Example of Assessing Criticality and Maximum Acceptable Downtime

Critical Service	Student Care Centre
Nature of impact if service is discontinued	Essential - Services cannot be suspended during a crisis because the children of essential workers will still require care. However, the frequency or scale of service/programmes may be scaled back due to reduced manpower support from volunteers.
Critical volunteer roles	Activity Facilitator
Nature of impact if critical volunteer role discontinued	If volunteers are unable to support the program, staff will have to take over responsibilities and multi-task. The teacher-student ratio will be higher, and staff will be unable to spend time with each individual student due to the heavier workload.
Maximum acceptable downtime	1 day (In this illustrative example, the Student Care Centre had obtained feedback from parents, many who were essential workers. The parents had indicated that the maximum acceptable downtime for the service was 1 day).

Step 1: Identify Critical Areas

Identify critical VM functions

1. Identify the existing VM functions that must continue during a crisis.

Getting Organisation
Volunteer-Ready

Conducting Needs Assessment

Volunteer Recruitment
and Selection

Volunteer Onboarding
and Training

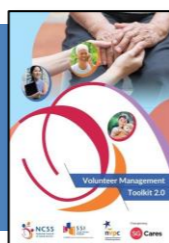
Volunteer Support
and Recognition

Volunteer Review and Exit



QUICK TIP!

Refer to the **VM Toolkit 2.0** for details on the VM functions and processes.



2. Adjust VM functions to ensure effective management of volunteers through a crisis. The following are some examples:

VM function	Existing Function	Key focus during crisis
Getting Organisation Volunteer-Ready	Seeking approval for volunteer-related budget	Obtain additional budget approvals for new volunteer-related costs (e.g. additional equipment, transportation, screening)
Conducting Needs Assessment	Continuous review of volunteer roles	Review volunteer roles for meaningful volunteer involvement during crisis
Volunteer Recruitment and Selection	Interview and screening of volunteers	Assess how and when to screen volunteers quickly and effectively
Volunteer Onboarding and Training	Planning and implementing volunteer training	Equip & brief volunteers for essential tasks necessary for crisis situations and compliance
Volunteer Support and Recognition	Ongoing communication and engagement of volunteers	Conduct regular check-ins with volunteers to ensure they are safe throughout the crisis

TEMPLATE: Complete the blue columns of “VM Impact Assessment”






Step 2: Assess Risk of Volunteer Roles

Key Objective:

Assess the risk level of volunteer roles in your SSA.

Assess the risks for the critical volunteer roles identified

Assess the risk of the volunteer roles, identified in Step 1, to gain an understanding of whether they can continue during a crisis. The following are some examples of risks to consider in the COVID-19 crisis:

	 Nature of volunteer activity	 Total no. involved (volunteers, service users, staff)	 Location of volunteer activity	 Level of interaction between volunteers and service users	 Type of service users
Low Risk	Backend	< 8 people	Open air	No contact	Individuals or families not at risk
Med Risk	Front-facing	< 8 people	Well ventilated	< 15 minutes face to face interaction	Individuals or families at risk
High Risk	Front-facing	> 8 people	Enclosed	> 15 minutes sustained interaction	Individuals or families at risk



QUICK TIP!

In addition to risks specific to volunteer roles, it is important to consider general risks to volunteering (e.g. compliance risks). Refer to the **VM Toolkit 2.0** for guidance on the general risks to consider.



TEMPLATE: Complete the blue columns of “Volunteer Role Risk Assessment”

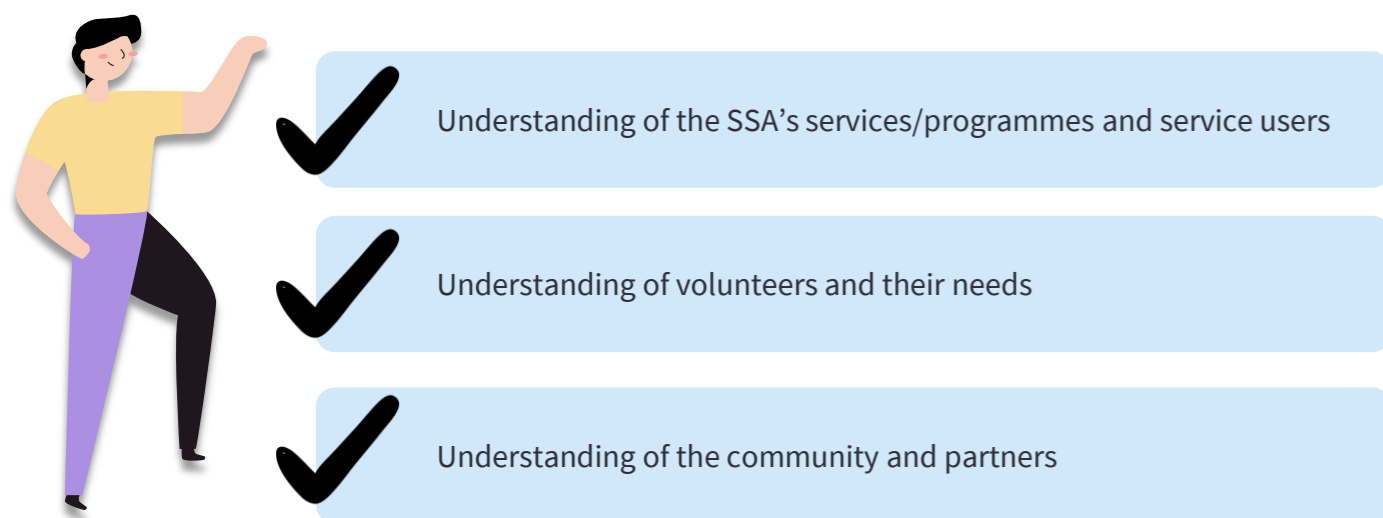
Step 3: Set Up Your VCP Team

Key Objective:

Assemble a team to oversee the activation of the VCP.

Who to include in the VCP team?

The VCP team should include a mix of team members with the following:



Examples of individuals to include in your VCP team includes:



Outline the key roles within the VCP Team

Appoint individuals to take on the roles and assign responsibilities. Depending on the organisation structure, some of these roles can be new roles created for the purposes of the VCP, while others simply require overlaying additional crisis-related responsibilities on top of individuals' existing business-as-usual roles.



VCP Lead

- Acts as the executive decision maker.
- Oversees and approves VCP plan.



VCP Coordinator

- Ensure all functions are operating smoothly.
- Provide updates to the VCP Lead.



Impact, Risk and Mitigations Coordinator

- Liaise with programme heads to identify critical services, assess risks and impact of crisis on the roles and services.
- Guide VCP team on development of new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), mitigation and recovery strategies.



Volunteer Coordinator

- Coordinate and schedule individual volunteers through the crisis.
- Support team in admin matters regarding volunteers.



Partnerships Coordinator

- Manage corporate partners.
- For VCs, act as a link between MCCY and VCP team.
- Liaise with VCP team on corporate and community needs.
- Allocates resources and sets priorities for sustaining partnerships through crisis.



Communications and Engagement Coordinator

- Manage volunteer crisis communications.
- Act as liaison between volunteers and rest of SSA.
- Manage media together with Corporate Communications Dept.



Facilities and ICT Coordinator

- Manage facilities and ICT recovery plans, e.g. volunteer database, centre infrastructure.

“

It is **important to always be prepared and ready with the need to safely transit from online to face-to-face and vice versa, especially when measures are lifted in a calibrated manner** as part of Singapore's transition towards COVID resilience.

Our volunteers are our eyes and ears and we trust in the importance of consistent communication and regular check-ins to ensure that our volunteers and beneficiaries are doing alright. Through this we hope to continue to bring light and joy to our volunteers and beneficiaries. Together we emerge stronger, fighting and containing the spreading of the virus, overcoming the pandemic altogether towards the normal norm.

Ms Saleemah Ismail
Co-Founder and Executive Director
New Life Stories



PHASE 2: MITIGATE & RESPOND

Step 4 Prepare Mitigation Strategies

- Key mitigations for critical volunteer roles and VM functions

Template:

- VM Impact Assessment
- Volunteer Role Risk Assessment



Step 5 Prepare Communication & Engagement Plan

- Identify key stakeholders to communicate with
- Communicate crisis response to key stakeholders
- Support volunteers' well-being

Template:

- Communication & Engagement



Step 6 Activate Your VCP

- Obtain approval to activate the VCP
- Ensure VCP is relevant, updated and ready for activation
- Activate the VCP
- Track status of progress

Template:

- Activating Your VCP

Step 4: Prepare Mitigation Strategies

Key Objective:

Having identified the critical volunteer roles as well as VM areas during a crisis, it is important to develop mitigation strategies to ensure volunteer partnership can continue safely.

Key mitigations for critical volunteer roles and VM functions

These are some ways you can prepare mitigation strategies for critical services and volunteer roles.



1. Update policies and SOPs

Policies and processes need to be updated and aligned to crisis situations.

Develop new policies to ensure the safety and well being of your volunteers

Align policies and processes to reflect national guidelines

Examples



Inclusion of processes for compliance checks to SOPs



Travel restrictions and mandatory health check procedures



Purchase additional volunteer insurance such as Employer Liability Insurance



Restrictions on number of volunteers

2. Adapt volunteer roles

Adapt volunteering roles in a crisis. These could include:

- Changing the mode of volunteering (e.g. virtual platforms).
- Changing the location of volunteering (e.g. outdoors during a pandemic, indoors during pollution).
- Changing the roles and responsibilities of the volunteer to suit the needs of the service users during crisis (e.g. from befriending to delivering essential goods to service users).

Law Society Pro Bono Services (Singapore)

Law Society Pro Bono Services kickstarted an online community legal clinic initiative with its volunteer lawyers.

Pivoting to a virtual platform enabled service continuity for applicants, and at the same time encouraged more lawyers to volunteer.



QUICK TIP!

Refer to the **Volunteer Role Redesign Guide** for more in-depth guidance on adapting or creating new volunteer opportunities.



TEMPLATE: Complete the orange columns of “VM Impact Assessment” and “Volunteer Role Risk Assessment”

Step 4: Prepare Mitigation Strategies

3. Forecast volunteer resource requirements

While some services may be scaled back during crisis, there may also be some scenarios in **which SSAs will need to recruit more volunteers**. These can include:



Increased demand for specialised skills (e.g. digital skills, counselling)



Manpower shortage caused by regulatory restrictions (e.g. border closure resulting in loss of foreign manpower)



Increased demand for services such as counselling, mental wellness, etc.

How to forecast volunteer resource?

A. Understand the current volunteer workforce delivering your critical services

This includes the:

Volunteers' skills

Volunteers' time commitment

Current number of volunteers

B. Identify the current sources of volunteers and the numbers required to scale up and sustain critical services

Take into account the following:

- ✓ Higher demand for service during crisis
- ✓ Volunteer skills needed
- ✓ Volunteer profile (e.g. youths, seniors)
- ✓ Time commitment expected
- ✓ Potential for volunteers to take on multiple roles

C. Evaluate gaps and plan mitigations needed

Plan the mitigations needed for any volunteer resource shortfall. Some strategies to ensure there is a sufficient supply of volunteers during a crisis include:



Train current volunteers in the new skills needed



Set up partnership arrangements with other agencies to provide support during a crisis



Build a reserve pool of volunteers to tap on during crisis.

4. Update recruitment and selection strategies and procedures

A. Update volunteer role descriptions

Based on the adjustments to the roles identified during a crisis, reassess the responsibilities and skills needed to perform the volunteer role. Update the role descriptions to guide recruitment and redeployment of volunteers.



QUICK TIP!

Different volunteer profiles will be impacted by a crisis differently.

As seniors are a more at risk profile during the COVID-19 pandemic, internal policies might include stricter restrictions for that group to ensure their safety.

Disruption to this volunteer profile highlights the importance of **diversifying the volunteer pool**.

B. Diversify your volunteer profile

Diversifying your volunteer pool with different profiles builds resilience. Different volunteer profiles include youths, seniors, and working adults. This ensures that should any one profile be disrupted, not all volunteers are affected to the same degree.

C. Identify sources of volunteers during a crisis



Social media

Enhance online presence by leveraging social media platforms (e.g. Instagram) to reach out to more volunteers

Volunteer database

Reach out to past volunteers to check if they are keen to help your SSA. With their past experience, they might be able to adapt quickly to volunteering roles



Partner agencies/groups

Partner agencies such as volunteer centres, corporates, community partners and other SSAs can also be explored as source of volunteers



QUICK TIP!

While crises bring disruption, they can also provide opportunities!

Giving.sg as well as the SGUnited portal experienced an increase in volunteer signup during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The ability to quickly respond and put in place safe volunteering measures will enable SSAs to **tap on these opportunities**.

D. Assess volunteer suitability to support during crisis

The recruitment and selection process for new volunteers during a crisis, as well as the deployment of existing volunteers, should be based on the following considerations:

- Feasibility of volunteers to support during crisis (e.g. availability of transport, health conditions, scheduling availability)
- Volunteers' comfort level with the challenges of volunteering during the crisis
- Matching of the volunteer's skills to the needs of the programme

TEMPLATE: Complete the orange columns of "VM Impact Assessment" and "Volunteer Role Risk Assessment" 

Step 4: Prepare Mitigation Strategies

5. Onboard and train your volunteers

Onboarding and training during a crisis is important to equip volunteers with the skills and knowledge needed to volunteer safely. This will mitigate the risk of incidents which can be prevented if volunteers are sufficiently prepared to perform their role during the crisis.



Key skills/knowledge for success in their roles



Changes in work processes/policies



Risks that arose from the crisis and **mitigations**



Channels of support from your SSA



SOPs and protocols volunteers should follow



Latest government **advisories and regulations**



QUICK TIP!

Training can be useful for more than just crisis upskilling.

Identifying new skills and knowledge required during crisis (e.g. virtual service delivery) allows you to prepare your volunteers early.

With many events cancelled, training can also **be used as a way to engage volunteers** during this period.

6. Support and recognise your volunteers

Volunteer support and recognition is as important, if not even more so, during crisis.

By making volunteers feel that the SSA is there for them even amidst crisis, SSAs can foster stronger commitment from volunteers. However, it is easy to neglect support and recognition efforts when focusing on crisis response.

To mitigate this risk, the following is a list of potential support and recognition strategies.

A. Establish regular channels of communication

Crises can disrupt the normal channels of communication. To prevent this:

- Set up two way channels across a variety of platforms (e.g. social media) as alternatives.
- Establish protocols for crisis messaging (e.g. check in emails).

B. Establish a community of volunteers

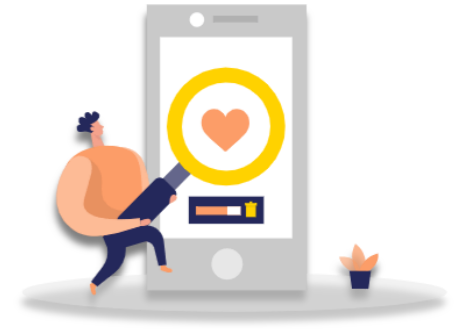
Foster a community of volunteers (e.g. mentor systems, social media groups,) so that:

- Volunteers feel a sense of belonging to the SSA during a crisis.

C. Conduct small-scale but regular appreciation activities during crisis

In the absence of large-scale initiatives, consider small but regular initiatives to ensure sustained appreciation efforts:

- Care packages delivered to volunteers' homes.
- Emails and thank you cards to express appreciation.
- Virtual events appreciating volunteer contributions.
- Virtual networking and check in sessions with volunteers.



LEARN MORE: More detailed guidance on crisis communication can be found on pages 26 to 28.

7. Manage volunteer exit

The unpredictable nature of a crisis may lead to an increase in volunteers who exit their roles without prior notice.

To minimise the risk of disruption to services, it is good practice to consider a structured but short process to address sudden exits, while still allowing the SSA to activate contingencies.

- Agree on a notice period for regular volunteers to inform the SSA of their exit, where possible.
- Develop a checklist for volunteers to return SSA-owned equipment upon exit (e.g. access card, keys).
- Develop a short feedback survey to understand their reason for exit, volunteering experience and interest in supporting the SSA in future.
- Remember to thank the volunteers for their contributions.
- Suggest alternative ways which the volunteer can continue to be involved with the organisation (e.g. events-based volunteering, as a donor).
- Provide volunteers with the channels and opportunities to keep in touch.

Step 4: Prepare Mitigation Strategies

8. Leverage external partners

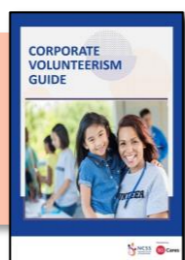
A. Corporate partnerships

- While crises may disrupt corporate volunteering, corporate partners can still be a potential source of volunteers due to their network of resources and manpower.
- Corporates typically have corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs in place to help the community during a crisis.
- Consider establishing long-term arrangements with your corporates during peace time which can continue to be tapped on and adjusted in response to the crisis.
- Consider approaching new corporates who may be interested to step up during a crisis.



QUICK TIP!

Refer to the **Corporate Volunteerism Guide** for more In-depth guidance on engaging your corporate partners.



Key things to note when engaging corporates during crisis

Share regular updates

- Include your partners in your comms team's mailing list.
- Provide monthly updates on how your SSA has responded to the crisis.
- Outline mitigation measures to reassure corporates of the safety of their volunteers.

Explore opportunities for collaboration

- Creative new volunteering opportunities may excite your partners and provide them innovative avenues to meet their CSR goals.

Offer resources

- Offer resources that your partners may benefit from during the crisis, e.g. resources on mental well-being, counselling support etc.

Acknowledge and recognise efforts

- Shine a spotlight on partners who step up.
- Share the benefits for both your SSA and your corporate partner with other potential partners, and invite them to do the same.

To balance corporate engagement efforts with the increased demands from service users, appoint a **dedicated team member to manage corporate partnerships**, or schedule a dedicated time every week to manage engagement initiatives.

B. SG Cares Volunteer Centres

SG Cares Volunteer Centres (VCs) are the conduit between organisations and SSAs which require volunteers, by engaging SSAs to understand their volunteering needs and referring interested organisations to them.

LEARN MORE: Click [here](#) for the updated list of SG Cares VCs.

Benefits of SG Cares VCs during a crisis



Prioritise recruitment, support and promotion of volunteer roles related to the crisis response.



Communicate with local volunteers and organisations to let them know what is happening.



Divert resources to smaller or less established SSAs which may need more support during crisis.



Provide guidance on volunteering safely when dealing with members of the public who are more at risk.



Connect volunteers, SSAs and organisations to meet their respective supply and demand needs.

How do I know if I need the help of a SG Cares VC?

My agency is a smaller SSA which needs support in **increasing our presence in the volunteering network during the crisis.**

I'm confused about the **latest crisis guidelines and advisories** and need help with being kept up-to-date.

The crisis has impacted my SSA's ability to **recruit volunteers.**

I'm looking for support in **identifying and engaging SSAs or corporates** which are interested in partnering during the crisis.

Volunteering restrictions has reduced our volunteering opportunities and left us with a **surplus of volunteers.**

I'm looking for **resources that can help enhance our VM capabilities** during the crisis.



Step 5: Prepare Communication & Engagement Plan

Key Objective:

Prepare consistent and transparent communication messages to ensure volunteers are adequately informed and engaged throughout the crisis.

Identify key stakeholders to communicate with

Volunteers



Programme staff



Community/ Corporate partners



Service users who interact with volunteers



Communicate crisis response to key stakeholders

Acknowledge the crisis situation and provide a calm voice of reassurance

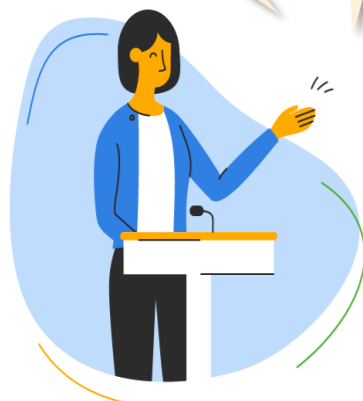
Share the next steps of the SSA in responding to the crisis

Updates on their volunteering activities (e.g. whether it would continue or stop)

Key dates to take note of for resumption of volunteering activities

Share policies and measures identified in light of the crisis

Provide opportunities to stakeholders to **raise their concerns** or ask any questions



Identify channels for communication

Establish two-way channels such as hotlines or messaging platforms between key stakeholders and the SSA where stakeholders can reach out to ask questions, get more information and make informed decisions.

SG Cares VC @ Boon Lay

At SG Cares VC@Boon Lay, communications to stakeholders are tailored based on how impacted they are by the crisis.

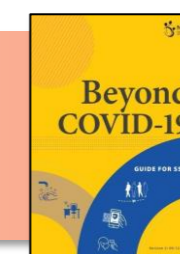
Stakeholders who are more significantly impacted by the crisis (e.g. community partners with service user populations who are more at-risk, volunteers whose services are disrupted) are prioritized for engagement, with tailored communication around the next steps, and SOPs.

For all other stakeholders who are less impacted, they are kept updated on what the Centre is doing in response to the crisis, and regular updates are sent on continuing partnership opportunities.



QUICK TIP!

Refer to the Beyond COVID-19: Reopening Guide for SSAs to find out more about the steps to maintain effective communication in **times of crisis**.



Step 5: Prepare Communications & Engagement Plan

Support volunteers' well-being

Your communication and engagement strategy should also focus on supporting volunteers' well-being as they may also be impacted by the crisis. Here are some ways to provide support:

Physical Well-being

- Send **regular reminders of safety protocols** to ensure volunteers are up-to-date with the latest advisories on keeping the SSA environment a safe one to volunteer in
- **Share how the SSA is taking steps** to ensure volunteers' physical well-being (e.g. changes in physical infrastructure, enlisting of medical professionals)

Mental Well-being

- Provide regular **opportunities for volunteers to escalate** challenges or issues on volunteering activities
- **Send tips and knowledge articles** on taking care of one's mental well-being through the crisis (e.g. destressing tips)
- Show appreciation for volunteers' efforts through **regular small-scale appreciation activities** such as thank you notes

Social Well-being

- Establish **communication channels** for volunteers to connect (e.g. WhatsApp group)
- Provide opportunities for volunteers to **connect, share experiences and learn from each other** (e.g. informal chat sessions, virtual games night)



QUICK TIP!

Consider planning your engagement activities in a **communications calendar** for smoother implementation and avoid over or under engagement



Step 6: Activate Your VCP

Key Objective:

The VCP should incorporate the key steps you would need to take to activate the crisis response.

WHEN to activate your VCP?

Triggers to activate the VCP could include:



- Government advisories and restrictions (e.g. health and safety advisories)
- Events which may result in large scale disruption to volunteer supply (e.g. natural disasters)



- Activation of organisation's BCP
- Agency's management decision



HOW to activate your VCP?

Step A: Obtain approval to activate the VCP

- VCP Lead consults management to decide if VCP should be activated. Organise kick-off call with the VCP team to plan next steps for crisis response.

Step B: Ensure VCP is relevant, updated and ready for activation

Update VCP based on the current crisis, especially the templates in Steps 1-5 of the VCP.

- Review the critical services identified and the critical volunteer involvement needed.
- Identify the volunteer manpower needed for critical service delivery.
- Review the mitigation strategies that needs to be put in place.

Step C: Activate the VCP

- Activate the mitigation strategies.
- Prepare the standardised messaging to be communicated to stakeholders.

Step D: Track status of progress

Volunteer Coordinator to track the status of the above key steps and provide constant updates to VCP team.

TEMPLATE: "Activating Your VCP" 

“

At AMKFSC Community Services (AMKFSC), we believe that volunteerism is a catalyst for sustainable social change. With their diverse backgrounds and skillsets, volunteers bring unique strengths to the table, which allows our agency to create an impact in new ways that complement our existing capabilities. The altruism, dedication and passion of volunteers is an untapped potential which the social service sector can leverage on.

Going forward, AMKFSC hopes to harness volunteerism as a key driver in augmenting our service offerings, so as to better support our professional staff in meeting the needs of our clients and strengthen the social network and resources in our community. As a first step, we are redesigning jobs and roles traditionally undertaken by professionals, to allow volunteers to have greater involvement in supporting the work that we do.

While AMKFSC has a business continuity plan (BCP) in place, this does not cover volunteerism in a substantive way. To ensure smooth operations with minimal disruption, **it is integral to have a Volunteer Continuity Plan (VCP) that is aligned with the BCP, ready for activation to provide critical support to the community.** Our aim in developing a VCP is to ensure that both critical professional services and volunteer services can still operate efficiently in times of crisis, allowing us to enhance and enrich the lives of disadvantaged communities we serve without disruption, regardless of the circumstances.

Dr Vincent Ng
Chief Executive Officer
AMKFSC Community Services Ltd
SG Cares Volunteer Centre @ Ang Mo Kio



PHASE 3: RECOVER & REVIEW

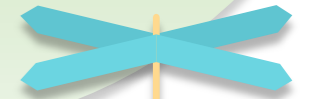


Step 7 Plan for Recovery

- Plan for resumption of volunteer activity
- Re-engage volunteers, corporate and community partners on resumption

Template:

- Recovery Action Plan

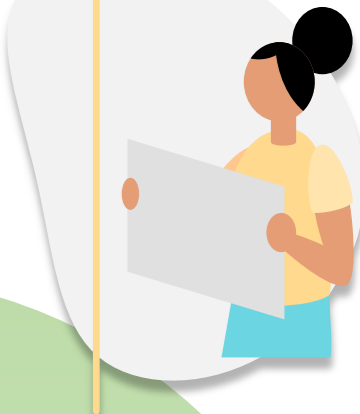


Step 8 Review Crisis Response

- How to review a crisis response?

Template:

- Crisis Response Review



Step 9 Test & Maintain

- Conduct testing and training of VCP
- Conduct review and maintenance of VCP

Template:

- Schedule of Maintenance

Step 7: Plan for Recovery

Key Objective:

Plan resumption of services/programmes involving volunteers to a normal operating state.

What is a recovery plan?

A recovery plan provides a **detailed overview of activities** that need to be done for the SSA to transit out of the crisis and into normal operations, including the **sequence of recovery activities** and the **resources** needed.

Key activities planned by the VCP team will need to be presented to senior management, who should be involved in **prioritising the sequence of activities** to resume.

Approach to recovery planning

1 What to recover?

- Services
- Source of volunteers
- Processes
- Infrastructure and equipment

2 How will it be recovered?

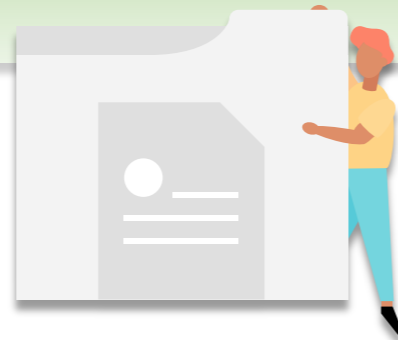
- Appoint a person in charge.
- Develop a plan of the steps to take
- Identify stakeholders who can help the recovery efforts

3 When will it be implemented?

- Develop a plan setting out the actions and timeline for recovery

4 How much will recovery cost?

- High level budget requirements (manpower, funding)



Activities to resume after crisis

Plan for resumption of volunteer activity

Following a crisis or disaster, SSAs can take the following steps to resume volunteer activities.

1. Decide what activity to resume

- ✓ Consider resumption in phases, depending on criticality of programmes/services and safety.
- ✓ Consider that the priority of programmes/services to resume may differ depending on the crisis.
- ✓ When in doubt about what to do for a particular service, take reference from the sector regulator of that service.



2. Work with programme staff

Suggested areas to plan for include:

- ✓ Staff manpower needs to partner with volunteers.
- ✓ Additional or new logistics needed to resume to normal operations (e.g. infrastructure, equipment).
- ✓ Retraining of new areas. Training should include safe volunteering and preparation for future disruptions.
- ✓ Adaptation of volunteer roles.
- ✓ Start date for resumption.

3. Communicate the resumption to volunteers

- ✓ Provide existing and new volunteers with information about the resumption of the activity.
- ✓ Check with volunteers on their readiness to resume.
- ✓ Provide other options they can consider to resume volunteering.



Re-engage volunteers, corporate and community partners on resumption

SSAs will need to continue engaging and communicating with volunteers, corporate and community partners to ensure that they are properly supported and guided through uncertain times.

1. Consider which engagement strategies were successful during the crisis and which should be continued in the return to normal.
2. Develop key messages for each stakeholder group (volunteers, corporate and community partners).
3. Determine channels that are best used for each stakeholder group.

Examples of engagement approaches



VOLUNTEERS

Offer opportunities to co-create and pilot new ways of volunteering to re-ignite their interest. Reassure volunteers of your agency's commitment to sustaining safe volunteering in the transition to normal.



**COMMUNITY /
CORPORATE
PARTNERS**

Proactively reach out to partners to source opportunities to share resources and collaborate e.g. volunteer training and other development opportunities. Understand their concerns and their corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals. Be mindful that their organisation may also be adapting to crises and tailor your engagement accordingly.

Step 8: Review Crisis Response

Key Objective:

Evaluate the effectiveness of the VCP response plan to identify improvement areas.



The work is not done just because the crisis is over...

Failing to review the crisis response plan is a lost opportunity for the SSA to improve on its crisis preparedness. SSAs can take the opportunity to emerge stronger and become more resilient going forward.

What are the benefits of reviewing crisis response?

1. Assess the **SSA's effectiveness in minimising the disruption** caused by the crisis, recovery objectives and maximum threshold period of disruptions.
2. Assess the **adequacy of the VCP** and immediate actions response.
3. **Identify improvements** to be made to the VCP.
4. Identify the need **to plan for more scenarios**.

How to review a crisis response?

Collect feedback from stakeholders (e.g. staff and volunteers in critical services) on the effectiveness of service delivery during crisis.



Review observations and documentations of the VCP effectiveness.

Review data on the SSA's capacity and capability to deliver services during the crisis.



Reach out to other agencies with similar challenges and understand their crisis response as a point of comparison.

Guiding questions to review crisis response



Strength of plan

- ✓ Did the response plan have the flexibility to accommodate this crisis situation as it continued to evolve?
- ✓ What were the deficiencies and weaknesses of the response plan?



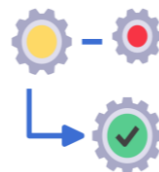
Meeting of stakeholder needs

- ✓ Were the volunteers given sufficient support and direction during the crisis?
- ✓ Was the response plan communicated well to all relevant stakeholders?



Improvement points

- ✓ What are the key takeaways learnt that can help the SSA improve the VCP?
- ✓ What changes are necessary to be made to the SSA, procedures and resources?



Strength of execution

- ✓ Was the response plan followed through?
- ✓ What was executed well?

Step 9: Test & Maintain

Key Objective:

Keep VCP updated so that it can be activated easily anytime.

Ensure that **testing and training** are part and parcel of VCP activities

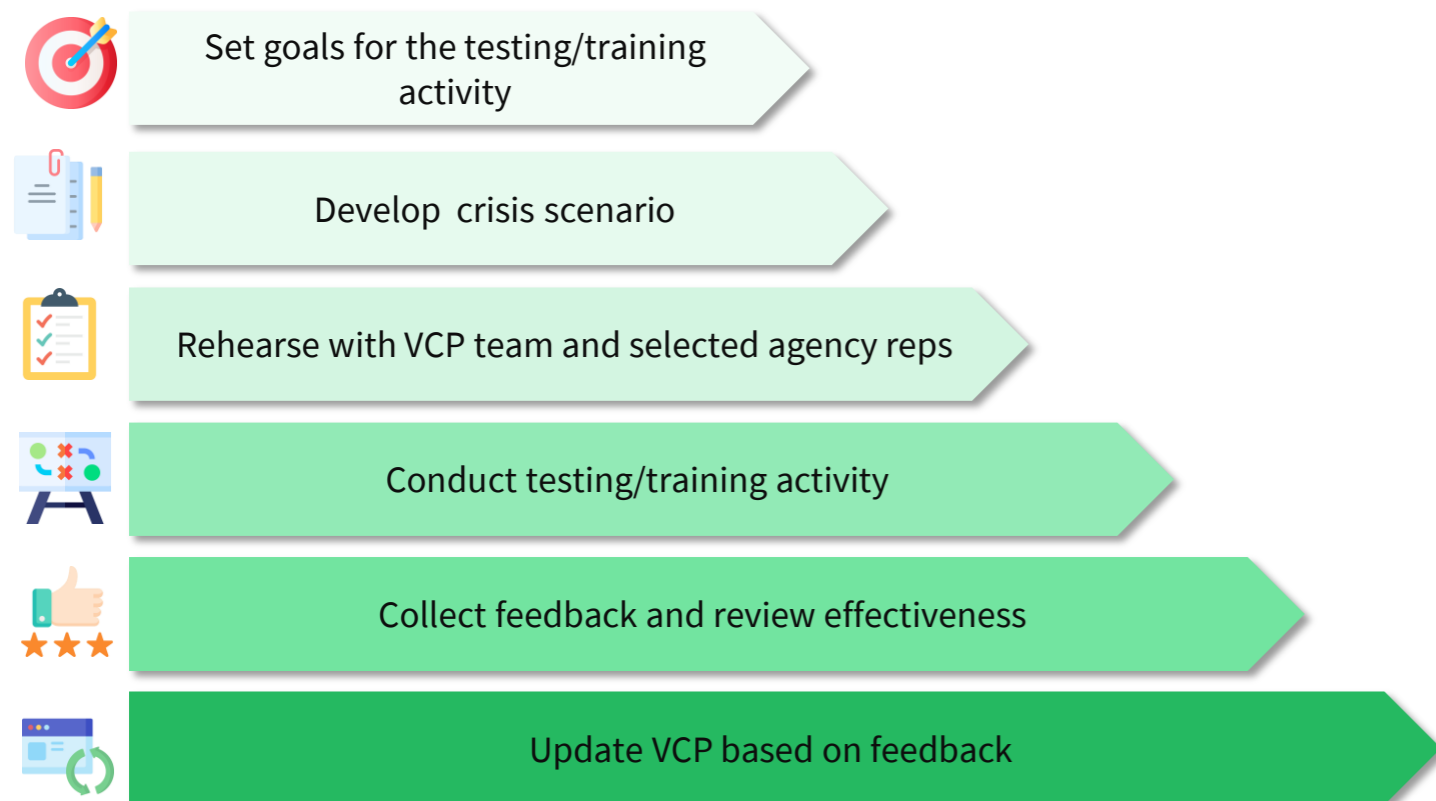
Regularly **review** the outcomes of this testing and training

Conduct testing and training of VCP

Testing the plan allows your SSA to understand whether the plan is useful when an actual disruption occurs. If the test reveals otherwise, the SSA can take steps to remedy the situation by allocating relevant resources to keep the VCP actionable, reliable, and updated.

Training the VCP team and also familiarising staff **with the necessary skills and knowledge** is important to ensure that the VCP can be executed in times of crisis. Training activities could include formal/informal briefings and workshops.

Testing and training process



Your VCP is a live document!

The VCP should be reviewed regularly (e.g. annually) and updated with the following:

- Latest advisories and regulations.
- Details of the current VCP team members and impacted stakeholders.
- Any changes (both external and internal to the agency) that impact your processes and stakeholders.



QUICK TIP!

Training can occur formally through dedicated training workshops, or **informally as part of testing**.

For the VCP to be effective, all stakeholders involved in VM must be aware of where to access and how to execute the VCP when a disruption occurs.

Conduct review and maintenance of VCP

- **Schedule regular reviews** to your VCP by keeping a log of maintenance activities.
- **Update your plan yearly!** The following is a list of regular recommended activities to ensure your VCP is continuously kept up to date. These activities should be done as part of the yearly maintenance plan and scheduled in advance.



Align with internal BCP



Annual review of VCP



Annual documentation refresh

The VCP should also be updated after events which may impact your SSA's continuity in delivering services. Examples include:

- Update of VCP after significant change in external environment
- Update of VCP after testing
- Update of VCP after significant change within the SSA
- Update VCP after a crisis/emergency



Volunteer Continuity Planning Workbook

How to use the Volunteer Continuity Planning Workbook:

- The Volunteer Continuity Planning Workbook consists of **9 templates in total**, provided for each of the three phases.
- The templates are **sequential and all templates should be completed in order** when developing the VCP.
- Detailed instructions on how to complete the template is provided within the respective templates.
- Examples are included in each template in red font. These serve as illustrations only, and can be added to or removed to suit your SSA's needs.
- Upon completion of the Workbook, you will have your very own VCP!

[Click here to download the Volunteer Continuity Planning Workbook](#)

Templates provided in the Volunteer Continuity Planning Workbook:

Phase 1: Plan & Prepare

1 Identify Critical Areas

Volunteer Services Impact

VM Impact Assessment (Columns E-F)

2 Assess Risk of Volunteer Roles

Volunteer Role Risk Assessment (Columns D-K)

3 Set Up Your VCP Team

Distribution & Responsibility List

Phase 2: Mitigate & Respond

4 Prepare Mitigation Strategies

VM Impact Assessment (Columns G-K)

Volunteer Role Risk Assessment (Columns L-S)

5 Prepare Communications & Engagement Plan

Communication & Engagement

6 Activate Your VCP

Activating Your VCP

Phase 3: Recover & Review

7 Plan for Recovery

Recovery Action Plan

8 Review Crisis Response

Crisis Response Review

9 Test & Maintain

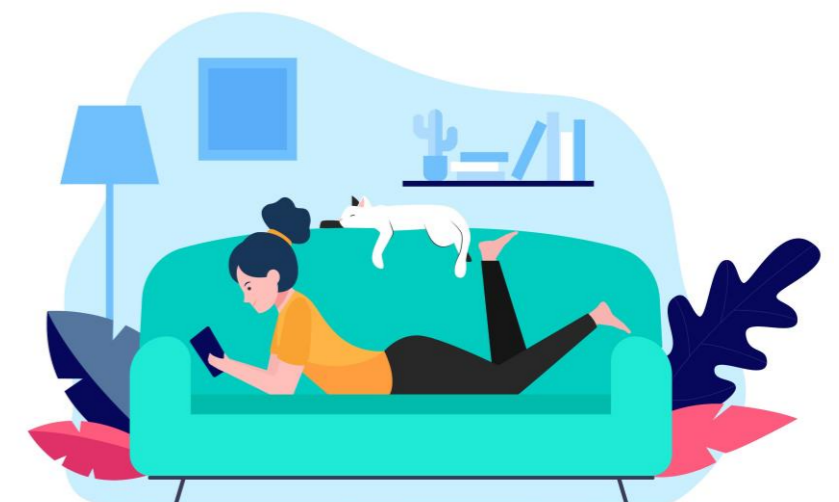
Schedule of Maintenance



Glossary

Term	Explanation
Business Continuity Plan (BCP)	An organisation's plan to ensure it can continue operations during crisis. It differs from a VCP in that a VCP is primarily focused on volunteer services and roles, while a BCP is broader and typically includes an action plan for the whole organisation. The VCP can take reference from the BCP, if it exists within your organisation.
Crisis	An emergency or event that causes disruption to volunteering.
Crisis response	While the VCP is the draft plan of action for a future crisis, the crisis response is the action that has already been taken based on the guidance of the VCP. It is important to review the action that has already been taken (crisis response) to ensure that the VCP is actually effective.
Critical services	Services which are essential and have a significant impact on the SSA, on service users and on the community if discontinued.
Critical volunteer management (VM) functions	The VM practices and processes that are essential to continue during a crisis to ensure volunteering can continue.
Critical volunteer roles	Roles and responsibilities of volunteers which are essential to the function of the SSA.
Maximum acceptable downtime	The maximum amount of time a service can be discontinued before its loss has an adverse impact on the SSA, service users and community.
Mitigation strategies	Actions to reduce the severity and impact of a crisis.
Peace-time	Normal operating conditions in the absence of disruptive emergencies (or equivalent).

Term	Explanation
Recovery plan	Detailed overview of activities that need to be done for the SSA to transition out of the crisis and into normal operations.
Risks	Potential situations which expose the organisation or stakeholders (e.g. volunteers, service users, staff) to danger, harm or loss.
Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs)	Routines and processes to guide normal operations.
SG Cares Volunteer Centres (VCs)	Local organisations that provide support and expertise within the local community, to potential volunteers, existing volunteers and organisations that involve volunteers. The list of SG Cares VCs in Singapore can be found here .
Volunteer Continuity Plan (VCP)	A document of key actions (e.g. your Volunteer Continuity Planning Workbook) that enables SSAs to respond quickly and efficiently to manage changes in volunteer activities during service disruptions. The plan of action should be developed during peace-time to ensure it is ready to be used the moment a crisis hits. Once a crisis hits, activate the VCP by checking that the plan of action is relevant and customised to the current crisis. Once confirmed, your team can use the VCP as guidance for the key actions to take during crisis.



Acknowledgements

We thank the following organisations for their contribution to the development of the Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide and Workbook:

1. AMKFSC Community Services Ltd, SG Cares Volunteer Centre @ Ang Mo Kio
2. Assisi Hospice
3. Bizlink Centre Singapore Ltd
4. CampusImpact, SG Cares Volunteer Centre @ Yishun
5. Care Corner Singapore Ltd, SG Cares Volunteer Centre @ Toa Payoh & Woodlands
6. HCSA Community Services
7. Home Nursing Foundation
8. Methodist Welfare Services
9. New Hope Community Services, SG Cares Volunteer Centre @ Kreta Ayer, in partnership with Kreta Ayer-Kim Seng Citizens' Consultative Committees
10. Persatuan Pemuda Islam Singapura (PPIS)
11. Singapore Anglican Community Services
12. Sathya Sai Social Service (Singapore)
13. Singapore Children's Society
14. Samaritans of Singapore
15. SUN-DAC
16. SG Cares Volunteer Centre @ Boon Lay



References

Volunteer Management

- [VM Toolkit 2.0](#)
- [Volunteer Role Redesign Guide](#)
- [Corporate Volunteerism Guide](#)
- [Volunteer Resource Hub](#)

Business Continuity Planning

- [Responding to a Pandemic: A Practical Guide for Volunteer Involving Organisations \(Australia\)](#)
- [Business Continuity: COVID-19: Resource 2 \(Australia\)](#)
- [Business Continuity Planning Template and Scenario Planning \(Australia\)](#)
- [Service Continuity Planning Guide for Community-Based Organisations \(Australia\)](#)
- [Disaster Planning, Emergency Preparedness & Business Continuity for Nonprofit Organizations \(US\)](#)

COVID-19 Related Information

- [GOV.SG: Updates on the COVID-19 situation in Singapore](#)
- [MOH: Updates on Singapore's COVID-19 situation](#)
- [MCCY: News & Resources](#)
- [Beyond COVID-19: Reopening Guide for SSAs](#)
- [Beyond COVID-19: Adapting Digitally for Service Continuity](#)



Contact Details of NCSS

Reach out to the NCSS Volunteer Resource Optimisation team at Volunteer_Resource@ncss.gov.sg for any help or clarifications regarding the Volunteer Continuity Planning Guide.

You may also visit the Volunteer Resource Hub at this [link](#), or scan this QR code, to access more resources on volunteer management.



Together, Because  Cares

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