Promoting Safe Volunteering

Now more than ever, non-profit organizations must prepare to deliver programs and services in a way that promotes the health and safety of their volunteers. Volunteer managers will inevitably encounter volunteers who are unwilling or unable to follow safety measures, and all staff members must be equipped with the knowledge to handle these circumstances.

The size and structure of your group or organization will determine how and who is responsible for updating health and safety rules. Whether this is done by committee or is the task of an individual these rules will apply to all staff, volunteers and clients, with few exceptions. It is also important to determine the requirements that are specific or unique to in-person roles, such as the need for additional personal protective equipment (PPE), physical distancing guidelines, and isolation procedures.

As information is changing rapidly, volunteers may require additional reminders and explanations about why these rules are necessary. Regular check-ins are common during any time of transition, however, if volunteers are finding it difficult to adhere to new procedures, it is appropriate recommend virtual opportunities (if available) or pause engagement until these health and safety rules are no longer required.

Reiterating New Protocols

Care must be taken to be clear about the new rules that have been put in place as a result of the pandemic. While different organizations or groups will have varying needs or circumstances, everyone must follow public health guidelines. Be sure to:

- Pre-screen volunteers to verify their comfort wearing a mask during shifts
- Remind volunteers about self-isolating if they are experiencing any symptoms or have come in contact with someone who has tested positive
- Deliver training on how to maintain appropriate and safe physical distancing
- Explore virtual options so new and existing volunteers can engage safely
- Stay in touch with all your volunteers to keep them up-to-date on health and safety guidelines
- Follow-up with clients and community members who inquire about volunteer safety procedures

How to Support Volunteers Unable to Wear a Mask or Maintain Physical Distancing

- Ensure all staff understand any medical exemptions from wearing face masks in public
- Avoid making assumptions about why a volunteer may not be able to follow these rules
- It is not appropriate to inquire why a volunteer is not wearing a mask. Instead, respectfully address mask requirement rules and discuss other options to stay engaged
- Highlight proper mask wearing tips in your updated volunteer handbook to ensure volunteers always wear their masks effectively
- Provide examples of physical distancing, such as floor markers or signage, to remind volunteers of distance requirements
- Provide links to Public Health websites for volunteers to access more information

Other Planning Resources

- Remote Volunteer Opportunities
  Strategizing Virtual Roles
- Keeping Volunteers Informed
  Communicating Boundaries & Change
- Additional Safety Guidelines
  Applying COVID-19 By-Laws When Volunteering