



## HOW TO VOLUNTEER IN-PERSON NOW

It's been over a month of social distancing for most Americans. With stay at home and apart orders in place, helping others has shifted from "going to volunteer" at a food bank, the Red Cross, a local shelter, donating online to virtually support vulnerable communities, or adding a few items to grocery carts for seniors and at-risk community members. But the needs continue to grow. When the volunteer workforce – which for many nonprofits equals 60 percent of their staff—can't show up, nonprofits lose capacity to serve exactly when they need it most. Volunteers are essential to tackling the crisis created by the pandemic and helping communities heal physically and economically. As the news shares dramatic (and real) pictures of tens of thousands lined up for food bank support and unemployment climbing, we need to build a path to get Americans volunteering again.

### What can be done?

With a safety-first mindset, there are ways to consider re-engaging in volunteer service. At Points of Light, we have summarized the recommendations and best-practices across our network of nearly 200 service organizations around the world and an equal number of corporate leaders to begin the dialogue around when and how to bring the largest part of the nonprofit labor force back.

### FOR INDIVIDUALS

- 1. Stay in the know.** Because things are changing so much on a daily basis, it's important to be aware of the latest COVID-19 news, especially locally. Make sure you pay attention to the social media, emails, texts and latest news coverage from the organization you're volunteering with and other reputable resources like the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the [World Health Organization](#), and your local health and safety officials.
- 2. Understand the risks.** Before you consider volunteering outside your home, make sure you ask about any risks associated in your volunteer role and what they are doing to mitigate the risk. Also, check to see if there is a volunteer handbook you can reference.



**3. Are you healthy enough to volunteer? It's best to be cautious.** If you have a cough, fever, or underlying conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes, or have been in close contact with anyone who is confirmed to have COVID-19, you should not volunteer and stay at home for the safety of everyone.

**4. Follow health and safety protocols.** Follow the advice and guidance of staff or local teams at all times. Staff are working around the clock to ensure their volunteers are in a safe environment, both virtually and in-person. Because of this, it is important that you follow their instructions to ensure the safety of everyone involved. Clean your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. Make sure you continue to exercise social distancing and keep plenty of space between yourself and other people. And be sure to clean and disinfect shared spaces.

#### **IF YOU MANAGE A GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS**

**1. Update safety protocols.** Your volunteers and clients see you as the expert both in volunteering and in safety. Review restrictions under any type of quarantine or lockdown within your city/state municipality. You should also consult your insurance company or legal counsel to update liabilities in your volunteer waiver. Make sure you explain any changes to your volunteers.

**2. Volunteer management is key.** Managing volunteers is no small task, but with a little effort on your part, you can develop a program that's effective, engaging, and exceptionally fulfilling for everyone involved. At the most basic level, successful volunteer management should develop clear role descriptions/update training materials, create opportunities to offer support to your volunteers or to answer any of their questions (e.g. virtual office hours), and keep volunteers up-to-date with the latest news from your organization, via e-newsletters, emails, texts and social media channels (even through video messages).

**3. Engage your volunteers.** During times like these, people are feeling more isolated than ever. Providing a space for volunteers and your employees to engage in a safe, and inclusive environment (like [Zoom](#) or [Slack](#)) will be essential to your programming success. Try hosting an online lunch-and-learn to discuss potential volunteer opportunities, share video stories from your volunteers on social media, or just host an online happy hour to bring everyone together to celebrate all their amazing work.



4. **Manage volunteer stress.** Volunteering at a time of disaster can be stressful and challenging for everyone involved, even on a simple task. Be mindful of these stresses and try to ensure that volunteers are not pushing themselves too hard or taking on more than they can do.

5. **Document all your hard work.** Throughout this process you will learn a lot from your research, other nonprofit professionals, your volunteers, and more. Don't let all your hard work be in vain—make sure you take the necessary time to document everything in case you or someone you work with needs to access it in the future.

6. **Share best practices.** One thing we can all agree on is that, during times of disaster, we learn the importance of community and how much we are all in this together. Feel free to post these learnings in your social media groups/channels, in a blog, and/or listservs.