COVID19: How To Set Up a Volunteer Group

Tips from those who have done it

Contents

Group Name

Recommendation

It is recommended to name your group in this format:
    [Town] Covid-19 Mutual Aid

Reason

For example
    Carlisle Covid-19 Mutual Aid
    Stevenage Covid-19 Mutual Aid
    Wigton Covid-19 Mutual Aid

By having a standard naming convention, it makes it easier for people to search for your group and find it. It also helps councils, the NHS and other agencies find you and enlist your help.

Council Engagement

Recommendation

It is recommended that you inform your area's district council of your group. Let the council know how they can contact you.

How it works

The councils, both county council and their district subsidiaries, get phone calls from members of the public asking for help. They then decide if it is a call that is best answered by themselves or if a volunteer could assist.

In this crisis, the volunteer community is essential in helping to supplement the help that the council can provide. There are many areas of assistance that the council cannot provide that the volunteer community can offer.

By notifying the council of your volunteer group and and what services you provide, the council is able to delegate requests for assistance to your group.

The diagram below shows the structure of volunteer groups with-in the county council structure:
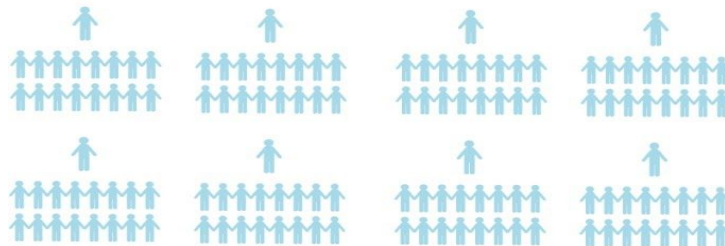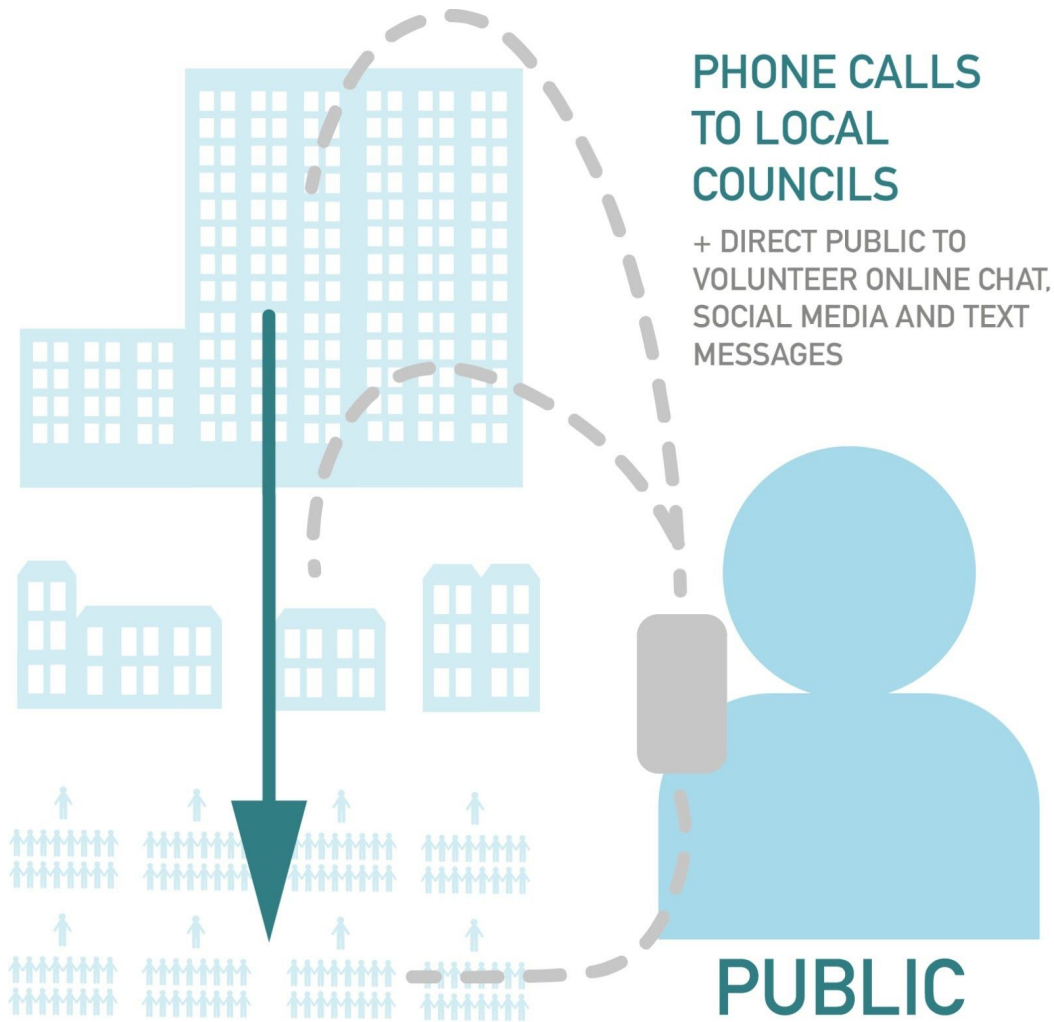
COUNTY COUNCIL
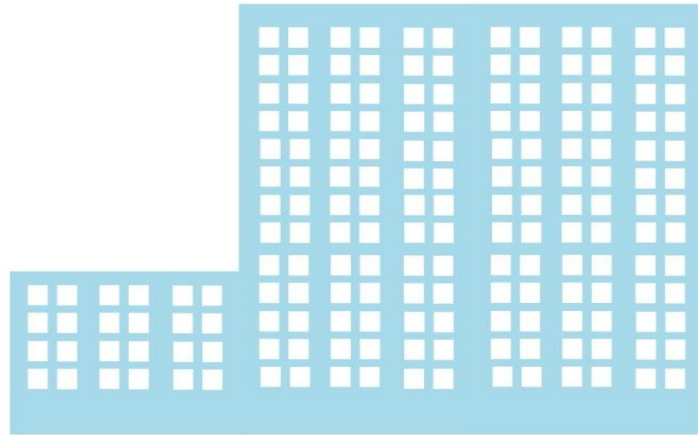
DISTRICT COUNCILS

VOLUNTEER GROUPS
VOLUNTEER LEADERS
VOLUNTEERS

The flow of requests for assistance to the councils is shown below. Calls from the public can go to either the county council or district council who then analyse which organisation is best placed to respond:

PHONE CALLS TO LOCAL COUNCILS

+ DIRECT PUBLIC TO VOLUNTEER ONLINE CHAT, SOCIAL MEDIA AND TEXT MESSAGES

PUBLIC

Group Structure

Recommendation

A volunteer group can get very busy, especially the COVID-19 volunteer groups. So we have been asking various successful groups for their tips and ideas. This is what we have learnt from others' successes.
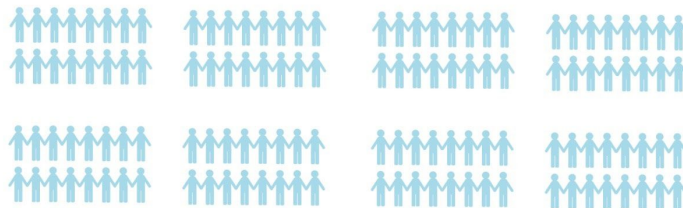
How it works

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

VOLUNTEER LEADERS

VOLUNTEERS

Structure your group so that you have:

Coordinators

- Three co-ordinators. These are the people who act as the main contact points for the councils, media, suppliers, volunteers seeking to join the group, etc. Volunteering is about ordinary people doing great things together, so there are no *leaders* as such, it's all by consent and collaboration. However, the coordinators do the tasks that in non-volunteer organisations would be regarded as "leadership".
- Having an odd number of coordinators is important when voting on decisions.
- The coordinators should define the geographic area that the group will operate in.
- This area should then be broken down into sub-areas. It's these sub-areas that will have operational groups of volunteers.
- As such, take into consideration population density as well as physical distances and the ability of volunteers to cover that area.

Leaders

- Each sub-area has at least one leader. Ideally there will be at least two leaders to allow for handover of duties.
- If possible, the leaders should devise a duty schedule when each one will be "on duty" that fits with the time that they are able to donate to the group.

- Leaders receive requests for volunteer assistance and liaise with volunteers to get that assistance to the person/people who need it.
- An important part of the leadership role is efficiency: Attempting to deliver the most for the least possible requirements from the volunteers. For example, if groceries are to be picked up from the same store, aggregating several requests into one trip to the shop.
- Another important role is escalation. For example, should a volunteer discover that someone needs medical help, they can refer it to the coordinator freeing them to continue to help the person as best they can.
- Leaders also talk with their volunteer colleagues to keep up to date with their availability, any problems that may be occurring, stresses or emotional difficulties created by things that they experienced doing the volunteering activities.

Volunteers

- Everyone in the group is a volunteer. It's all about the volunteers and the important work that they do. Everyone is important. It can be a challenging activity and expose people to things that they might never otherwise encounter in their lives.
- It is important to note that as ordinary citizens, volunteers are not expected to be qualified experts in any activity. They are not medical or other assistance-giving professionals and should not be regarded or relied on as such. *Volunteers should never be used instead of suitably qualified professionals*.
- Several successfully running groups tell us that a volunteer should not be assisting more than 30 households. Even if it seems to the person that they can cover a larger area, the rapidly changing nature of COVID19 infections make this ill-advised as the situation can change very quickly.

It is important to note that all members of a volunteer group are actively giving volunteer assistance as well as some members taking on additional coordination duties.

Community communication - Volunteer Cards

Recommendation

Engaging with the community is both an online and offline activity.

- Most people have internet access and can use social media, text messaging and messaging services
- However, some people cannot do this. Often these are vulnerable people who need help.

Supporting people who do not have access to technology is possible. One such method is through introduction cards. This also empowers people without online access with physical information about what help is available and how to seek the volunteer's assistance.

How it works

Using introduction cards are a simple and effective method of offering help to neighbours during social distancing. It is also a handy way for them to keep the volunteer's details to hand.

A template for introduction cards is here: Volunteer Introduction Card Download (text link: http://covid19.sms-speedway.com/)

It is recommended that a volunteer group obtains a good supply of these cards printed at a professional printers on a thin cardboard.

Volunteers fill in their name and contact details and post them through the letterboxes of the people they are volunteering to assist.

Community communication - Online

Recommendation

As a volunteer, accessing online information and communication is efficient. It also alleviates pressure on volunteer groups and organisers.

Online tools enable excellent collaboration through better communication and support abilities and are compliant with COVID19 social distancing and "lockdown" requirements.

How it works

Getting help
Help and assistance can be found here:

FaceBook
- Search for @covid19volunteersupport
- or click here: Covid 19 Volunteer Support Group

Twitter
- Search for @covid19_group
- or click here: Covid 19 Volunteer Support on Twitter

<u>Useful tools</u>

The following recommendations have been found to work well by many volunteer groups.

FaceBook

1. Set up a FaceBook page, preferably named according to the above guidelines. Help and assistance can be found at the Volunteer Support Group online services above
2. Attach a chatbot to the FaceBook messenger on your group's page. This will help both your volunteer communication and organisation be more efficient as well as help people seeking assistance from volunteers in your group.
3. Have more than one "admin" for your FaceBook page so that the work can be shared. We have heard groups recommend 3 people.

Twitter

1. Create a Twitter account for your group and encourage your volunteers to "follow" it.
2. Twitter is more of a "broadcast" capability and better at making announcements that people can see as it is less prone than facebook pages to having important information superseded by comments and community posts.

WhatsApp

1. Volunteer groups report that setting up a private WhatsApp group for each area group or overall volunteer group (depending on the size of the group) is very helpful for coordination and daily running of things.
2. It should only include volunteers
3. Conversation on the group should be encouraged to remain strictly related to the groups' activities.

<u>COVID-19 Volunteer Support Group</u>

Engage in online sharing of ideas, best practice and support with other volunteer group organisers. A great place to do this is on the COVID-19 Volunteer Support Group on Facebook or the @covid19_group on Twitter.

We're all learning as we go along and there are some great ideas and solutions available from other people and your contribution to this shared knowledge is valuable to others.