

IVCO 2022 Think Piece

TIME OF CRISIS

Leadership for Volunteering and Community Resilience

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IVCO
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The pandemic changed the way we live our lives, creating fear, uncertainty, instability, a lack of momentum, and a sense of isolation. These same issues also affected the volunteering community, including national volunteering leadership organisations.¹

The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE)² research report “Leadership for Volunteering: the COVID-19 Experience”³ examines how COVID-19 impacted the strategic role of leadership for volunteering organisations in advocacy, development, and volunteer mobilisation. It collected data from seventy organisations across sixty-seven countries. It is clear from the research that the pandemic increased the complexity of the volunteering environment; it created challenges for volunteering, yet also created opportunities for development and innovation.

Key findings from the research indicate that in the context of the pandemic, the increased use and development of technology have been key factors. The national volunteering leadership organisations created portals and websites to help manage the supply and demand for volunteering. They developed more online opportunities and quickly adjusted their communication and support for volunteering to virtual.

For many organisations, moving to more online activity was a necessity. This notable change also had to be thoroughly resourced and managed. It is equally important to note that the world has many digital divides, across continents and within countries. Using and maximising technology as a resource presented a challenge for organisations where consistent, affordable connectivity is a problem.

Another key finding of the research concerns the importance of partnerships and coalitions. In several countries, national leadership for volunteering organisations strengthened their volunteer-based partnerships with government. New coalitions with volunteer-involving organisations have also been developed to support volunteer mobilisation.

While volunteering activity has both increased and decreased at different times and in different countries during this pandemic period, the report’s findings indicate that organisations engaged a wider diversity of volunteers and that most of the national leadership for volunteering organisations see inclusivity as a key feature of future volunteer mobilisation strategies.

¹ IAVE describes national volunteering leadership organisations as “operating at a national level or a strategic regional level to promote and support volunteering, having linkages and/or active relationships/partnerships with volunteer-involving organisations, government, and corporations, as well as institutions such as United Nations Volunteers when appropriate.”

² IAVE—the International Association for Volunteer Effort—is a 501(c)(3) organisation whose mission is to create a more just and sustainable world by enabling leaders, leadership organisations and environments that empower volunteers. www.iave.org

³ Jacob Mwathi et al., “Leadership for Volunteering.”

THE LEARNING...

The engagement of individuals through volunteering is vital to building resilient communities that will help all of us prepare for the next crisis. This includes reenergising existing volunteers, recruiting younger generations, and developing volunteer leadership. We need to adapt to create space for both formal and informal volunteering—to create a volunteer movement in solidarity with itself. It also means being mindful of diversity and inclusivity as the hallmarks of our volunteer strategies.

Leadership for volunteering organisations understand that the effective management of volunteers maximises impact and that during the pandemic, a wealth of good practice has been developed. Networking and the global sharing of information, experience, and expertise are important to maximise use of available resources and enhance effectiveness. IAVE's Global Network for Volunteering Leadership (GNVL)⁴ is an example of this in practice. IAVE believes it is imperative that others also recognise that information and knowledge-sharing enable volunteering to flourish worldwide.

COVID-19 has been a disruptive force that challenged volunteering leadership and the entire global volunteering family. It continues to create a sense of uncertainty and unpredictability about what the future will hold. Within this maelstrom, there is one important hopeful reflection: "Volunteering is a fundamental building block of civil society. It brings to life the noblest aspirations of humankind—the pursuit of peace, freedom, opportunity, safety and justice for all people."⁵

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4 International Association for Volunteer Effort, "Global Network of Volunteering Leadership," IAVE, accessed 2021, <https://www.iave.org/gnvl/>.

5 Universal Declaration on Volunteering, Adopted by the international board of directors of IAVE at its sixteenth World Volunteer Conference, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, January 2001, the International Year of Volunteers, <https://www.iave.org/advocacy/the-universal-declaration-on-volunteering/>