

Learning Report

NCSS Volunteer Management Network 2025 Session 2 was themed ***Building a Robust Volunteer Pipeline: Sustainable Approaches to Increase Overall Manpower Capacity***. The session focused on leveraging volunteers to enhance manpower capacity - be it to support service delivery, address organisational development needs or both. Participants gained insights on strategic and operational considerations when leveraging volunteers, as well as creating, enhancing and measuring volunteer impact on manpower capacity.

Pre-VMN Poll

SSAs have been incorporating volunteers to enhance manpower capacity but challenges remain



A pre-session survey was conducted to gain insights into the current practices and challenges organisations faced in leveraging volunteers to enhance manpower capacity. **Most** of the respondents indicated that their organisation has **leveraged volunteers to enhance manpower capacity as well as support service delivery**.

However, a segment of respondents indicated that there were **(i) a lack of resources to diagnose needs**; and **(ii) recruiting volunteers with suitable skills and commitment levels** when incorporating volunteers to enhance manpower capacity.

SSAs are ready to leverage on volunteers to enhance manpower capacity

Majority of the respondents indicated that they have **clearly defined roles to align volunteers' contributions to their organisation's needs**. Of these organisations, a majority have also **designed these volunteer roles to be recurring** over a period of time to better support service delivery.

SSAs are currently focused on measuring output but expressed interest to move towards outcomes measurement

Majority of respondents indicated that their **current focus is on measuring output** such as the number of hours/ tasks volunteers have contributed and **receiving feedback from volunteers** based on their role and experience. Feedback is also collected from **organisation staff and service users on the volunteers' contributions**.

Panel Speakers



Ms Eileen Chua
Volunteer Manager
SPD



Mr Eric Hu
Volunteer Manager
Kampong Kapor Community
Services (KKCS)



Mr Cho Ming Xiu
Founder
Campus Psy

Key Insights from Panel Speakers

1. Importance of Volunteerism to Enhance Manpower Capacity



For **Eileen**, work in the **disability cluster** often requires intensive and personalised care which could be a stretch on their staff resources. As such, volunteers bring immense value to SPD, through service-based and skills-based volunteering opportunities for individuals and groups. Supported by volunteers, staff are able to extend their outreach to support more service users, improve the quality of their programmes, and achieve better cost efficiencies. More importantly, involving volunteers helps build an inclusive society where people of all abilities are valued and included.



For **Eric**, the needs in the **children, youth and family cluster** are primarily addressed by social workers and supplemented by volunteers. Having grown from two Family Service Centres to six since 2016, there is a need for KKCS to enhance manpower capacity - both by growing their teams and enlarging their volunteer pool to better support the work they do. Through programmes such as Kasih Sayang, which has evolved beyond food distribution to incorporate various community-based initiatives, resident volunteers have been empowered to contribute in a greater capacity.



For **Ming Xiu**, igniting positive change in the **mental health landscape** can be achieved through incorporating volunteers both on an organisational level (for Campus Psy) and on a national level. Campus Psy believes in co-creating programmes and services with their youth volunteers, namely through five pillars: advocacy, training, support, volunteering and intervention. On a national level, volunteers are key as seen from their roles as peer supporters and trainers in initiatives, such as the Well-Being Circles. These help in creating a supportive and inclusive community not only for youths, but people of all ages with mental health conditions.

Considerations & Success Factors in Integrating Volunteers

Key operational & strategic considerations for successful integration of volunteers, as shared by the speakers, include the following:

Fostering a volunteer-ready culture to support meaningful volunteering

1

Needs analysis is critical for Volunteer Managers to understand the organisational and service delivery needs before recruiting volunteers with the relevant knowledge and skills to address identified needs. To gain deeper insight on ground needs, initiating conversations with programme staff or shadowing the particular staff role are possible options. Part of such efforts could involve **addressing staff buy-in** - where some may view volunteers as “competitors” taking over their jobs, while others may view volunteers as manpower to take over less desirable tasks.

Addressing these perceptions requires organisation-wide advocacy on the *supportive role* that volunteers play in helping staff become more efficient and effective in the work they do. With that, corresponding staff support is needed to cultivate a good volunteering experience for everyone.

Risk management when leveraging volunteers to enhance manpower capacity

2 The session highlighted the importance of **risk assessment** of programmes and **pilot testing** new volunteer roles with close staff supervision. Speakers highlighted the importance of scoping volunteer roles to complement rather than replace staff roles, especially professional roles such as psychologists or counsellors. Another example was on financial roles where volunteers can undertake tasks such as cash flow accounting or bank reconciliation. An experienced staff should oversee and remain responsible for these tasks to ensure good governance.

Specifically for roles involving direct contact with beneficiaries, ensuring volunteers are familiar with **escalation protocols** serve as safeguards when working with vulnerable populations. **Tailored onboarding** also ensures that volunteers are equipped to better manage exigencies while serving in the community. Examples include comprehensive **induction**, and **scenario-specific training** prior to deployment.

Empowering and appreciating volunteers contributes to retention

3 Providing development opportunities for regular volunteers to **grow and take on additional responsibilities as volunteer leaders** is essential to empower volunteers and increase their contributions to the organisation. Speakers shared the need to assess the readiness of volunteers to assume leadership roles, such as commitment levels, relevant skills and alignment to organisation values.

Additionally, volunteers would also experience a **sense of agency** when they contribute in areas where they can apply their strengths and interests, such as designing outreach materials or engaging with children/ seniors based on their interests.

Conduct of volunteer appreciation activities enhances a **sense of belonging** experienced by volunteers when they serve. Such appreciation activities like a thank you note post-programme, providing regular performance feedback or presenting an award during the organisation's annual charity dinner, means much to them.

3. Identifying, Assessing & Communicating Impact for Successful Integration of Volunteers

Identifying Impact

1 For beneficiaries, impact areas could include improvements in well-being, or increase access and use of social support services achieved as a result of volunteers' support to deliver services.

For volunteers, their sharing on personal development, skills development or increase in social networks due to their volunteer contributions are valuable references to support future recruitment efforts by the organisation.

For staff, their feedback on whether they are able to better focus on supporting beneficiaries' needs, expand outreach to engage more beneficiaries or better manage their workload are good impact indicators to exhibit success.

Assessing Impact

2 Conducting pre and post volunteer programme surveys are the decision-making common impact assessment methods. The session highlighted going beyond output indicators, such as number of beneficiaries in a volunteer program. An example of outcome indicator shared was "Percentage of volunteers who indicated an improvement to their mental health literacy through the peer-support training". This enabled organisations to understand meaningful change from volunteers.

Communicating Impact

3 The **use of data from impact indicators available in the Volunteer Impact Measurement Kit can effectively demonstrate the impact of incorporating volunteers to enhance manpower capacity** specifically in support of organisational needs and in service delivery. The impact data can also be used to enhance volunteer recruitment effectiveness, inform the decision-making process of board and senior management team, as evidence to gain stronger internal support and buy-in for volunteer programmes and enhance credibility with partners.



Key Quotes by Panellists



Eileen focused on balancing volunteer involvement with service quality. Her quote highlights the importance of alignment between volunteers' contributions and the programme's objectives. It also emphasises how volunteers should support service delivery without compromising quality or the impact on clients.

"We really have to make staff align what we want to see from volunteers; what kind of contributions that they can create, back to the programme that we are doing. Volunteers are here to support us to expand our reach. Volunteers can serve more clients with more programmes running so that we can reduce the dependence on staff and we can channel the staff resources to other important areas."



Eric highlighted the critical need for clear support structures and well-defined escalation protocols for volunteers, especially in high-stakes situations. Uncertainty can lead to delays and distress, making explicit communication of support lines essential. By ensuring volunteers always know who to turn to, organisations enhance both volunteer confidence and client safety. This reinforces that effective risk management goes beyond training to include access to timely guidance and professional intervention.

"No matter what happens, they (volunteers) cannot be left not knowing what to do, who to turn to — that line of support must be expressed explicitly to the volunteers when they are deployed."



Ming Xiu highlighted a thoughtful and holistic approach to volunteer engagement. He emphasises the importance of considering volunteers' personal, academic, and professional aspirations. He also suggests that a strong volunteer programme should offer value beyond just service, helping volunteers navigate their personal growth, career ambitions, and life stages.

"How do we value-add to our volunteers' personal lives, studies, and careers? How do we then provide the resources to help develop our youth volunteers or young adult volunteers? And for others; adult volunteers and senior volunteers, in their life stage, how do we help to make them feel meaningfully engaged? How do we ensure we provide them with the right resources to ensure they succeed in life too, to ensure they are successful as a person."

