

Develop Your Volunteer Strategy

Together, Because  Cares



Capability &
Capacity Series

Volunteer Management Sandbox Learning Resource:
Guiding SSAs to Develop a Volunteer Strategy

Introduction and Background

About this Learning Resource

This learning resource was curated from the inaugural National Council of Social Service (NCSS) Volunteer Management Sandbox Series. The series brought together volunteer managers and sector leaders, through thematic workshops, promoting discussions on strategic alignment and resource development to address challenges in sustainable volunteerism. The VM Sandbox Series aim to:

- Spark innovation and empower participants
- Foster collaboration and camaraderie among participants
- Co-create valuable learning resources for the sector

This learning resource on **“Develop Your Volunteer Strategy”**, is a collection of volunteer management practice experiences and insights of 83 SSAs engaged across 3 workshops, strengthened through NCSS and its appointed consulting partner – Empact's strategic perspectives to deliver comprehensive guidance for the social service sector.

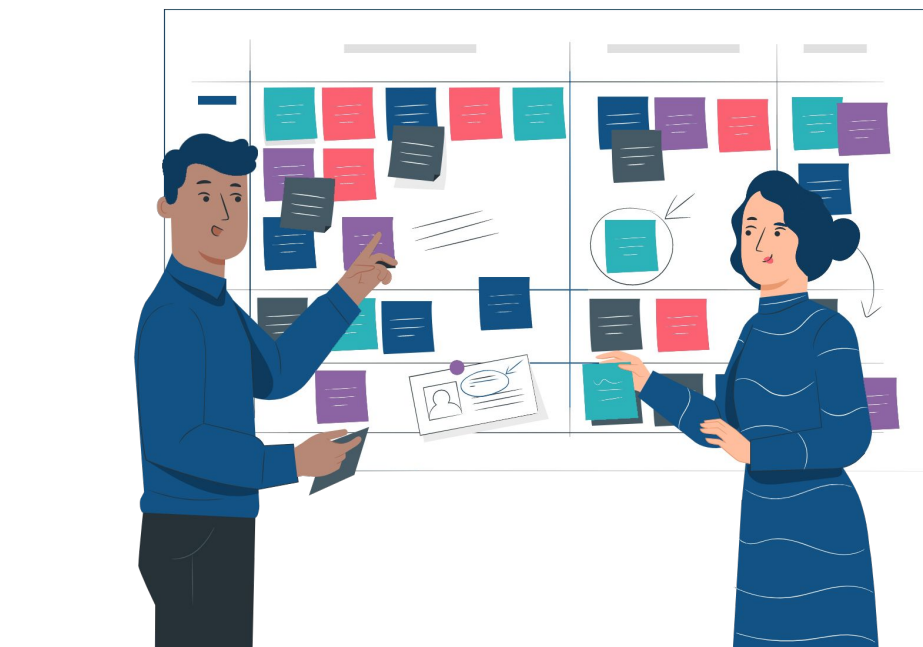
This learning resource serves as a guide for SSAs to develop their volunteer strategy.

Who is this Learning Resource for

This Learning Resource is intended for the senior management, volunteer managers and any staff in SSAs, who are keen to develop or enhance their Volunteer Strategy.

What does this Learning Resource cover

This Learning Resource covers the development of a volunteer strategy that aligns with organisational mission and goals. It examines key components, guiding principles, and success indicators for strategic alignment, while detailing stakeholder roles in implementation. The resource provides practical guidance for organisations to create and operationalise volunteer strategies that enhance their overall mission effectiveness.



1. Develop Your Volunteer Strategy

A. Strategy Fundamentals

A volunteer strategy is a structured plan that outlines how an organisation will attract, engage, and retain volunteers to support its mission and goals. It includes defining the volunteer roles, identifying the skills needed, creating training programs, developing communication plans, and setting up recognition systems.

It is important that Volunteer Strategy is a component within your organisation's strategic plans, playing a role as enabler and catalyst to secure various organisational outcomes. These outcomes include enhanced service delivery, strengthened stakeholder relationships, improved community outreach, increased fundraising capabilities, and effective marketing initiatives. A well-integrated volunteer strategy not only enhances operational capacity, but also brings fresh perspectives to foster impactful positive change in the community.

Key Concept

An effective strategy builds a bridge linking challenge with action, desire with immediate objectives that lie within grasp¹.



Useful Tips: While goals are important, be careful not to mistake them for strategy. Goals are just one component of strategy, which is broader and includes mission & vision, goals, implementation plan, budget, and other elements..

B. Why Volunteer Strategy

Having a Volunteer Strategy allows a SSA to better leverage volunteers' contributions to significantly amplify the organisation's impact beyond what staff alone could achieve. This strategic approach ensures structured and purposeful volunteer engagement that aligns with organisational goals.

Increasingly, SSAs are acknowledging the pivotal role volunteers play in their organisations' overall strategy. Embracing volunteers helps overcome resource constraints while enriching the organisations with diverse skills and perspectives, enabling SSAs to respond more effectively to evolving social challenges.

Volunteers provide value across multiple timeframes: they alleviate staff workload in the short and medium term, and contribute to building organisational capabilities and enhancing service delivery in the long term. SSAs with established volunteer partnerships are well-positioned to capitalise on these benefits, leading to improved programme outcomes and stronger community connections.

This complex endeavour requires capabilities in initiating and sustaining the engagement of volunteers. Board members can play a fundamental role in shaping an organisation's volunteer strategy by providing strategic oversight, championing volunteer initiatives, and ensuring adequate resources are allocated to support effective volunteer programmes. [Learn more about the possibilities [here](#)].

Key Concept

A Volunteer Strategy allows a stronger linkage of volunteers towards SSAs' strategic plan which includes its mission and vision.



¹ Rumelt, Richard. (2017). *Good Strategy, Bad Strategy: The difference and why it matters*. Profile Books.

C. What is a Volunteer Strategy

Among the Board members, senior management and volunteer managers, who contributed to the discussion, some defined it as a framework, which is a visual diagram one can use to illustrate various components, their relationship to each other, and the corresponding enablers and constraints. Others defined it as a roadmap that provides direction for how a plan can be executed in phases over time. Yet others defined it as a practice arising from clarity in efforts and focus. Further definitions from other participants can be found in [Diagram 1](#) on page 5. You may also refer to [Diagram 2](#) on page 5 if you wish to learn how volunteer strategy is defined in overseas contexts.

Among these definitions, the common distinctive feature of a volunteer strategy is that it is a well-defined plan requiring a series of interventions or sub-plans for recruiting, engaging and retaining volunteers to be executed coherently over a period of time.

When documented, a coherent volunteer strategy shows clearly why, what and how to achieve better impact with volunteers. This serves as an anchor that aligns all levels of operations in the organisation, including steps to recruit, engage and recognise volunteers' contributions. To ensure sustainability, it promotes a two-way exchange where volunteers have a positive experience while social service agencies are able to effectively leverage their skills and time.

As gleaned from the insights provided by participants during the VM Sandbox Series, the sub-plans within a volunteer strategy very much align with the contents in the [Volunteer Management Framework \(VMF\)](#). Broadly, the VMF guides volunteer managers on the end-to-end journey of volunteer partnership. It starts from the needs analysis of an organisation and getting the organisation volunteer-ready, to engaging volunteers effectively at various stages or touchpoints in their journey with a social service agency.

We will delve more into the components of a volunteer strategy in the next section.

Key Concept

A Volunteer Strategy is, in essence, a well-defined plan consisting of sub-plans for recruiting, engaging and retaining volunteers to be executed coherently over a period of time.



Useful Tips: Document your volunteer strategy as it serves as an anchor that aligns all levels in your organisation.





Diagram 1: Participants’ responses to what is a volunteer strategy



Diagram 2: How other countries have defined Volunteer Strategy

2. Components of a Volunteer Strategy

A. Strategy Component - Fundamentals

Regardless of the topic that a strategy is developed for, a strategy contains 3 key components:

1. A diagnosis of the situation
2. An overall guiding policy
3. The design of coherent action

Key Concept

A strategy contains 3 key components: a diagnosis of the situation; an overall guiding policy; and the design of coherent action.

Underlying the components of a strategy lies in bringing these components together. This involves discovering the critical factors in a situation and designing a way of coordinating and focusing actions to deal with the identified factors.

Many see the 'overall guiding policy' as a critical anchor to support the design of a strategy. We will explore this component further in the [next segment](#) of this resource.

B. A Volunteer Strategy Starts with a Vision Statement

A volunteer strategy statement is a concise declaration that outlines the desired end state the organisation aspires to achieve with the support of volunteers. This statement should inspire both staff and volunteers, resonate with the organisation's direction and commitment to volunteerism, and serves as a guiding framework for the development of the volunteer management practices.

A clear volunteer strategy statement helps to:



Establish purposeful volunteer programme together



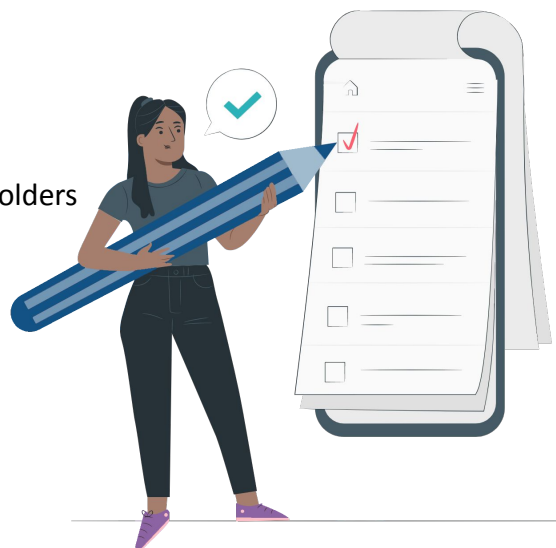
Connect volunteers to the offerings of the organisation



Plan how you can achieve your goals

A volunteer strategy statement should be:

1. Clear and simple
2. Written in the present, not future tense
3. Describes your desired outcomes
4. Evokes emotion and seeks to inspire
5. Builds a common picture in everyone's mind
6. Easily explained and understood by all stakeholders



C. Components of a Volunteer Strategy

As identified by participants, a volunteer strategy includes components as follow:

Stages in a Volunteer's Journey with the Organisation (Aligned to the 7 Domains of a VMF)

1	Organisational Culture	Cultivating a culture where staff are willing to partner with volunteers
2	Organisational Readiness	Organisational readiness to partner with volunteers
3	Volunteer Recruitment and Selection	Practices to recruit and select volunteers
4	Volunteer Onboarding and Training	Efforts to onboard and develop volunteers
5	Volunteer Engagement and Experience	Engagement methods with volunteers to cultivate good volunteering experiences
6	Review of Volunteer Management	Review of volunteer management practices and programmes
7	Collaboration	Practices to foster collaboration with institutional partners

Goal(s) of Volunteer Partnership Efforts

1	Enhance Community Impact	Collaborate to address community needs more effectively by combining resources, expertise, and networks
2	Expand Reach and Resources	Pooling resources, whether financial, human, or material, to amplify the impact of volunteer efforts and extend the reach of services
3	Build Capacity	Strengthen the capabilities of the SSA through leveraging knowledge and skills
4	Foster Innovation	Encourage creative solutions to social issues by leveraging diverse perspectives and approaches

Components of a Volunteer Strategy



Diagram 3: The diagram captures key components of a Volunteer Strategy as identified by participants



Useful Tips: A Volunteer Strategy consists of components of the Volunteer Management Framework and the goals of volunteer partnership.

3. Considerations/Guiding Principles When Drafting Your Volunteer Strategy

A. Guiding Principles - Components

A volunteer strategy needs to be applicable across all stages of a volunteer's journey with the organisation.

Drawing from the Volunteer Management Framework, this segment puts the spotlight on the key stages that volunteer managers have identified as important during the VM Sandbox Series. It mainly focuses on the three key aspects of volunteer partnership: People, Process, and Structure.

Key Concept

A coherent Volunteer Strategy revolves around the considerations of three key aspects of People, Process, and Structure.

1 Organisational Readiness and Culture

Finance Allocation	Resources such as grants and operating budgets are critical for volunteer management efforts. These resources enable dedicated manpower for volunteer management and provide funding to offset related expenses, such as training and allowances.
A Volunteer Manager or Volunteer Management team	Having a dedicated individual or team is essential for translating these policies into practice and driving the volunteer management efforts forward.
Policy on Volunteer Management	When processes and structures are in place, they serve as a means to align organisational efforts and convey expectations in a volunteer partnership.
Clear Communication Processes	Clear communication channels and processes facilitate the sharing of essential information with volunteers. This includes expectations, responsibilities, benefits, and the impact that volunteers make. Communication with stakeholders impacted by volunteer partnership follow similar principles. See more on stakeholder guidelines in Page 13 of this learning resource.
Risk Management for Volunteer Roles Serving Agency Needs	For volunteers to effectively meet organisational needs, safeguards need to be in place. Risk management policies must comply with the prevailing regulations and best practices, including volunteer safety, background checks, protection of both volunteers and service users data under the PDPA. To learn more, refer to our other learning resource, Managing and Mitigating Risks for Volunteers and Volunteer Managers .

2 Recruiting and Selecting Volunteers

Communications and Outreach

When reaching out to or engaging potential volunteers:

- State your organisation's services to show how your volunteers can contribute.
- Describe available roles and assess potential volunteers' interests.
- Address concerns of potential volunteers (e.g. assure them that they do not need prior experience or that training will be provided).
- Outline the basic requirements you need from the volunteers in the given roles, including time commitment or skills they need.
- Share the benefits that the volunteers will gain from their volunteer experience.
- Ensure prompt follow-ups with prospective volunteers.

Volunteering Opportunities

To attract the right volunteers, organisations need to differentiate themselves by offering a range of volunteer roles that provide both flexible time commitment and opportunities for volunteers to contribute specialised skill sets or to hone their skills further.

 **Useful Tips:** You can refer to the NCSS' [Volunteer Role Redesign \(VRR\) Guide](#) to find a structured approach to create new volunteer roles or adapt existing ones to better fit agency needs.



3 Onboarding and Training Volunteers

Appointment Process

Formalise your volunteer partnership with an appointment letter including the following details:

- Role description and responsibilities
- Service terms and schedule
- Organisational policies and conduct code
- Volunteer declarations

Orientation Process

Conduct orientation sessions for new volunteers to ensure better assimilation into your organisation and provide them with an overview of:

- Vision, mission, values and goals
- Background, history and culture
- Organisation structure
- Volunteer philosophy and/or strategy
- Overview of services, programmes and service users
- Impact of volunteers on organisation and service users (Personal sharing by current volunteers)
- Overview of volunteer roles
- Performance expectations and review process
- Code of Conduct and procedures
- Dos and don'ts of a volunteer
- Benefits of volunteering



Development Process

Invest in relevant training to enhance volunteers' skills and capabilities, enabling them to perform their roles effectively. It is important to conduct a training needs assessment to identify critical areas before deploying the volunteers.

4 Supporting and Recognising Volunteers

Ongoing Support	Support and appreciate volunteers to ensure long-term engagement and retention. Examples of support include: • Schedule regular short meetings to discuss tasks, progress and programme challenges. • Give clear instructions and confirm their understanding. • Make sure volunteers know whom to approach if they have any questions. • Maintain an open door policy for volunteers to raise suggestions, questions or concerns at all times. • Organise informal bonding sessions (e.g monthly coffee sessions) to help your volunteers build a sense of community in your agency as well as interact with staff.
Recognising Volunteers	Provide your volunteers with progression opportunities, such as: • Mentoring new volunteers and/or taking on new volunteer leadership roles - enhances personal satisfaction and deepens skills. • Supporting new programmes/services – provides exposure to different programme types and deepens transferable skills
A Remuneration and Benefit Policy	While not mandatory, having this structure in place helps alleviate volunteers' concerns about expenses incurred during volunteering and demonstrates that they are valued by the organisation.



5 Reviewing Volunteer Management

Volunteer Feedback

Regular volunteer feedback sessions help develop effective long-term working relationship. Additionally, feedback helps to:

- Gather new ideas, improve current processes, increase engagement, and build rapport with the volunteers.
- Assess volunteers' suitability for future volunteering/leadership roles and opportunities within the organisation.
- Better understand your organisation's outreach and service effectiveness.

Manage Volunteer Exits

Volunteers may leave your agency when the tenure of their service ends, or for various reasons such as a changes in job, life, and family priorities, burnout, or loss of interest. Conducting exit interviews enables your agency to understand why volunteers leave and identify solutions to address any contributing factors. These interviews also help maintain good relationships with volunteers and increase the likelihood of their future involvement with your agency.

Review your Organisation's Volunteer Programme (including guidance on how to track key metrics)

Regular programme evaluation helps your agency to determine what works and what doesn't. It also identifies problems and solutions, increases volunteer engagement and satisfaction, and improves efficiencies and reduce costs. To evaluate effectively:

- Define success criteria for your volunteer programme.
- Align strategic goals and expectations of what constitutes success with senior management and staff.



B. Considerations - Stakeholders

Given the multi-faceted nature of the above efforts at all stages, stakeholder buy-in remains critical. Understanding who the common stakeholders are and their key concerns will help strengthen your volunteer strategy.

Consider engaging stakeholders with high influence and high impact as a priority. You may find the stakeholder engagement matrix below helpful in prioritising your engagement efforts and approach.

Key Concept

Consider engaging stakeholders with high influence and high impact as a priority of your volunteer engagement strategy.

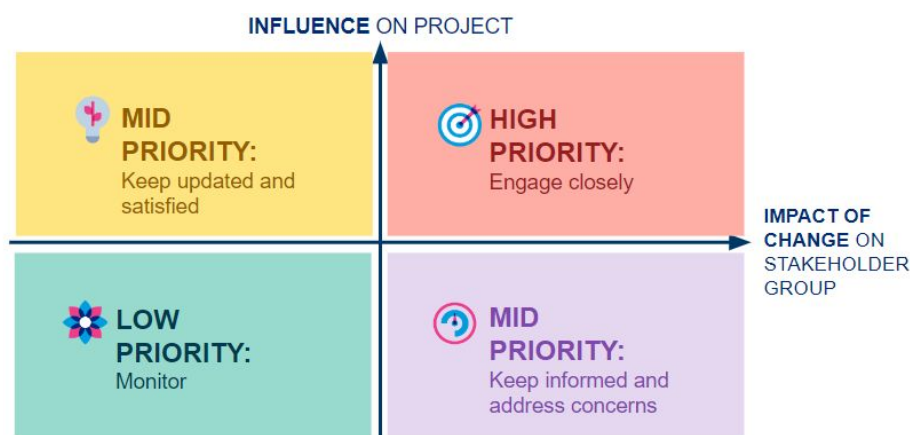
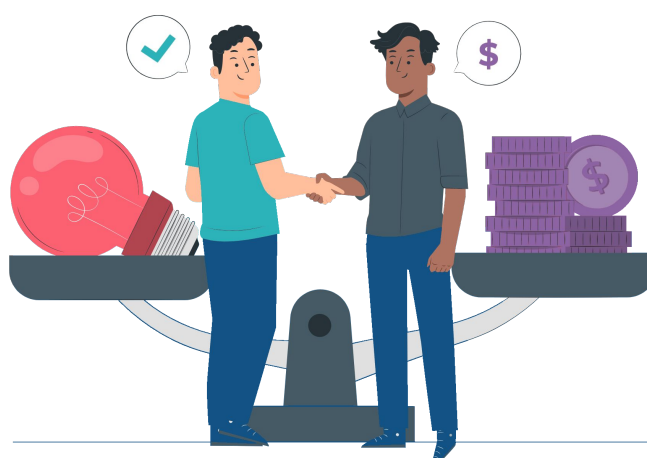


Diagram 4: 2x2 Stakeholder Mapping Template

Common stakeholders and their key concerns to consider	
Service Users	Clearly identify their needs and determine how volunteers can address them.
Volunteers	Understand their motivations, skills, and knowledge to match them to suitable volunteering opportunities.
Internal Partners	Identify relevant teams, such as programme or corporate teams, that will work with volunteers and prepare them to provide effective support.
External Partners	These partners (corporate organisations or schools) provide support through deploying their employees or students as volunteers. Understand their partnership objectives and preferred mode of engagement to ensure effective collaboration and alignment of expectations.



C. Additional Considerations

Timeline	As a general guide, a volunteer strategy should be planned for three to five years and reviewed annually. The resulting masterplan can be broken down into shorter-term milestones or phases for easier management and monitoring.
Success Indicators	To measure and evaluate the success of the volunteer strategy, indicate and differentiate between output, outcomes, and impact.

Overall, an effective volunteer strategy should strike a balance in its ability to guide volunteer management efforts of the organisation while being aspirational in elevating volunteerism to the next level.



4. How Success Look Like when Volunteer Strategy is Aligned with Organisational Strategy

An organisational strategy is a blueprint that guides an organisation through its operations and sets out how it will achieve its objectives. A good organisational strategy helps to ensure that everyone within the organisation works together and towards the same goals, sets a clear sense of direction for employees, reduces costs, and improves efficiency for everyone. It is an essential piece to ensure long-term success and development in any organisation (Pandey, N., 2023)².

Similarly, for non-profits, organisational strategy is as important as it is for-profit organisations. The plan can help readers visualise how each element, like a puzzle piece, builds the full picture of the organisation's efforts. Some of these puzzle pieces may be the organisation's mission, vision, purpose and values, donor management approach, priorities and business models, and how volunteers can support each effort (Meyer, J., 2024)³.

Volunteer strategy should be aligned with organisational strategy, as it is a demonstration to stakeholders that volunteers are valued through their contribution towards organisational strategic objectives. Alignment between the two strategies can identify potential areas where volunteers can be involved in the most effective way (Christine, 2018)⁴. Participants from the VM Sandbox Series discussed and identified what success looks like when these strategies are aligned (Diagram 5).

How does success look like when Volunteer Strategy is aligned with Organisational Strategy?			
Organisation	Staff	Volunteers	Process
- Helps to steer and focus volunteer engagement efforts towards achievement of organisation strategies - Everyone embraces volunteerism - Social impact of agency is multiplied - Improves public awareness of agency's causes - Happy service users!	- Clear roles and responsibilities between staff and volunteers to complement each other in delivering programmes and services - Build trust between staff and volunteers - Programmes run organically with minimal staff supervision	- Contribute at organisation level - Better outputs and outcomes in volunteer engagement and retention - Enhanced volunteering experiences - More skills development opportunities - Volunteers progress to donors/staff roles	Seamless and structured process for the volunteer management lifecycle

Diagram 5: Participants' responses to how success look like when volunteer strategy is aligned with organisational strategy

²[Discover the 4 Organisational Strategies and their importance](#)

³<https://bloomerang.co/blog/nonprofit-strategic-planning/>

⁴[Align Your Volunteer Strategy with Organisational Goals – Flutterby](#)

5. The Roles Different Stakeholders Play in Operationalising a Volunteer Strategy

A good volunteer strategy is only effective when put in motion. A strategy plan may sound great but would require constant monitoring and collaboration to succeed. To operationalise a strategy, 3 focus areas need to be worked on - People, Process and Structure. For People, there is a need to ask if the Board members are engaged and how strong the partnership between the board and staff members is. For Process and Structure, the plan should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, and the allocation of resources and tasks to different members of the organisation (Humphreys, E., 2018)⁵.

Members across all organisational levels have distinct roles in operationalising the Volunteer Strategy. While Board members, senior management, volunteer managers and staff have different roles, their aligned and collaborative efforts are crucial for effective implementation of the strategy. Diagram 6 shows the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders as discussed by participants of the VM Sandbox Series:



Stakeholder	Role
Board Members	Advocate for volunteer management, effect change management, set strategic directions, and leverage networks and connections.
Senior Management	Align with Board on strategic directions, strategise VM processes and operations, foster and embrace a volunteer friendly culture, empowers volunteer managers, being knowledgeable in VM operations.
Volunteer Managers	Be grounded, be the voice of the volunteers, be the bridge between various stakeholders, creating a framework (system, processes) for managing volunteers, risk management on different profiles of volunteers.
Others	Enhance volunteer experiences within their programme, embrace volunteerism and understand volunteers' needs and challenges.

Diagram 6: Roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders as discussed by VM Sandbox Series participants

⁵https://www.asaecenter.org/resources/articles/an_plus/2018/april/from-strategy-to-action-best-practices-for-operationalizing-your-strategic-plan

References

- Rumelt, Richard. (2017). Good Strategy, Bad Strategy: The difference and why it matters. Profile Books.
- Volunteer Management Toolkit 2.0

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the following SSAs for their contributions to the development of this Learning Resource:

3Pumpkins Ltd	Humanitarian Organization for	REACH Community Services Ltd.
Babes Pregnancy Crisis Support Ltd	Migration Economics (HOME)	Samaritans of Singapore Limited
Beautiful People SG Ltd	Impart Ltd	SASCO Senior Citizens' Home
Bethesda Care Services	Jamiyah Singapore	Sathya Sai Social Service 4S
Beyond Social Services	Kampong Kapor Community Services	Sembawang Family Service Centre
Bishan Home for the Intellectually	Leukemia and Lymphoma Foundation	SG Cares Volunteer Centre @ Jalan Besar
Disabled	Lions Befrienders	Shared Services for Charities Ltd
Bright Hill Evergreen Home	Lions Home for the Elders	Sian Chay Medical Institution
Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu-Chi	Loving Heart Multi-Service Centre	Singapore Association For Mental Health
Foundation (Singapore)	Malay Youth Literary Association	Singapore Environment Council
Calvary Community Care	Marymount Centre	Singapore General Hospital
Canossaville Children and	Methodist Welfare Services	Singapore International Foundation
Community Services	METTA Welfare Association	Singapore Police Force
Care Community Services Society	Ministry of Manpower	Singapore Red Cross Society
Caritas Singapore	Ministry of Social and Family	Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to
Catch Them Young	Development - Youth Residential	Animals (SPCA)
Centre for Fathering Ltd	Service	Society for WINGS
Chen Su Lan Methodist Children's	Muhammadiyah Association	St Andrew's Autism Centre
Home	Muslimin Trust Fund Association	St. Joseph's Institution International Ltd
Children's Cancer Foundation	National Arthritis Foundation	SUN-DAC
Christian Outreach To The	NeuGen Fund	Sunshine Trust
Handicapped	New Life Community Services	The Hut Limited
Clementi United temple	NTUHealth	Thye Hua Kwan Moral Charities
Cornerstone Community Services	OH! Open House	TOUCH Community Services
Dover Park Hospice	Our Daily Bread Ministries	Trans Family Services
Epworth Community Services	Pertapis Education & Welfare Centre	Tsao Foundation
EQUAL-ARK SINGAPORE LTD	Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura	TSB Charity Association Limited
Etonhouse Community Fund	Presbyterian Community Services	Woodlands Social Centre
Filos Community Services	Rainbow Centre	Yayasan MENDAKI
Good News Community Services	Rare Disorders Society (Singapore)	Young Women's Christian Association of
HCSA Community Services	Ray of Hope	Singapore

Copyright © 2024 by National Council of Social Service
All Rights Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage system and retrieval system, without the written permission of the copyright owners.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE



ncss.gov.sg