

Terms of Reference

Forum COVID-19 Research

22 June 2020

Background and Rationale

Forum members and the wider volunteering for development community have been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Following an initial period in which thousands of international volunteers were repatriated, local volunteers adapted to new restrictions, and organisations found ways to maintain their programmes while keeping their people safe, the sector is considering how it can move forward and continue to support programmes and deliver impact in a responsible way.

The pandemic has fundamentally disrupted normal ways of working for volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs). This presents challenges, and also opportunities for the sector to innovate, and to diversify the ways we work with volunteers to support communities.

Returning to 'business as usual' is not possible, or adequate. Many VIOs have responded to the pandemic but have not had the time or capacity to study the impact of COVID-19 on their operations, to extract learning to help them to respond to similar shocks in the future, or to anticipate and innovate their programmes for new areas of growth.

VIOs are exploring alternative models of volunteering and new ways of working to anticipate the evolutions in our sector that inevitably follow a transformational shift in the external environment. This new thinking will allow VIOs to strategically create innovative programmes and diversify their offerings to volunteers and to the communities they serve. Doing so, they will not only be less vulnerable to similar shocks in the future, but they can harness the disruption caused by this pandemic to position their organisations for new areas of growth.

The Forum Research, Practice, Policy and Learning (RPPL) group is commissioning research to explore three key research questions to inform the future direction of the sector.

Audience and objectives

The intended audience is decision makers in Forum member organisations.

This research will inform Forum members' thinking and decision making on common issues resulting from COVID-19, including how to respond to similar future crises, and how to diversify their programmes and volunteer offerings in a way that best serves the people and communities who benefit from their work.

Deliverables

The main deliverable for this research will be one written report in three parts, addressing the three research questions.

We estimate that this research, including the production of a report no longer than 20 pages, will require 25 days.

We want this research to inform conversations on COVID-19 at [IVCO 2020](#) in late October, and will agree with the researcher(s) what type of input will be possible in time for IVCO.

Research Questions

The research will address three questions: **the future direction of volunteering for development, alternative volunteering models, and lessons from the COVID-19 response.**

a. The future direction of volunteering for development. (8 pages)

How can VIOs innovate new areas of growth in their programmes to deliver volunteering for development in the months and years ahead? How can the volunteering for development sector better position itself to respond to the particular challenges and opportunities that will result from COVID?

COVID-19 is having an effect on partner organisations' needs, opportunities and priorities. VIOs are predicting, for example, that post-COVID-19 recovery will see higher demand from partner organisations for volunteers with expertise in areas like livelihoods and public health. COVID-19 is also resulting in issues like increased rates of domestic violence and loss of education for girls, and partners are pivoting to address these needs.

VIOs expect that they will have to adapt their ways of working in the context of COVID-19 restrictions, and that they will commit additional resources to achieve their objectives, or adapt their objectives.

As a result of COVID, we are seeing increased interest in volunteering globally, and a rising sense of international solidarity and recognition of how small and interconnected the world is. At the same time, international mobility is severely limited - and may remain so for several years. Likewise, VIOs, volunteers, and donors are recognising new areas of value emerging from digital and distance methods of engagement. Anticipating these intersecting trends and opportunities, how can VIOs evolve by creating new and innovative models and methods?

How will this redefine how VIOs support their partners and the types of volunteers they engage? Through this research, we want to better understand the future needs and demands of partner organisations, and how VIOs can position themselves to address them.

b. Alternative Volunteering Models (8 pages)

How effective and practical are the alternative models now being applied and explored in the absence of international volunteering?

This element of the research will look in more detail at the new models of volunteering being adopted by VIOs, and how they are adapting existing models in response to the challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19 and the changing needs of their partner organisations.

What new models are being explored? The research should look in detail at online volunteering and greater support to local volunteers, as well as innovative models such as community-based global engagement approaches.

As VIOs explore these new models, how can a volunteering for development approach be implemented through non-traditional means, including online volunteering and remote support for local volunteers?

This part of the research, in particular, should consider the perspectives of partner organisations in the Global South on how impactful and responsible these new models are.

c. Lessons from the COVID-19 Response (4 pages)

What lessons has the volunteering for development sector learned from the initial months of the COVID-19 response, and how can these lessons improve our response to future shocks?

An examination of VIOs' initial response to COVID-19 to identify lessons and guidance for future shocks.

This will address:

- Repatriating international volunteers and standing down volunteers in-country
- How ways of working can be adapted for volunteers and partner organisations
- Safety and security of volunteers, staff and partners
- How VIOs can support partners, staff and national or local volunteers to continue programmes
- How repatriated volunteers can support their partners remotely
- The management of volunteers who return early from placements, are stood down, or are unable to begin planned placements
- How VIOs respond to changes in the supply of volunteers.

Suggested Research Methods

These will be agreed with the researcher(s).

We would expect that much of this research will be carried out through a combination of consultation with Forum members and, if possible, other volunteering for development organisations. It will draw on the thinking happening in many Forum members about their future direction.

Research question (c) will also draw on Forum's documentation of members' responses to COVID.

It is important to Forum that this research, especially questions (a) and (b), should focus on the views and experience of organisations that host volunteers and benefit from their work, and that it should reflect their perceptions of the future direction of volunteering.

We are open to focusing elements of the research on a specific region or regions.

Key Sources for Consultation

1. These will be agreed with the researcher(s), and may include -
2. Representatives of Forum member organisations – head office and in-country staff. We expect that they will provide a range of perspectives on the future direction of their organisations and their medium and long-term planning.
3. Resources created by Forum members on their future direction, and the future of volunteering for development post-COVID.
4. Representatives of in-country partner organisations and other community-based organisations that work with volunteers.
5. If possible, representatives of communities served by these partner organisations. We recognise that this is extremely challenging at this time.
6. Forum documents related to members' COVID-19 response, including repatriation tracker and notes produced from Heads of Agency calls.
7. Literature on models of volunteering

Timeframe

This research should be completed by the end of 2020. The researcher(s) will be invited to present on elements of the research at IVCO 2020.

Detailed timetable to be agreed with the researcher(s) in the inception phase.

Management

The Forum Executive Coordinator will be responsible for managing the research process, and will be the primary point of contact for the researcher(s). The researchers will provide regular updates to

the Executive Coordinator, who will report to the Forum Board. The RPPL group will have a light steering role for the research – providing guidance in the inception phase and feedback on drafts.

Ethics and Risk

We ask that the researcher(s) make clear that their research approach will be based on ethical principles.

Qualifications and Experience Required

The researchers selected should have strong experience of qualitative research methods and a track record of research in the field of volunteering for development.

Expressions of interest

The Forum RPPL Group invites expressions of interest from researchers to carry out this work. Given the breadth of focus and the forward-looking nature of this work, we are open to expressions of interest from groups of researchers and/or strategists.

To be considered, please submit an expression of interest, no more than two pages please, setting out the relevant skills and experience of the project lead (and others where relevant), and a brief proposal of how you will approach the work, including a timetable.

The deadline for expressions of interest is 5pm GMT on Friday 3 July. Please email them to jobrien@forum-ids.org.