

# Volunteering Alliance Plan of Action

## Executive summary

Very concerned by the crisis in volunteering as demonstrated by the Global Review on Volunteering, the IFRC Governing Board endorsed in June 2016 a **Framework for Action for Volunteering** to be driven by an **Alliance of National Societies** across all five regions.

The Plan of Action has two objectives:

1. **OBJECTIVE 1: Identifying, sharing, adapting for replication and/or scaling-up successful volunteering practices**

To identify, share, support, innovate, evaluate, adapt, scale-up, and/or replicate when appropriate, promising volunteering practices that are being tested or deployed by National Societies.

2. **OBJECTIVE 2: Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of volunteers**

To work with volunteers, communities, governments and other stakeholders to implement the International Conference Resolution on “The safety and security of humanitarian volunteers” and to further develop systems to ensure their safety and wellbeing in dangerous situations.

# Volunteering Alliance Plan of Action

## The problems

### **1. Many National Societies are losing their volunteers for lack of appropriate volunteering practices**

Despite being one of the oldest and most prestigious humanitarian volunteer organisation in the world, present in 190 countries, there are only 17 million Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) volunteers or just 0.2% of the world's population<sup>1</sup>.

Even more worrisome, the distribution of volunteers has no relation with global humanitarian needs:

- 57% of our volunteers are in just 4 National Societies.
- 10 National Societies have 75% of our volunteers.
- 100 National Societies, combined, have just 1.25% of our volunteers despite having more than 11% of the world's population in their countries.

Moreover, the overall number of RCRC volunteers is at best stagnating, and maybe even declining in absolute terms, perhaps by as much as 10% a year.

Declining numbers and difficulty in sustaining volunteer engagement are not just National Society managerial issues - trends also suggests that patterns of volunteering are changing, with, for example, shorter periods of engagement and commitment to causes rather than to organisations, and different expectations in terms of participation and empowerment.

### **2. Too many volunteers are losing their lives and lack protection and support**

More than one million Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers work in countries where there is a conflict, among which about 100,000 are in the front lines. These frontline workers are risking their lives which often affects their mental health. They require protection and in many cases, psychosocial support. It is as well estimated that many volunteers worldwide are still not adequately insured.

Too often, and especially in the midst of an emergency, volunteers are mobilised with little time for complete briefings on their role and responsibilities, and on their rights and the risks they face. This leads to misunderstandings, frustrations and sometimes conflict. In the absence of a clear, forceful and unambiguous commitment to uphold the rights and responsibilities volunteers are less likely to understand their role, uphold their rights and take responsibility for their actions. National Society need to demonstrate their accountability to volunteers and be clear on what they expect from volunteers.

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<sup>1</sup> IFRC Global Review on Volunteering (2015)

## What we need to improve

### 1. All National Societies can improve and modernize their volunteering practices

People's lives are changing and our volunteer models will have to change as well. National Societies need to build more diverse and relevant models to adapt to the changing patterns of volunteering in their communities. National Societies can learn from each other and from others outside the Movement, and lead in designing and testing new approaches. This is not just about digital or technology-based volunteering, though there are certainly many opportunities in these spaces that we have yet to fully explore, but it may involve also, simple ground level solutions that can enable people to make a difference on causes they care about and to build a relationship with their National Society. These relationships can lead to deeper engagement if they are well understood and managed.

Many National Societies also need to **strengthen their approaches to data**. Only 50% of National Societies have a national volunteer data system and only half of those think it is accurate. If National Societies want more volunteers - and make sure they are effectively managed, engaged, and insured - they must have more reliable data. Better data systems will enable National Societies to fulfil their mission towards communities.

### 2. It is a moral imperative for National Societies and IFRC to protect the safety and wellbeing of volunteers - without compromising our mission.

Adequate protection, training, equipment, insurance coverage, psycho-social support should be routine. For example: some progress has been made with the global volunteering insurance but more needs to be done; psycho-social support tools are available but not widely used.

### National Societies can demonstrate their commitment to volunteers with a Federation-wide charter, policies and management systems that clarify and seal the rights and responsibilities of volunteers

A charter is a means to improve both volunteering practices in all National Societies and the safety and wellbeing of volunteers in dangerous settings, by formalising and operationalising the *accountability of National Societies to their volunteers*, and clarifying *the responsibilities of volunteers*.

### The successful implementation of these two sets of solutions require

- **Evidence-based solutions to successfully test, adapt, replicate and scale up effective practices in different contexts – across all regions.** The Federation lacks an overall vision on how volunteering connects to National Society sustainability, relevance and impact. It needs better tools to capture and better understand volunteer motivations to strengthen their participation in National Society programs and services, thereby contributing to their effectiveness and sustainability. While we often claim that

volunteer driven programs are effective and sustainable, we have little evidence to back this assumption convincingly.

- **That we all ensure adequate resourcing in terms of staff and budget – and deliver value for money.** The Global Review on Volunteering indicated that across all levels of the Movement volunteering is typically under-resourced, despite everyone agreeing that volunteers are our most important asset: less than half of National Societies have dedicated volunteering development resources or strategies. Volunteering requires financial and human resources to maintain let alone grow. National Societies must invest appropriately to strengthen their volunteer base - demonstrating, with robust evidence, to key partners and donors that they know what works and have the capacity to replicate successful volunteer systems and take them to scale. We will thus collectively build a strong case for investing in National Societies and in a stable secretariat structure to support and coordinate membership efforts.

## A Plan of Action

For all these reasons the Governing Board endorsed the Framework for Action and requested a plan of action and budget to:

- 1) improve National Society **volunteering practices**,
- 2) improve the **safety and wellbeing of volunteers** in dangerous situations.

In December 2016, National Societies were invited to join the **Alliance of National Societies** that will work collectively on these solutions.

## An Alliance of National Societies

National Societies in the Alliance will help themselves and help others by working together on all volunteering development issues. They will discuss and exchange best practices, tools, data systems and other practical ideas on how to improve volunteer recruitment, training and engagement, take part in volunteer research, including working to increase National Society accountability to their volunteers' safety and well-being, develop a Charter for Volunteers and any other initiative that strengthens volunteering.

### **OBJECTIVE 1: Sharing, adapting, replicating and scaling up successful volunteering practices**

The Alliance will invest time, human, technical and financial resources to design, test, adapt for replication and scale-up volunteering tools, models and engagement practices, and test new approaches. More specifically, it will:

- Match National Society technical expertise with technical support needs of other National Societies, and facilitate technical support between National Societies.

- Identify promising volunteer practices that are being deployed or hold enough potential to be worth piloting by National Societies. Practices include specific topics such as volunteer data systems, innovative approaches to volunteer recruitment, engagement, motivation, training, retention and re-engagement.
- Peer to peer learning. Some of these practices will be evaluated as case studies to understand and share evidence of what works, under which conditions and in what contexts, and on that basis, discuss where and how these successful volunteering engagement models can be adapted, replicated and scaled up. The case study evaluations will be conducted jointly and on the ground by volunteer managers from National Societies that want to improve their own volunteer management systems
- Adapt, replicate, and scale best practices. Results will be shared and discussed among Alliance members at regular face-to-face biannual meetings (with field visits to meet volunteers) - then presented to the rest of the membership through different channels, including at the statutory meetings. Adapted, replicated and scaled-up practices will also be shared in the wider international community, and, when appropriate, lead to publications.
- Organise face to face structured learning and other forms of peer to peer learning to explore successful volunteering strategies and innovative solutions.
- Inform National Society Development framework and activities.
- Inform review of relevant OCAC attributes for future revisions of the OCAC tool.
- Foster a culture of innovation, including among volunteers.
- Further motivate and inspire volunteers by promoting a Federation-wide charter that makes them feel part of a greater, global volunteer movement.

## **OBJECTIVE 2: Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of volunteers**

The Alliance will adopt a holistic approach, working with volunteers, communities, governments and other stakeholders, to:

- Promote the role of volunteers and implement systems to ensure their safety and wellbeing.
- Ensure the successful implementation of the International Conference Resolution on “The safety and security of humanitarian volunteers”. All National Societies and governments committed to improve training, equipment, support and the provision of volunteers – with detailed milestones to be achieved.
- Strengthen training, including the Safer Access modules and use of (and provision of) Personal Protective Equipment and building tools from research initiatives such as the Swedish Red Cross led Volunteering in Conflicts initiative.
- Build on the work of the IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support to go to scale and ensure that all National Societies have the necessary training and resources to provide adequate support to volunteers before, during and after a crisis.
- Increase our capacity to insure our volunteers so that in the tragic event that they are injured or killed their families are supported financially.

Prepare a volunteer charter to improve accountability to volunteers - who often are RCRC beneficiaries with an inspirational document setting out their rights and duties.

- A charter that clarifies the volunteers' rights and responsibilities, including the right to a safe working environment, the right to protection, the right to information about the risks they face, the right to participate, to be heard and to be recognised for their contribution, the right to insurance.
- A list of minimum standards and objectively verifiable indicators to assess whether a National Society is respecting the principles and spirit of the charter;
- A set of mechanisms by which National Societies are encouraged to implement the minimum standards.

## **What is the role of volunteers in the Alliance?**

Volunteers will be fully involved, at all levels, in the design and implementation of the activities within the objectives. National Societies in the Alliance will decide how best to maximise their volunteers' involvement in the alliance's work. Volunteer involvement includes – but is not limited to:

- Discussions and surveys on social media (e.g. IFRC and National Society Facebook pages)
- Advising National Society staff and volunteers who will be implementing the framework for action through key informant interviews, group discussions and workshops;
- Identifying best practice, tools, innovations that they feel can be beneficial elsewhere, or improved in their National Societies;
- Conducting and/or participating in case studies;
- Contributing to the draft Charter and annexes, and assessing their relevance and feasibility; etc.

Annex 1 – List of possible challenges to be taken up by Alliance Technical Team

### **Annex 1**

## The Volunteering Challenges

### List of possible challenges to be led by Alliance Technical Team members

The Alliance Technical Team is composed of volunteers or staff from National Societies with experience and expertise in volunteer management or organisational development. Each Technical Team expert will lead the work around a specific challenge in volunteering.

A challenge is a specific and strategic thematic, issue or question that the Alliance believes needs to be resolved to meet the objectives.

The Challenge Lead is responsible for coordinating the Alliance's work in addressing the challenge, reporting results to the Technical Team and disseminating key results to the Alliance members.

Below is a draft list of challenges from the Global Review on Volunteering and the most recent meetings on volunteering. The Technical Team, in consultation with Alliance members and the Governing Board, will identify those they believe are most likely to improve volunteering. National Societies are welcome to add the specific concerns they wish the technical team to address.

Some of these challenges will be based on case studies and mobilise existing data from the Global Review on Volunteering, Volunteering in Conflict and Emergencies (ViCE), and elsewhere.

### Volunteering Challenges

#### 1. Managing data – Managing volunteers

- Explore possible ways to build **volunteering data systems** in National Societies that do not have a digital system to manage their volunteers.
- Provide technical and financial support to improve volunteering data systems according to the capacities and context of the National Society.
- Connect existent databases with the Secretariat system.
- Systematically share information on the application of the technology to efficiently manage volunteers (i.e. self-management of volunteers via IT tools).

#### 2. Volunteering in cities – what works, for whom, where and why?

#### 3. New forms of volunteering

- **Online volunteering**, cyber-volunteering and other opportunities offered by information technology and social media.
- **The future of volunteering** – How are the changing patterns of volunteering and new societal problems opportunities for National Societies?

- **The globalisation of volunteering** – Is there global network of Red Cross Red Crescent Volunteers? Can technology bridge the national borders and language barriers? Can a global charter federate volunteers from different countries into one global volunteer movement? Can a global network of volunteers be inclusive to all? How will it manage diversity in volunteers and in volunteer circumstance?
4. **Volunteering through the life course... for a lifetime of volunteering**
    - When and how can National Societies recruit and train volunteers who are legally minors?
    - Volunteer motivations and commitment change with age: how can National Societies take this into account to maintain volunteer engagement over a lifetime?
    - How to maintain engagement and enhance motivation in life-time events (e.g. marriage, first child, retirement)
    - What does a volunteer career in the Red Cross Red Crescent currently look like? How should it *ideally* look like?
    - Age-specific gender differences in volunteer incentives, participation and leadership
  5. **The economies of volunteering:** incentives, motivations, sustainability, scale, cost-effectiveness and funding mechanisms. When is providing financial incentives appropriate? What is the impact of per diem in terms of livelihood? What are the long-term effects of per diems on motivations, cost-effectiveness, scalability and sustainability? Can volunteers be rewarded based on performance/results? Are non-financial incentives less pernicious than per diems? Understanding the management cultures, contexts, systems and styles that improve and maintain volunteer engagement, motivation and commitment.
  6. **Volunteers as beneficiaries and beneficiaries as volunteers:** challenges and opportunities.
    - Volunteering as a source of dignity, recognition, social inclusion and therapy
    - Volunteers as peer educators and first-hand experts (CBHFA in prisons, Harm reduction, TB, HIV, violence prevention, etc.
    - How can National Societies overcome the legal and cultural obstacles to working with undocumented migrants, substance users, prison inmates or volunteers with criminal records, sex workers, etc.?
    - How can these volunteers be full-fledged participants in the life of a National Society and contribute to its diversity?
  7. **Authentic volunteer participation, leadership and accountability**
    - **Volunteers as leaders**
      - In the community
      - In the National Society



8. **Staff and volunteer relations:** how differing statuses affect their self-esteem and the perceived value of their respective contributions. How can staff-volunteer collaboration be maximised?
9. **Volunteering in dangerous situations:** What mechanism and systems could be put in place to strengthen the protection of volunteers? Do other organisations and agencies implementing through NS in dangerous situations consider and contribute to the protection of volunteers.
10. **Volunteering in international operations and programs**  
**Organisational learning.** Does volunteer participation improve the program design/theory? How can it better inform the recommendations of international experts and NS managers? Red Cross Red Crescent Programs are underpinned by a theory of change which is often implicit. Whose knowledge and experience informed a program's theory of change? How much was influenced by the volunteers, relative to other stakeholders (experts, donors, local government, NS staff). How did volunteer participation influence the program design? How is local knowledge validated? Is it more valid than the knowledge of experts, staff, donors? How are the discussions and negotiations between these actors captured, contrasted, documented in program reports? In which direction does knowledge flow? From experts to volunteers (e.g. through training) or from volunteers to experts (during project design, management, monitoring and evaluations).
11. **Volunteer and community relations**  
Understanding the communities' volunteers engage with is necessary for more impactful activities, and needs to be approached in a more proactive manner on our behalf. The relationship between volunteers and communities needs to be strengthened and recognised as a vital step in building a sustainable global movement, one which promotes community resilience. We need to encourage the positive impact gained through their local knowledge and at the same time mitigate the perceived negative impact caused by the power imbalance between the volunteers and the local communities. An analysis of the relationship between volunteers and local communities will facilitate the promotion of organised volunteering and of the recognition of spontaneous volunteering. More importantly, the role of volunteers in linking the RCRC to communities needs to be elevated and better supported to reflect its importance in delivering effective activities.
12. **Effective global partnerships**  
The problems we face are multidimensional and interrelated at a global scale. This requires an equally diversified approach which works across sectors and forges partnerships around the world. Our scope needs to go beyond searching for funding to seeking the political, social and material support which makes our activities possible on the ground. With regards to donors, the need for a more tailored approach was identified. Also identified was the need to broaden the scope of our partnerships: celebrities and other eminent personalities can champion our causes and funding and insurance institutions can help with our training and health insurance needs. These examples highlight how we need to grab the attention of the public and of the private sector through other means.
13. **Volunteering partnerships at the community level**

We need to widen the net by encouraging partnerships and exchange of volunteers with sister organisations in order to increase community resilience and global outreach. This will promote skills transfer and better funding prospects. The development of the Volunteer Charter can be the first step towards volunteering partnerships at the community level because it creates a true global movement.