

# Inviting cultural diversity in volunteering

## MIGRANT INFORMATION CENTRE (EASTERN MELBOURNE)



*In the National Survey of Australian Volunteers from Diverse Cultural and Linguistic backgrounds (Australian Multicultural Foundation and Volunteering Australia 2007) the biggest barrier for organisations to recruiting volunteers from diverse cultural and language backgrounds was low English proficiency. Here are some helpful hints on overcoming communication issues*

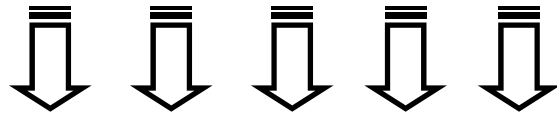
### IN THIS INFORMATION SHEET:

- ▶ Addressing the needs of volunteers with low English proficiency
- ▶ Cross-cultural communication
- ▶ Tips on using interpreters & translators
- ▶ How you can tailor your program

## Low English proficiency can exclude non-English speaking people from volunteering

### How do you communicate with potential volunteers from non-English speaking backgrounds?

- ? Is key information about your volunteer program translated into key community languages?
- ? Have your staff attended cross cultural communication training?
- ? Are you flexible and able to adapt roles to meet the volunteer's needs and expectations?
- ? Do you access interpreters for your volunteers?
- ? Have you simplified the selection and application process?
- ? Do your language requirements indirectly



**While organisations indicated the biggest barrier to recruiting volunteers from diverse cultural backgrounds was low English proficiency, volunteers indicated that time/family constraints & travel were the biggest barriers to them volunteering. English language difficulties was the third highest barrier and expenses fourth.**

(National Survey of Australian Volunteers from Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds, AMF & Volunteering Australia 2007)

"There are many things organisations can do to communicate effectively across language barriers, and most of them sit within 'best practice' in volunteer management — that is, they will contribute to more effective communication across your organisation generally, and will benefit **all** your volunteers" (Volunteering Australia 2007, Practical Guide, p. 61)

## LIMITED ENGLISH DOES NOT NEED TO BE AN OBSTACLE TO VOLUNTEERING

- ◆ People often understand more than they can speak — if you create a supportive environment individuals will gain confidence with their English speaking
- ◆ The level of English will vary considerably between individuals — many will understand English to some degree, some may be more proficient with writing than speaking
- ◆ Volunteering provides the perfect opportunity for individuals to practice their English language skills



home and community care

A JOINT COMMONWEALTH AND STATE/TERRITORY PROGRAM PROVIDING FUNDING AND ASSISTANCE FOR AUSTRALIANS IN NEED

The information provided in this sheet was adapted from a number of sources (see p.4) and was prepared as part of the Inviting Cultural Diversity in Volunteering Project, funded by the HACC Program, a joint Commonwealth and State/Territory Program. The Project is coordinated by the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne).

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## How do you communicate with potential volunteers?

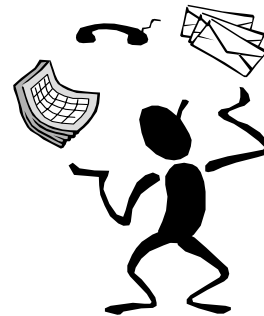
How do your workers and volunteers present information? Promotional material? Information about the organisation? Face to face? Over the phone? About your application and selection procedures?

What format does this communication take – auditory, visual, written, bilingual? Is it culturally appropriate?

Do you utilise the languages your staff and volunteers have?

### Tips for effective communication

- Really listen to people and respond with empathy, respect and genuineness
- Avoid making judgements
- Remain flexible
- Try to use open questions
- Use clear and concise language
- Choose an appropriate time and place to communicate
- Use appropriate tone and manner to communicate as well as words – non-verbal communication is as important as verbal communication
- Let people finish what they are saying
- Give people time to respond to you
- If you are not sure what someone has said, ask them to explain it



### Be aware of common communication difficulties

- ◆ Different communication styles, for example, expressive and loud or passive and reserved
- ◆ Different approaches towards disclosure, for example, level of trust in disclosing personal information depending on past experiences
- ◆ Understanding of culturally specific terms such as “bring a plate” or “lunchtime”

## COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY WITH PEOPLE THAT HAVE LOW ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

### Avoid:

- ◆ Jargon
- ◆ Double negatives
- ◆ Local expressions
- ◆ Sarcasm
- ◆ Jokes
- ◆ Questions as statements
- ◆ Speaking too fast, mumbling or shouting

- \* Use short sentences – don’t give too much information at once, it takes time to process and respond
- \* Use direct questions, for example “Can I sit here?” not “Would you mind if I sat here?”
- \* Explain technical terms such as respite or PAG
- \* Confirm understanding - repeat back what you and the volunteer have said to ensure you both understand
- \* Listen carefully and attentively
- \* Use non-verbal forms of communication – demonstrate actions or use symbols and pictures

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Strategies to address limited English of culturally and linguistically diverse volunteers

## Roles

- ☺ Think about whether willing volunteers need perfect English
- ☺ Can the volunteer role be adapted to suit the strengths of the volunteer? Review and redesign roles where English proficiency is not as important
- ☺ Focus on the capabilities of the individual, not their limitations

## Recruitment & Selection

- ◆ Be flexible with initial language requirements
- ◆ Clearly explain why information is needed and how it will be used
- ◆ Find out what the volunteers strengths and weaknesses are - why have they volunteered? What skills can they offer? What are their expectations?
- ◆ Simplify the selection and application process - use simple, direct, clear language - streamline the amount of written forms and paperwork required
- ◆ Assist individuals to fill in forms
- ◆ Explain the police check using simple words

## Promotion & Signage

- ◆ Translate brochures and flyers
- ◆ Use key languages for signs around your building
- ◆ Display a language map
- ◆ Present information to key communities
- ◆ Include a statement that information is available in alternative formats
- ◆ Use visuals wherever possible
- ◆ Use plain English in all written material

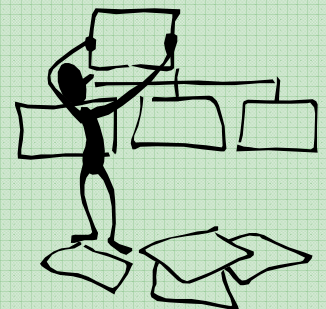


## Interviewing

- ◆ An 'interview' can be just a chat
- ◆ Ask about language origin and ethnicity to assist your preparation
- ◆ Think about the cultural appropriateness of questions and communication styles
- ◆ Use interpreters where required
- ◆ Hold group interviews as these may be less intimidating
- ◆ Take care to learn the correct pronunciation of the person's name
- ◆ Put them at ease by talking about non-threatening subjects such as the weather
- ◆ Ask open-ended questions
- ◆ Watch for signs that the person is uncomfortable
- ◆ Be clear about what volunteering is and is not
- ◆ At the end, summarise the key points and check their understanding - ask them to tell you how they will explain their role to their friends or family

## Induction & Training

- ◆ Assess what training and support is needed
- ◆ Avoid information overload - limit the information you present - decide the key points you want people to take away with them
- ◆ Plan training at a time and date that is convenient to the new volunteers - be aware of cultural and religious days that may influence their availability and dietary requirements
- ◆ Brief trainers about English language abilities
- ◆ Tailor training to suit language needs and learning styles
- ◆ Participatory and interactive training works well - show and explain - walk them through tasks, ask them to show you, avoid 'yes' and 'no' answers
- ◆ Be open about cultural differences and how they impact on the workplace
- ◆ Offer English training if appropriate



MORE STRATEGIES

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## EVENT MORE STRATEGIES

### In the workplace

- ⇒ Provide a short summary of key policies and procedures in plain English using symbols & pictures to convey the key messages
- ⇒ Pass on information face to face
- ⇒ Use a buddy or mentor to support the volunteer
- ⇒ Explain roles and responsibilities fully and ensure volunteers know who to go to with their questions
- ⇒ Meet cultural needs such as a space for somewhere to pray
- ⇒ Encourage staff and other volunteers to attend cross cultural training
- ⇒ Encourage staff to view communication difficulties as a shared challenge
- ⇒ Use the skills of existing bilingual staff and volunteers
- ⇒ Welcome cultural diversity and celebrate special cultural days

### Be aware of language services and how to use them

- Prepare information for translation carefully using simple language, short sentences and the active rather than passive voice
- Check translated material with community members or bilingual workers
- Include the language, organisation name and topic of the translated material in English on the translation
- Explain the interpreter's role in the interview but always address the new volunteer directly
- Cultural Awareness and Use of Language Services training is available through the HACC Training Calendar

HACC agencies are eligible to use the ONCALL credit line - find out more at [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/multicultural](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/multicultural)

Other interpreters/translators are:  
 TIS National Telephone Interpreter Service 131 450  
 VITS Language Link 9280 1955

## References

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