

# Strength & Diversity in Supporting Communities



## Engaging CALD communities in volunteering in Victoria

*A Guide for Volunteer-Involving Organisations*

July 2011



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# Glossary of Terms

## **Asylum Seeker**

A person who has fled their own country and applies to the government of another country for protection as a refugee.<sup>1</sup>

## **Best Practice Volunteer Management**

The best/most appropriate way for an organisation to support, manage and recognise volunteers.

## **CALD**

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (includes new and emerging communities)

## **DPCD**

Department of Planning and Community Development (Victoria)

## **Ethno-specific organisation**

A community-based organisation established by a specific ethnic community (or communities) to support that community.

## **Migrant Resource Centre/Migrant Information Centre**

A community-based organisation that provides settlement services for migrants and refugees. Their main purpose is to cater to the immediate and longer term needs of migrants and refugees to facilitate successful integration into the local community, enabling them to reach their full potential.

## **New and emerging communities**

New and emerging communities are defined as being small in number, newly arrived and have all or a combination of the following characteristics:

- Significant increase in numbers over the last five years;
- Often lack established family networks, support systems, community structures and resources, relative to more established communities;
- Can be more vulnerable than established communities as they are often from a refugee background and have experienced displacement due to civil unrest;
- Comprise individuals with low levels of education and skill due to displacement;
- Comprise individuals who do not have English language skills;
- Comprise individuals who are unfamiliar with mainstream government services that are available in Australia and are less likely to be able to locate services that can help them meet their basic needs, and
- Tend not to have community infrastructures and organisations that can attract funding. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission

<sup>2</sup> FECCA – Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia

## **Refugee**

A person who is outside their own country and is unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their:

- Race;
- Religion;
- Nationality;
- Membership of a particular social group;
- Political opinion.<sup>3</sup>

## **Victoria's Volunteering Portal**

An online resource managed by DPCD containing information specifically for VIOs and potential volunteers, including a state-wide matching service.

## **VIO**

Volunteer-Involving Organisation

## **VRC**

Volunteer Resource Centre

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Without these people the seminars would not have been such a great success.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission

## Introduction

In 2010, AMES received an Organisational Change Support Grant from DPCD to engage CALD communities, particularly those considered new and emerging, in volunteering in Victoria.

As part of this project, four volunteer seminars entitled 'Strength and Diversity in Supporting Communities' were held in Broadmeadows, Noble Park, Melbourne and Geelong between March-May 2011. Over 100 VIOs attended.

VIOs gained a better understanding of how to further engage volunteers from CALD communities. DPCD demonstrated Victoria's Volunteering Portal and discussed their role in supporting volunteering in Victoria.

This booklet provides VIOs with a resource on how to engage and support volunteers from CALD communities as discussed at the 'Strength and Diversity in Supporting Communities' seminars.

A further report of recommendations will be made available to DPCD outlining how the Victorian Government can better support VIOs in this ongoing process.

## Overview of Speakers

Presentations on volunteer management in relation to CALD communities were given by people from the volunteering and community sectors including:

- **Cameron Glover, Manager, Volunteer West**

Cameron oversees the matching of volunteers to organisations, the strengthening of VIOs through capacity building initiatives and the promotion and support of volunteering within the western suburbs of Melbourne, an area with a high number of CALD communities.

- **Shirlene Standish, Manager, Volunteer Services, Monash Volunteer Resource Centre**

Shirlene supports VIOs in east and south-eastern Melbourne (an area with a high number of CALD communities) to develop and strengthen their volunteering programs.

- **Alison Duff, Training and Development Manager, Volunteering Geelong**

Alison assists organisations in the Geelong region to implement a best practice volunteer management program using the National Standards of Volunteering as a framework within their own workplace setting. In the past she has also worked on projects designed specifically to assist VIOs engage with CALD communities.

- **Sue Hartigan, Manager, Cloverdale Community Centre**

Sue ensures that Cloverdale Community Centre, a Neighbourhood House and Learn Local organisation in the outer Geelong suburb of Corio (an area of high settlement) successfully engages with the members of the diverse surrounding community.

Community Leaders from various CALD communities throughout Victoria were also present to answer questions on their respective communities' experiences of volunteering.

# Engaging CALD communities in volunteering in Victoria

## Overcoming barriers

### 1. Understanding volunteering

According to the 2006 Australian census, 26% of people born in countries in which English is not the primary language had volunteered in the last 12 months.<sup>4</sup> However, there is still the misconception that people from CALD backgrounds are not active volunteers.

For some, 'volunteering' may be an inherent part of belonging to the community, whilst for others, the concept and term 'volunteering' may not be well understood.

Although many people from CALD backgrounds do volunteer, they may not understand the census question.

#### Suggested Approach

##### Make sense of the census

Whilst many organisations assist people with low English proficiency in completing the census, further explanation of the term 'voluntary' would assist in increasing understanding and be reflected in more accurate data.

### 2. Low English Proficiency

Victorians come from over 200 countries and speak over 230 languages and dialects.<sup>5</sup> According to VIOs, the biggest barrier to recruiting volunteers from CALD backgrounds is low English proficiency.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst many new migrants and refugees speak more than one language, their English language skills may not be as strong. Furthermore, refugees that have not attended school and/or have spent long periods of time in refugee camps may not be literate in their own language, let alone English.

#### Suggested Approaches

##### Case-by-case assessment

Keep an open mind when recruiting volunteers from CALD backgrounds. Be aware that accent is not necessarily indicative of English language skill, and that English proficiency will vary from person to person.

<sup>4</sup> ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2006

<sup>5</sup> Victorian Multicultural Commission

<sup>6</sup> Volunteering Australia – Involved and Valued? Findings from a National Survey of Australian Volunteers from Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds, July 2006

**Give it time**

Language skills will generally improve in English-speaking environments.

**Tailor roles**

Being innovative will allow VIOs to develop volunteer opportunities suitable for diverse English language proficiency.

Start volunteers in roles that do not require advanced English language skills. As language skills progress, rotate roles.

Many existing volunteer roles require high level spoken English language skills. Expand roles to include extra administration, translation, short-term and/or skilled projects such as website updates and events planning.

**3. Time and travel constraints**

Time and travel constraints are the top reasons why people from CALD communities do not engage in volunteering.<sup>7</sup>

New migrants, asylum seekers and refugees may have additional commitments that may act as additional barriers to volunteering. These could include English language classes, legal appointments, and no Australian driver's licence or car.

**Suggested Approaches****Flexibility**

It is becoming popular for volunteers to conduct their roles at home. VIOs should assess the needs of the organisation to determine whether such opportunities exist for volunteers. Examples include report writing, research, and updating databases.

A flexible approach to the onsite time requirement of volunteers (that does not compromise the objectives of the position), may also attract applicants with stronger skill sets.

**Travel Reimbursements**

Many organisations cannot offer full travel reimbursements due to budget constraints, however, partial refunds may be an option. Some corporate organisations (see Resources) offer funding to VIOs for travel reimbursements to volunteers. Nonetheless, some volunteers do not wish to accept reimbursements. Each VIO will need to determine the appropriateness of travel reimbursements for their volunteers.

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<sup>7</sup> Volunteering Australia – Involved and Valued? Findings from an National Survey of Australian Volunteers from Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds, July 2006

#### 4. Overwhelmed by paperwork

Potential volunteers from CALD backgrounds may find the required paperwork overwhelming and confusing. Paperwork could include registration forms, police checks, and working with children's checks.

Depending on the type of visa an asylum seeker holds, they may not have the right to work or volunteer in Australia. Unfortunately, there is little that VIOs can do to overcome this. There are legal consequences for both the organisation and the volunteer if they do not have the correct visa specifications that allow volunteering in Australia.

##### **Suggested Approaches**

###### **Clearly explain the need for paperwork**

Provide potential CALD volunteers with a clear and concise explanation of the various paperwork requirements. This could be included in a volunteer interview, a volunteer handbook, or introductory information when volunteers first inquire.

Assure volunteers that all information will be kept confidential and will only be used to determine role appropriateness and for insurance purposes.

###### **Fight for the right to volunteer**

If appropriate, support campaigns for greater rights for asylum seekers within Australia.

#### 5. Limited opportunities for skilled involvement

There are many skilled migrants making Victoria their home. However, some are unable to find appropriate employment due to a lack of work experience. Many skilled migrants may be engineers, architects or health professionals, with limited relevant volunteering opportunities available within VIOs.

##### **Suggested Approach**

###### **Provide skilled volunteering opportunities**

Volunteering can be a means by which skilled migrants can gain the required Australian work experience in a role in or close to their area of expertise. Such opportunities will usually require the development of short term capacity building roles.

## Planning and Design

### Does the VIO invite cultural diversity?

It is essential that Victoria's cultural diversity is reflected in VIOs. As 45% of Victorians are born outside Australia<sup>8</sup>, supporting diversity within VIOs is essential to reflect and support the Victorian community the organisation is supporting.

#### Suggested Approaches

##### Embed cultural diversity within the organisation

Ensure support for cultural diversity is evident in documents across the organisation, from the strategic plan to volunteer policies.

##### Make it visible

Depending on the nature of the organisation, it may be appropriate to demonstrate a real celebration of cultural diversity.

- Create a noticeboard display of cultural events, photos and information about various countries, cultures and ethnic groups.
- Ensure important signs around the organisation are represented visually and where possible, translated.

##### Translate or use Plain English

Translate relevant material, particularly brochures and handbooks into key community languages in the local area. If there is no access to a translator, recruit a volunteer specifically for this task. Meanwhile, ensure all material uses plain and simple English, excluding all jargon. For tips on plain English, contact a local organisation that teaches English as a second language (see Resources).

##### Use diverse mediums

People from CALD backgrounds, particularly asylum seekers and refugees, do not always have regular access to the internet. As such, VIOs should advertise via a variety of different mediums so that communities are aware of and can easily access information about the organisation.

##### Be flexible

Plans offer a guide as to how to implement the volunteering program. However, this does not mean that the program cannot be adapted as the program progresses. Where there are failings in practice, adjust the program accordingly.

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<sup>8</sup> Victorian Multicultural Commission

## Recruitment

### Are potential volunteers from a diverse range of backgrounds?

#### Suggested Approaches

##### Make connections

Local resource centres such as MRCs, MICs and AMES education and employment sites have a wealth of knowledge about, and contact with, local CALD communities. They can assist VIOs to make direct contact (see Resources).

- Know the local CALD communities, especially those new and emerging.
- Build relationships with religious groups, schools, universities, and community centres, where new and emerging communities may already be engaged.
- Develop and maintain relationships with local VRCs to encourage referrals of potential volunteers and advocate for the organisation.

##### Advertise in communities

- Promote volunteer opportunities directly to CALD communities using appropriate languages or plain English.
- Advertise in ethnic community newspapers and radio stations,
- Post flyers and arrange times to visit English classes and community events to promote volunteer opportunities.
- Ensure that recruitment strategies support and complement the objectives of local communities.
- Use existing volunteers from diverse backgrounds to act as 'champions' for volunteering in their respective communities.

##### Promotion

Organisations in direct contact with new and emerging communities should routinely promote volunteering to clients as appropriate, for the benefit of both surrounding VIOs and clients. Remember that potential volunteers may:

- be in need of work experience to apply for jobs
- wish to engage more in their local communities
- seek opportunities to practice English language skills.

Members of CALD communities that have had good volunteering experiences are likely to share them with the rest of their community, with word-of-mouth still being the most effective way to successfully recruit volunteers.

##### Link to current needs

Volunteering may not be a high priority for some, particularly refugees and asylum seekers.

- Have realistic expectations about the amount of volunteers to be recruited from new and emerging communities.

**Allow for group/pair opportunities**

Allow for new volunteers to begin in groups or pairs. As confidence builds, individual volunteering may occur.

**International students**

International students are often keen to be involved with their local Australian community.

- Create opportunities for international students from local tertiary education institutions to undertake their student placements at the organisation. This will likely result in a stronger commitment from the volunteer and allow the organisation to attain more relevant skills for the position.

**Refer onwards**

Having a good knowledge of local VIOs and attending regular network meetings will result in a better sharing of resources, knowledge and referrals.

- Refer volunteers on to more suitable roles in another organisation in the area if they are not suitable for the opportunity they have applied for.

## Screening and Matching

**Are screening and matching processes culturally appropriate?**

Although formal methods of screening and matching are the 'norm' in Victoria, the notion of completing numerous forms and being interviewed for an unpaid position may be unfamiliar to many people from CALD communities.

**Suggested Approach****Interviews**

Select an informal setting and style of interviewing, use plain English, and adhere to a set of simple relevant questions.

## Orientation and Training

**Is orientation and training culturally appropriate?****Suggested Approaches****Times and dates**

Some trainees may have to take time to pray throughout the day (depending on their religious background).

- Ensure that training does not fall on any cultural or religious days.
- Ensure facilities are available and that the training program allows for prayer.

**Food**

If food is provided throughout the training, ensure there are a variety of options available to suit the needs of trainees such as Halal and vegetarian.

**Tailored training**

- Ensure that the training suits a range of English language skills of trainees.
- Communicate the key messages of the training as clearly and concisely as possible.

**Diversify training**

Offer a diverse range of training to all volunteers on an ongoing basis as both an attractor and reward. This may include first aid training, food safety, occupational health and safety, and equal employment opportunity.

- Check VRCs, Volunteering Victoria and VCOSS, for information on a variety of training opportunities. Some free training may be available for volunteers.

## Supervision and Support

**Do volunteer management practices embrace cultural diversity?**

It is critical to ensure ongoing support to volunteers. Some CALD volunteers may not continue as they do not feel welcomed and comfortable in their role.

**Suggested Approaches****Embrace cultural diversity**

Ensure staff members support the organisation's commitment to cultural diversity and understand culturally appropriate behaviour, particularly those managing or supervising volunteers.

- Organise cultural awareness training where appropriate. This can be organised through various multicultural support agencies or through VCOSS (see Resources).

**Mentors**

Take advantage of the skills of existing bilingual volunteers and staff members by assigning new volunteers a volunteer mentor who they can work with until they are comfortable in their role.

- Ensure that both mentor and mentee clearly understand the roles and responsibilities in this relationship.
- Remain mindful of potential cultural tensions when establishing partnerships.

**Clear instructions**

Check that instructions have been understood. This will not only save time in the long term but also foster strong working relationships between supervisors and volunteers.

## Recognition

**Are volunteer recognition and reward practices culturally appropriate?**

### Suggested Approaches

#### Equity and Appropriateness

One of the best ways to develop appropriate reward and recognition is to ask for feedback and ideas from volunteers.

- Create a standardised approach to reward and recognition and ensure that all staff are aware of these procedures.
- Ensure that all rewards are culturally appropriate.

## Evaluation

**Is the volunteer program continually reviewed with consideration of cultural diversity?**

### Suggested Approaches

#### Consistency

Undertake evaluations consistently for example, on an annual or biannual basis, to ensure a strong planning framework.

#### Ask volunteers

Involve all volunteers in the program in the evaluation process. This could be done by conducting surveys, group meetings or one-on-one interviews.

#### Involve the organisation

The evaluation process should be aligned with the principles of the organisation with relevant aspects of high-level documents feeding into the evaluation process and results feeding into high-level documents. Involve key staff and ensure the organisation is informed of the results.

#### Make appropriate changes

Rectify unsuccessful aspects of the program, even if it is the way the program has 'always' been operated. Ensure that the intention to make changes is appropriately communicated to all members of the organisation, especially volunteers.

## Concluding Remarks

### **Don't be overwhelmed**

Develop a long-term plan to implement program improvements, ensuring that the more important aspects are prioritised and that the overall plan is manageable.

Implementing changes will ultimately make the volunteer program easier to manage. Volunteer coordinators may be time-poor; nevertheless, the benefits will be felt organisation-wide.

### **Tailor the advice**

This report offers suggestions to enable VIOs to develop diverse volunteer programs. It is not to say that all strategies must be adopted. Recognise which strategies are suitable to implement now, or in the future.

### **Share the load**

Involve key staff in change processes and delegate where possible. Existing volunteers may take an interest in implementing positive changes to the volunteer program. Create a volunteer role to help design and support program changes. Local VRCs may be willing to support VIOs through this process.

### **Remember the benefits**

Organisations that are willing to put the effort into diversifying their volunteer programs will benefit from:

- Diversification and increase in skills
- More ideas and innovation
- The potential for growth organisation-wide
- A stronger, holistic connection to the community that the organisation supports.

### **Continuous Improvement**

The diversification of volunteer programs is part of a process of continuous improvement, one that all strong and successful organisations undertake. As the cultural make-up of the Victorian community continually changes, it is essential that VIOs are not only aware of these changes, but also adapt accordingly.

## Resources

For a comprehensive directory of support agencies throughout Victoria, visit

**Department of Justice Community Advocacy Services Directory:**

<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/CA256DB80025241B/page/Community+Advocacy+Services?OpenDocument&1=20-Community+Advocacy+Services-&2=~&3=~>

For a comprehensive directory of ethno-specific organisations throughout Victoria visit:

**Victorian Multicultural Commission Community Directory:**

<http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/resources/community-directory>

For a comprehensive directory of Volunteer Resource Centres, please visit

**Victoria's Volunteering Portal:**

<http://www.volunteer.vic.gov.au/about-volunteering/volunteer-organisations-and-key-bodies/volunteer-resource-centres>

For a comprehensive directory of trainers in Victoria, please visit

**VCOSS**

<http://www.vcooss.org.au/clearinghouse/index.htm>

Local Council websites also generally have information about the primary settlement groups in the area as well as community directories.

BP offers funding to VIOs for volunteer travel reimbursements:

<http://www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=9037532&contentId=7069023>

