

Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy

CONSULTATION ON THE LGBTIQ+ STRATEGY DIRECTIONS PAPER

TO: Department of Premier and Cabinet

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(submitted by email: equality@dpc.vic.gov.au)



1. OVERVIEW OF SUBMISSION:

Volunteering Victoria welcomes the overarching intent of the LGBTIQ+ Strategy Directions Paper.¹ We support the intent of the strategy to: “create equality for and improve the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex, and queer people, families and communities.”

Volunteering Victoria is the peak body for volunteering in Victoria. We have a strong interest in working towards a more inclusive volunteering community and breaking down barriers for LGBTIQ+ volunteers. We are closely aligned on the objective to “create a more equitable state, where everyone can participate and prosper.”

We believe the development of the Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy would benefit from a deeper exploration of LGBTIQ+ experiences in volunteering and actions to support the volunteering sector to be more inclusive.

Volunteering is an important way of participating in our community. We believe there is an opportunity through the development of the Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy to take a further systemic and strategic approach to improve LGBTIQ+ inclusion in our communities, by building greater capacity for inclusive volunteering in our sector.

Our preliminary proposals for initiatives to promote more inclusiveness in our communities would include:

- » Research to better understand the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people in the volunteering context.
- » Research to better understand the capacity of leaders of volunteers to provide LGBTIQ+ inclusive experiences.
- » Developing inclusive volunteer management training for organisations which deliver services for the Victorian Government, and which engage volunteers in the delivery of those services.
- » Developing or making training available for leaders of volunteers to build the capacity for inclusive practices across the volunteering sector.

As the peak body for Volunteering in our state, we offer our support should the Minister for Equality, the Commissioner for LGBTIQ+ Communities and the Department of Premier and Cabinet wish to pursue these initiatives further, or any other volunteering-related initiatives.

Respecting the lived experience of people in the LGBTIQ+ community and the expertise of LGBTIQ+ specialist organisations in the sector, we would only progress these initiatives with further consultation and collaboration with partner organisations, including our LGBTIQ+ specialist organisation members.

¹ See <https://engage.vic.gov.au/lgbtiqstrategy>

2. ABOUT VOLUNTEERING VICTORIA

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering, focusing on advocacy, sector development and the promotion of volunteering. We are a member-based organisation with over 500 individual and organisational members from all sectors and places around Victoria.

Volunteering Victoria has a singular and specialised focus on volunteering. We see our role as leading the development of a collaborative, sustainable, thriving volunteering community and movement in Victoria.

Our purpose is to promote and build a vibrant, strong volunteering community that is inclusive, respected and sustainable.

3. VOLUNTEERING SECTOR IN VICTORIA

2.3 million Victorians volunteer in our communities in regular times. That is 42.1% of Victorians who contributed some 507.7 hours of volunteering efforts in 2019.²

Victorians give back to their communities through a wide range of volunteering activities, including in the following areas:

- » culture
- » libraries
- » museums
- » health and aged care
- » law and order
- » education and training
- » heritage
- » festivals
- » political
- » welfare
- » community development
- » sports and active recreation
- » environment
- » tourism
- » international aid and development

Volunteering is an important form of participating in our society that everyone should feel safe and welcome to do. Volunteering is both a key means of social participation (which helps form friendships and social supports) and is critical to our workforce (also providing opportunities to develop skills and pathways to employment). Indeed, the collective and social nature of volunteering is central to the definition of volunteering in Australia: “time willingly given, without financial gain and for the common good”.

The size and nature of volunteer-involving organisations vary significantly, from small non-incorporated grassroots community organisations; to large international organisations with many different branches which are responsible for essential service delivery and with workforces that engage thousands of volunteers.

² <https://stateofvolunteering.org.au/> - note that number of Victorians volunteering has dropped significantly due to COVID and there is still some way to go before rates of volunteering recovers from the pandemic in 2021 and beyond.

It is common for leaders of volunteers (also known as “volunteer managers”, “volunteer coordinators”, or “program managers”) to engage dozens, hundreds or thousands of volunteers. The practices of these vital leaders impact a large and diverse workforce.

4. THE BENEFITS OF LGBTIQ+ INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING

We know it intuitively, but it is also well established and documented that there are numerous mental wellbeing and physical benefits to volunteering.³

In the most recent Private Lives 3: The Health and Wellbeing of LGBTIQ People in Australia survey, it was noted that participants volunteered and engaged positively with LGBTIQ communities, which are often sources of support and resilience.⁴

The Writing Themselves In 4: The Health and Wellbeing of LGBTQA+ Young People in Australia report found that “many young LGBTQA+ people find happiness in volunteering, in helping others, and in their creative and extra curricula pursuits.”⁵

This national survey of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia, also reported that:

“a great many participants... [emphasised] how they want to make a positive impact on the world around them, and that doing so helps them to feel good about themselves. This could involve volunteering or community activism, sometimes linked to LGBTQA+ human rights but often encompassing other matters of social justice, such as protecting the environment.”⁶

Last year Volunteering Victoria welcomed the announcement of the LGBTI Community Volunteer Hub initiative led by Thorne Harbour Health. The purpose of the hub is to connect volunteers with opportunities to support LGBTI communities across Victoria.⁷

Initiatives such as the LGBTI Community Volunteer Hub are good examples of the ways in which the positive benefits of inclusive volunteering can be expanded – and the volunteering sector more broadly can be supported to be more inclusive of all communities.

While there are strong benefits of volunteering for the volunteer having a positive experience, the converse can also be true. Being excluded or experiencing discrimination in the volunteering context is an incredibly distressing situation.

Taking a human rights approach, everyone should have the right to volunteer, regardless of sexual orientation, race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

4 Hill, A. O., Bourne, A., McNair, R., Carman, M. & Lyons, A. (2020). Private Lives 3: The health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ people in Australia. ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 122. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. P. 17.

5 Hill AO, Lyons A, Jones J, McGowan I, Carman M, Parsons M, Power J, Bourne A (2021) Writing Themselves In 4: The health and wellbeing of LGBTQA+ young people in Australia. National report, monograph series number 124. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. P 121.

6 Ibid. P 125.

7 <https://thorneharbour.org/news-events/media-releases/thorne-harbour-to-establish-victorias-first-lgbti-community-volunteer-hub/>

Volunteers and people in the LGBTIQ+ community do have rights and legal protections. However, in general, when volunteers are discriminated against or face a hostile working and social environment, there are fewer options for recourse available to them than there are for paid workers. Volunteers most often do not have the same procedural policies and protections within an organisation that protect paid workers.

Furthermore, volunteering is not “free” and does not “just happen”. Effective, safe and meaningful volunteering requires investment from organisations and by governments. This includes investment in capacity building for leaders of volunteers, the development of resources to support their work and maintenance of systems and regulations that support volunteering.

The degree of positive or negative experiences for LGBTIQ+ people in the volunteering context is not known by Volunteering Victoria, and does not appear to be documented from a desktop review of the research. This is likely an important area of research to explore.

5. THE VICTORIAN LGBTIQ+ STRATEGY AND DIRECTIONS PAPER

Based on the directions articulated in the LGBTIQ+ Directions Paper, there are two areas in which the Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy could benefit from a clearer focus on volunteering.

Strategic Direction 2: Equitable and accessible service systems

This Strategic Direction focused on inclusive service delivery, by the Victorian Government and by organisations that are funded by the Victorian Government.

Volunteers are an integral part of the workforce delivering government services. In our recent State of Volunteering in Victoria (2020) Report, our survey of Victorian residents found that: “10.0% of Victorians volunteered to support government services for an average 146.5 hours per year or 12.2 hours per month.”⁸

We also found in our survey of volunteer-involving organisations, that: “During 2019, nearly a quarter (24.7%) of all responding organisations engaged volunteers in delivering services funded by the Victorian Government.”⁹

The LGBTIQ+ Strategic Directions Paper included this example action:

“Targeted resources, training and support be provided to all mainstream services funded by the Victorian Government to support diversity, LGBTIQ+ inclusion and quality accreditation and that these be prioritised on the basis of need, gap analysis and impact (for example multicultural, NDIS, faith-based, rural/regional and emergency services; in justice, education, housing, arts and sports settings)”.

⁸ (This might be an under-representation given that volunteers may or may not know if the organisation they volunteer for is directly funded by a government). See <https://stateofvolunteering.org.au/>

⁹ Ibid.

We support the intent of this initiative and note that the lifecycle of a volunteer is similar but importantly distinct from paid employment – from role development, to advertising, recruitment, management, regulatory compliance, to exit and so on.

Many of the resources and training in a package for service delivery organisations may be generally applicable for an entire organisation and workforce.

However, for this initiative to have the most impact, a more targeted approach would consider volunteering as a distinct element of the service delivery workforce.

Strategic Direction 4: Safe, strong and sustainable communities

This Strategic Direction focuses on state-wide awareness raising and educational campaigns for the broader community to encourage inclusion and diversity.

“The LGBTIQ+ community is diverse; therefore, it is important to continue work on building a strong and inclusive community. This responsibility is placed on the Victorian Government, as well as the broader community, businesses, clubs and non-government organisations.”

It is no overstatement to make that volunteering is an essential part of community development. And volunteering is implied in the activities of the broader community, clubs and non-government organisations.

By spelling out the act of volunteering more clearly in the upcoming Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy we suggest there will be more opportunities to understand and improve LGBTIQ+ inclusive volunteering.

6. VOLUNTEERING VICTORIA SUPPORT FOR THE INITIATIVES OF THE VICTORIAN LGBTIQ+ STRATEGY

Volunteering Victoria is committed to promoting inclusive volunteering and supporting our members to inclusive volunteer workforces.

Because it is such a widespread activity that often flies under the radar, volunteering is often not explicitly built into the design of government reforms and programs. Our position is that volunteering should be considered systemically in all government and community infrastructure.

The submission is an opportunity to take a systemic and strategic approach to promoting LGBTIQ+ inclusivity in communities and organisations by focusing on volunteering.

Volunteering Victoria provides training opportunities and professional development support for leaders of volunteers. This includes:

- » our Continuing Professional Development program¹⁰,
- » training on the National Standards for Involvement¹¹;
- » holding various forums and sector events such as our Volunteering Victoria State Conference

We also convene an Inclusive Volunteering Special Interest Group¹² which supports the inclusion of all Victorians into volunteerism. One of the mandates for this group is to strengthen connections between volunteer-involving organisations to improve meaningful volunteering opportunities for CALD, refugee, migrant, LGBTIQ+, indigenous, people with disabilities and young and old people.

In the past, in collaboration with a range of organisations, we developed a short sector resource: *LGBTIQ Volunteers: Inclusive Practice Guide*.¹³ Resources such as these are important to raise awareness of inclusive practices and to support new personnel in volunteer coordinator roles.

Shortly before writing this submission, we initiated a survey to understand inclusive training needs and interests of our members. At the time of writing this submission there were few responses and this survey will remain open for longer beyond the completion of this submission. However, of the responses we have received, there is clearly an interest by our member organisations to undertake LGBTIQ+ inclusive training if such opportunities were made available to them. 90% of the early respondents would undertake LGBTIQ+ inclusive volunteer management training if we offered it.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an opportunity here to engage a large workforce from a variety of sectors which may not have been considered in the development of the Strategic Directions. Our special interest is that all Victorians can participate in our community through volunteering.

We make the following recommendations for consideration of the forthcoming Victorian LGBTIQ+ Strategy.

¹⁰ <https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/professional-development/cpd/>

¹¹ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material/#/>

¹² <https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/professional-development/inclusive-volunteering-sig/>

¹³ <https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/LGBTIQ-Volunteers-Inclusive-Practice-Guide-PDF.pdf>

Undertaking further research:

- 1.** Undertake research to better understand the experiences of LGBTIQ+ people in the volunteering context. Including the benefits of volunteering, experiences of discrimination and exclusion, and potential remedies.
- 2.** Undertake research to better understand the capacity of leaders of volunteers (volunteer managers and coordinators) and volunteer-involving organisations to provide LGBTIQ+ inclusive volunteering experiences.

Capacity building for leaders of volunteers:

- 3.** Where training and resources are developed as part of Victorian Government service delivery requirements (as posed by the draft Strategic Directions Paper), this should incorporate specialised advice on inclusive volunteer management.
- 4.** Partner with organisations – such as Volunteering Victoria and LGBTIQ+ organisations – to provide inclusive training opportunities to volunteer-involving organisations in the broader community.

We are available to discuss any aspect of this submission further.

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