

The Volunteering Victoria Submission to THE ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY CONSULTATION

TO:	Anti-Racism Taskforce
FROM:	Jenna Chia, Policy & Advocacy Officer
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ENDORSED:	Scott Miller, Chief Executive
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Volunteering Victoria acknowledges the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples, the traditional custodians of the land on which our office stands, and we pay our respects to them, their culture and their Elders past and present.

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 400 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, and inclusive volunteering community, and movement in Victoria.

THE ANTI-RACISM STRATEGY CONSULTATION

The Victorian Government has a commitment to Anti-Racism through the establishment of the Anti-Racism Taskforce and the development of the first ever Victorian Anti-Racism Strategy, due to be released in mid-2022. The strategy aims to “proactively prevent and address racism in Victoria and improve the lives of our state’s multicultural and multifaith communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.”

The public consultation for the Strategy seeks the perspective of community members and communities on their experiences and/or perspectives of racism, issues in key community sectors, and proposed strategies and opportunities for anti-racism initiatives.

The recent Scanlon Foundation Research Institute’s [Mapping Social Cohesion 2021](#) demonstrates just how crucial an Anti-Racism Strategy is: “When asked ‘how big a problem is racism in Australia?’, in 2020 the proportion indicating that it was a ‘very big problem’ or ‘fairly big problem’ was stable: 39% in July and 40% in November. In 2021, however, it was substantially higher at 60%. An increase of 20 percentage points in response to a general question of this nature is almost unprecedented in the Scanlon Foundation surveys.”¹

As the peak body for volunteering representing hundreds of members and tens of thousands of volunteers around the state, Volunteering Victoria welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion and highlight the opportunity for anti-racism advocacy and responses in the volunteering sector. Furthermore, Volunteering Victoria recently received funding from the Federal Government through the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) to break down barriers for three priority groups: People with Disability, First Nations Peoples and newly arrived migrants. We look forward to the opportunity to work with the Victorian Government and the Anti-Racism Taskforce to achieve the vision for Anti-Racism in Victoria.

1 Emeritus Professor Andrew Markus, [Mapping Social Cohesion](#), 2021, p.11.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Acknowledge the volunteer, not-for-profit and community service sectors as key focus areas in Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy.

Recommendation 2

Harness the social cohesion and participatory benefits of volunteering to achieve the vision for Anti-Racism in Victoria.

Recommendation 3

Promote and resource Anti-Racism initiatives in the volunteering and not-for-profit sectors.

Racism and discrimination in Volunteering

Recommendation 1: Acknowledge the volunteer, not-for-profit and community service sectors as key focus areas in Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy.

Volunteering Victoria acknowledges that racism is embedded throughout society's systems and institutions and perpetuated daily in the exclusion and differential treatment of people from diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. People from multicultural and multifaith communities, and First Nations peoples experience barriers to community participation including discrimination, bias, and stigma.

We acknowledge that these issues are also embedded in the volunteering sector. Volunteering culture and systems have historically been built on racist beliefs, assumptions, and practices. Traditionally White volunteers acted from a place of power and dominance in providing aid and community support to diverse community groups, perpetuating colonial practices². Contemporary volunteering structures and processes continue to privilege western systems of knowledge and social capital. The [Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement](#) outlines the many ways in which systemic racism functions in volunteering.

The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) has acknowledged these issues and committed to addressing the systemic and institutional racism that exists in the global volunteering sector by acting to increase diversity and inclusion in volunteering. Furthermore, IAVE pledged to support the self determination of multicultural volunteering sectors around the world. Victoria's Anti-Racism Taskforce and Strategy is aligned with this approach in seeking to better understand and address the racism embedded across society and institutions.

The barriers posed by systemic and institutional racism have also led to multicultural and First Nations communities being underrepresented in formal volunteering. Social determinants that are experienced at a higher rate by people from multicultural and First Nations communities, including unemployment, limited education, and lower socio-economic status, act as further barriers to volunteering participation. These communities are frequently deterred from volunteering due to microaggressions and racism experienced from other volunteers, organisational staff and members of the public whom they encounter in their volunteering³.

2 Blum & Schafer, [Volunteer work as a neocolonial practice – racism in transnational education](#), 2017.

3 VolunteerPro, [How to Talk About Race & Volunteerism: Advice for Allies](#), 2020.

While community-giving takes place across diverse population groups, those who are excluded from formal volunteering miss out on the pronounced wellbeing and social capital benefits associated with volunteering within social institutions and organisations. This exclusion also serves to perpetuate the cycle of systemic disadvantage experienced by multicultural and First nations communities.

Given the broad reach and contribution of the volunteering sector, and not-for-profit and community service sectors that rely on volunteers, we encourage the Victorian Government to acknowledge the importance of addressing racism in volunteering and develop Anti-Racism initiatives and resources to support greater inclusion, accessibility, and diversity in these sectors.

Volunteering to address racism

Recommendation 2: Harness the social cohesion and participatory benefits of volunteering to achieve the vision for Anti-Racism in Victoria.

The IAVE's Universal Declaration on Volunteering identifies that volunteering is the right of all people "regardless of their cultural and ethnic origin, religion, age, gender, and physical, social or economic condition"⁴. IAVE's vision is for all communities to have the right to freely offer their time, talent, and energy to others and to their communities through individual and collective action, without expectation of financial reward. Volunteering Victoria shares this vision wholeheartedly.

At Volunteering Victoria, we have a commitment to [equity, inclusion, and diversity](#), soon to be embedded in our strategic plan. We are committed to growing and developing a volunteering sector that is diverse, inclusive, and accessible and values the unique contribution of all Victorians. We are cognisant that racism and bias is structurally embedded in society's institutions and aim to actively contribute to addressing racial inequality and discrimination in our organisation and sector.

For Volunteering Victoria, a truly diverse, inclusive, and anti-racist volunteering sector includes:

- » Greater participation by diverse communities in formal volunteering.
- » Acknowledgement of diverse forms of community giving and contribution.
- » Volunteer involving organisations being committed to diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.
- » Sector-wide training for organisations, their paid staff and volunteers on cultural safety and anti-racism allyship.
- » Supported, self-reflective practice to encourage all participants in volunteer-involving organisations to reflect on their unconscious biases and misconceptions.

In achieving this vision for the sector, volunteering has the potential to be used as a tool to address and prevent racism in Victoria. The benefits of volunteering for individuals and communities include an enhanced sense of wellbeing, connection, meaning and purpose, and positive impacts on their physical and mental health. Volunteering actively promotes community connection and community resilience, bringing communities together to work towards common goals.

Recent research supports the idea that volunteering can be an agent of healing in communities identifying that "connections can be made across differences that push us apart so that we can live together in healthy, sustainable communities, working together to provide innovative solutions to our shared challenges and to shape our collective destinies"⁵.

4 International Association for Volunteer Effort, [Universal Declaration on Volunteering](#), 2021.

5 VolunteerPro, [How to Talk About Race & Volunteerism: Advice for Allies](#), 2020.

By increasing inclusivity and accessibility, and bringing diverse groups of people together, volunteering can also help to address unconscious bias and create a culture where people learn from each other and value diverse perspectives. However, to do this, the volunteering sector first needs to embed Anti-Racism initiatives and practices to ensure it is a safe place for all Victorians.

Anti-Racism strategies & initiatives in volunteering

Recommendation 3: Promote and resource Anti-Racism initiatives in the volunteer and not-for-profit sectors.

IAVE has identified the need for the global volunteer community to be an ally for racial justice, renewing its commitment to racial and social equity through its operations, programs, and advocacy⁶. Anti-racism allyship involves self-reflection on unconscious biases and privilege, cultural education, and learning, and actively addressing discrimination and systemic barriers⁷. Volunteering Victoria advocates for promoting and resourcing the following practices and initiatives, to reduce racism in the volunteering sector.

Self-reflective practice

Reflecting on one's position, privilege and power is a crucial first step in becoming aware of unconscious biases and the role they play in perpetuating misconceptions, stigma, and racism. Embedding supported, self-reflective practice as part of professional development in the volunteering, not-for-profit, and community service sectors has the potential to prevent and address interpersonal microaggressions and racism and activate members of the volunteering sector to address structural racism within their organisations.

“To act as a fully aware and involved steward of volunteer contributions, we need to become more aware of our own implicit biases and actively call into question volunteer policies that serve to discriminate, intentionally or otherwise”⁸.

Cultural Safety training

Cultural safety training supports the work of self-reflective practice by providing education on the role of unconscious bias and privilege in perpetuating discrimination and racism. It also supports organisations to understand the value of diverse cultures, perspectives, and experiences. Cultural Safety Training for paid staff and volunteers can help address these barriers and support the development of organisational practices and procedures that make the organisation a safe place for multicultural, multifaith and First Nations communities.

6 International Association for Volunteer Effort, [Being an Ally for Racial Justice](#), 2020.

7 Australian Human Rights Commission, [Racism: It Stops with Me](#), 2020.

8 VolunteerPro, [How to Talk About Race & Volunteerism: Advice for Allies](#), 2020.

Promotion of Self-determination

Self-determination is defined as an ongoing process of choice so that communities can meet their social, cultural, and economic needs⁹. IAVE endorses the importance of self-determination and stepping back to ensure that community members on the ground can lead the development of services and programs for their own communities¹⁰. This is particularly important in the volunteering, not-for-profit and community service sectors that have traditionally adopted paternalistic approaches to supporting communities¹¹. As a guiding principle for volunteering programs, self-determination would reduce systemic racism by privileging the knowledge, expertise and empowerment of communities to address their own issues and needs.

Improved legislative mechanisms for the protection of volunteers

Volunteering Victoria acknowledges that there is no neutral position in racism and discrimination and that not perpetuating racism on a personal level is only the first step. Sustained and meaningful changes to provide safeguards for volunteers from diverse multicultural, multifaith and First Nations communities is required to make volunteer organisations a safe place to participate. Volunteering organisations across multiple sectors require policies and procedures that clearly articulate an anti-racism stance and include clear pathways for addressing experiences of discrimination and racism within their organisation. It is imperative that legislative mechanisms that aim to protect employees from discrimination are extended to include and protect volunteers.

Addressing systemic barriers to participation

The Australian Federal Government has recently committed to addressing barriers to volunteering for underrepresented communities, including recently arrived migrants and First Nations communities, through their Volunteer Management Activity funding. This funding is an important first step in working to better understand and address the institutional and systemic barriers that act as a deterrent to volunteering. However, the narrow scope of this funding excludes the experience of more established multicultural and multifaith communities. Further investment is required to understand and address barriers to volunteer participation for all communities.

Conclusion

Volunteering Victoria stands ready to further consult with and assist the Victorian Government and the Anti-Racism Taskforce to develop innovative volunteering solutions to improve the lives of our state's multicultural and multifaith communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

9 Australian Human Rights Commission, [The Right to Self-determination](#), 2021.

10 International Association for Volunteer Effort, [Being an Ally for Racial Justice](#), 2020.

11 Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement, [Recognising Racism in Volunteer Engagement](#), 2020.