



# **Volunteering Victoria Submission Multicultural Framework Review**

**OCTOBER 2023**

**LEADING | REPRESENTING | CONNECTING | SUPPORTING**

## Introduction

*[V]olunteering often exists in abundance (in multicultural communities) but may be invisibilised*  
[The Story Project](#)<sup>1</sup>

Volunteering Victoria welcomes the [Multicultural Framework Review](#) (the Review) and the opportunity to highlight the role volunteering can and does play:

1. in fostering and advancing a successful and resilient multicultural society, contributing to building a more tolerant and respectful society in Australia;
2. supporting multicultural community building and upliftment;
3. providing pathways to employment and economic involvement;
4. supporting integration and social connection for multicultural communities;
5. strengthening public understanding of multiculturalism;
6. supporting the settlement journey of newly arrived migrants<sup>2</sup>; and
7. supporting a cohesive and inclusive society, fostering a powerful sense of belonging to a place and community.

The Review is an opportunity to ensure that equal and specific consideration is given to strengthen and support volunteering in a multicultural context. Research and planning in policy development and initiatives are required. Significant work must be further pursued to ensure that all aspects and forms of volunteering are made more visible and resourced.

In this regard, Volunteering Victoria therefore seeks to highlight research and initiatives in Victoria that demonstrate the importance of multiculturalism to volunteering, and volunteering to multiculturalism.

Volunteering Victoria, with funding from the Australian Government, delivers the [Volunteer Management Activity](#)<sup>3</sup> program with eight consortia partners to address barriers to volunteering for priority cohorts, which includes newly arrived migrants. This program has developed new resources and insights into improving access to volunteering and mitigating structural barriers for newly arrived migrants. This experience, and the collective experience drawn from projects by our members, affirms that volunteering is an essential wellbeing activity that is central to the lives of diverse communities. Volunteering activity, akin other activities (such as sporting activity), bring about social and economic outcomes, including employment, social connection, belonging and active citizenry. Investments must be made in diverse volunteering to ensure it is accessible, inclusive, and transformative for individuals and communities.

Volunteering Victoria also endorses Volunteering Australia's submission that makes the case for better recognition and support for multicultural communities in their voluntary activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Al Adawy, Heba, *The Story Project: Multiculturalism Through the Lens of Informal Volunteering*, Volunteering Australia, Feb 2023. The Story Project explores how volunteering helps to build a sense of community in Australia and beyond. <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Story-Project-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Volunteering and Settlement in Australia: A Snapshot*, Volunteering Australia and Settlement Council of Australia, 2019; <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteering-andSettlement-in-Australia-May-2019.pdf>. With requisite linguistic and cultural knowledge, volunteers within the settlement sector, many from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, are uniquely positioned to help settle individuals from humanitarian backgrounds into their new life in Australia.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>. See also the Volunteering Victoria VMA Highlights document on *Breaking Down Barriers and Building Sector Capacity* - [https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/VMA-Highlights-Year-1\\_2023.pdf](https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/VMA-Highlights-Year-1_2023.pdf)

## About Volunteering Victoria

Volunteering Victoria sees its role as leading the development of a collaborative, sustainable, thriving volunteering community and movement. As a state peak body, Volunteering Victoria advocates, advises, and facilitates for an inclusive and thriving volunteering culture. This is done with and for all volunteers, communities, and organisations. Volunteering is a whole of community effort, but it needs to be more inclusive. Systemic barriers must be addressed, and strong foundations built for all forms of volunteering practices. Our strategic goal is to ensure volunteering and community building is appealing and accessible to all Victorians.

## Overview of volunteering

Over 25% of Australians volunteer their time within organisations, while close to half of Australians volunteer 'informally'. Volunteering provides individual and collective social, cultural and wellbeing benefits. These benefits exist alongside the tangible economic contribution of volunteers that is in excess of \$58 billion annually to Victoria alone. If volunteers were paid, the volunteering sector in Victoria would be equal to 1.5 times the Victorian Government sector and nearly half the size of the Victorian private sector.<sup>4</sup> This substantial contribution involves local individuals and groups contributing their time, skills and effort to support their communities and address local area issues and needs in the delivery of crucial community supports such as community sports, religious organisations, education and training, and health and welfare.

The reach of volunteering in Australian society is extensive and diverse, both as a 'formal', role-based activity within organisations with significant volunteer workforces or in semi-formalised organisational structures. It also includes informal activity occurring outside organisations. This uniquely allows for the development of place-based initiatives and solutions, valuing and prioritising lived experience and community-led responses. Diversity within the volunteer workforce is an additional benefit.

In settlement contexts, volunteering is an effective way for newly arrived migrants to improve English skills. It also provides opportunities for mentoring by staff and managers. Volunteers can be immersed into workplace culture and gain confidence for future job applications.<sup>5</sup>

Volunteering Australia's submission points out that there is an abundance of volunteering within multicultural communities<sup>6</sup>. This may be less formal in nature, viewed rather as community obligation, an act of service or religious duty. This may lead to such volunteering being under-reported in survey research. Accurate data is necessary to appreciate the extent to which and the form such volunteering is taking place. It is also important to hear directly from the communities themselves to assess the impact and identify the barriers to meaningful volunteering in multicultural communities.

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<sup>4</sup> Ellis, C., Muller, P., & Szeker, D. State of Volunteering in Victoria 2020. Volunteering Victoria. 2020 - <https://stateofvolunteering.org.au/>

<sup>5</sup> Volunteering and Settlement in Australia: A Snapshot, Volunteering Australia and Settlement Council of Australia, 2019; <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteering-andSettlement-in-Australia-May-2019.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> According to the ABS General Social Survey 2020, 15% of recent migrants and temporary residents (defined as having lived in Australia for less than ten years) and 22% of non-recent migrants (born overseas and having lived in Australia for 10 years and more) have undertaken voluntary work through an organisation in the last 12 months. 37% of recent migrants, 31% of non-recent migrants have volunteered informally. It is likely that multicultural volunteering is much more extensive, with survey data not reflecting alternative cultural referents.

## Towards culturally inclusive volunteering

We highlight below notable recent research studies undertaken in Victoria.

### 1. Volunteering among people with migrant and refugee backgrounds and integration outcomes

Whittlesea Community Connections and the Melbourne Social Equity Institute's Community Fellows Program at the University of Melbourne collaborated on a project to explore volunteering among people with migrant and refugee backgrounds and its influence on integration outcomes. Participants volunteered in a range of roles and across a variety of sectors. Most participants volunteered within the first two years of settling in Australia often finding a pathway through the education system.

Reasons for volunteering included to gain employment related experience in Australia, improve English skills, give back to the community and build social and other support networks. Participants identified multiple benefits of volunteering particularly related to employment including improved communication and inter-personal skills, practical experience, and the ability to identify one's skills and relevant employment pathways. This had a direct impact on one third of participants who gained employment in the organisation they volunteered with.

Other benefits identified included helping the community, reducing isolation, and building support networks, a sense of happiness, improved mental health, changing the perception of refugees and people seeking asylum and learning more about the service system in Australia.

Their report *Volunteering & New Arrivals: A Social Cohesion Opportunity*<sup>7</sup> highlights that:

- People with migrant and refugee backgrounds newly arrived in Australia are interested in and do readily volunteer.
- Volunteers identified a range of reasons and benefits that directly relate to positive settlement outcomes including improved confidence, English language and cross-communication skills, employment related experience, mental health, and social support networks.
- Participant experience of volunteering in country of origin operated largely within the charity and faith sectors with greater scope for informal volunteering.
- Information and support to better understand a different volunteering 'system' in Australia is needed. Education was the main referral pathway into volunteering either through an educator or formal student placement program.

To improve the volunteer experience and outcomes, participants identified the need for:

- information about volunteering opportunities within the early settlement period provided in culturally and linguistically accessible ways;
- inclusion and diversity strategies that address participation barriers such as language, transport, financial and caring responsibilities;
- meaningful volunteer experiences that build on individual skills, strengths and aspirations;
- better volunteer management practices that support whole of organisation to be more inclusive.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/WCC\\_Volun\\_Arrivals\\_Final.pdf](https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/WCC_Volun_Arrivals_Final.pdf)

## 2. Critical success factors for volunteer engagement among culturally diverse groups

Volunteer West, a regional volunteer resource center, conducted an action-research case study focused on understanding critical success factors for volunteer engagement among culturally diverse groups. Volunteerism in two organisations (one faith-based<sup>8</sup> and one in emergency volunteering<sup>9</sup>) and their communities was explored in this study.

Their research report, *Pathways to culturally diverse volunteering towards COVID-19 recovery*<sup>10</sup>, described important differences in the ways people volunteer and that those differences deserve greater recognition. There are both organisational and cultural influences at play that contribute to these differences, highlighting that the labels of 'informal' and 'formal' volunteering that have been traditionally used, do not recognise, or demonstrate understanding of how community volunteering is actually conducted.

Volunteering experiences go beyond the common 'formal-informal' dichotomy of volunteering, where the 'informal' label is often associated with volunteering undertaken in multicultural and multifaith context. Such labelling has a disenfranchising effect. Further, participation in 'informal' activities is not always depicted as volunteering in official statistical reports, and thus under-represents the volunteering activity of diverse communities.

Analysis of the outcomes suggests that the terms Fluid Volunteering and Role-based Volunteering, better reflect the different approaches to volunteering in our communities, and in turn, volunteer engagement practices need to be tailored. The report found that:

- Role-based volunteering is bounded by roles and agreements; and
- Fluid volunteering is shaped by needs of circumstance and capability of the individual volunteer, allows movement across various roles.

	Role-based volunteering	Fluid volunteering
Ethos/narrative	Exchange/transaction 'Free will' Input of time and labour Psychic income	Volunteering as a way of life Civic/community connection Sense of place and 'being' (not just 'doing')
Volunteering experience	Bounded by role Contractual	Open Bounded by needs of circumstance, the organisation, community, and capability of the individual volunteer
Tools and approaches	Human resources management where volunteer management is based on recruitment, retention, reward, and recognition framework	Culture-based, customary procedures Hands on deck (volunteers find a role that they can do, where people are needed) Mobility (moving through role to role)

<sup>8</sup> Dal Baba Bidhi Chand Sikh Temple in Melton, Melbourne is managed entirely by volunteers.

<sup>9</sup> Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) in Brimbank, Melbourne.

<sup>10</sup> The study was commissioned by the Department of Families, Fairness, and Housing through the local Brimbank Melton Area. Report:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f1e61b22056001e99212c01/t/6233b4b75e9c752fda296e20/1647555773115/20211209+Summary+Research+Report+-+CALD+volunteering.pdf>

Critical success factors for volunteer engagement are salient to other community engagement contexts:

- Proactive and sustained approach to engagement with culturally diverse cohorts;
- Promoting diversity, inclusion, and cultural safety through leadership and champions;
- Building volunteering confidence among culturally diverse groups;
- Breaking barriers and ensuring cultural safety for culturally diverse volunteers by providing adjustments and accommodations, such as gender-specific toilets, uniform options, and practical rather than English-based assessments;
- Building on the strengths and resources of multicultural groups, including leveraging the mobility of fluid volunteering in emergency and crisis contexts;
- Nurturing a sense of belonging, through relationships and connections, as a core part of the volunteering experience; and
- Address discriminatory attitudes within organisations.

The report calls for further actions including:

- Understanding frames of volunteering from the lens of the community.
- Affording greater recognition and resources to diverse forms of volunteering;
- Brokering new paths for action-research, policy, and practice with deep insights; and
- Capturing and highlight the extent of the impact of diverse forms of volunteering;

### **3. Existing barriers to volunteering for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds**

AMES's briefing paper<sup>11</sup> identified existing barriers to volunteering for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. The paper discussed policy options for fostering increased and sustained CALD participation in formal volunteering and explores potential contributions from informal volunteering. The evidence presented is based on community consultations facilitated by AMES supplemented by an extensive literature review. The need for more data was highlighted.

- Limited knowledge about volunteering is a major participation barrier for CALD communities;
- Recruiting and supporting volunteers from CALD backgrounds is a challenge for volunteer involving organisations;
- Volunteering information may be best shared through informal communication channels and community consultations;
- Volunteers from CALD backgrounds often need support to transition from volunteering into paid work; and
- Data on informal volunteering activities within CALD communities is not currently being captured.

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<sup>11</sup> Volunteering in CALD Communities. AMES Australia. May 2020 <https://www.ames.net.au/-/media/files/research/ames-briefing--cald-volunteering.pdf>

## Concluding Recommendations

The Review provides an important opportunity to review the value and impact of volunteering's contribution to the building of multicultural society and community and develop effective means of better understanding and supporting this.

Volunteering Victoria recommends that the Review:

1. Recognise the importance of multicultural volunteering in building inclusive, cohesive, and resilient societies;
2. Consider current research and support further research and data collection into volunteering in a multicultural context; and
3. Support the identification of systemic barriers that prevent people from multicultural communities from fully participating in Australian society.

Volunteering fosters social connection and powers community building. But much more can and should be done to make volunteering more inclusive, diverse, and accessible. To do so, it is necessary to fully understand and appreciate volunteering in a multicultural context and leverage this to broaden community building and volunteer engagement practices.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss our recommendations with you further.

Yours sincerely

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Chief Executive Officer  
Volunteering Victoria