

Inclusive Volunteer Practices

An approach for organisations to engage, support and retain Newly Arrived Migrant Volunteers



Common Challenges Faced by Volunteer Involved Organisations



Volunteer Involved and community-based organisations across Victoria are navigating a shared and increasingly complex set of challenges. With already limited and stretched resources, many are struggling to recruit, upskill, and retain volunteers at the scale needed to meet growing community demand when servicing the community through their outreach services and programs.

At the same time, we are seeing broader social pressures play a part in adding to these sets of challenges, such as the rising cost of living, having impaired the number of people able to volunteer and the time they can realistically commit to due to the need to take up extra or additional paid work. The pressures of thinning out volunteer availability are being felt across the sector. Most organisations are battling similar hurdles: doing more with less, while striving to sustain the volume of people required to underpin their work.



Common Challenges Faced by Newly Arrived Migrants Looking for Volunteering Opportunities – How Newly Arrived Migrants may be a solution for VIOS



Whilst VIOs may be experiencing shortages in available hands, the same time, an opportunity exists within our communities. Many individuals identifying as Newly Arrived Migrants are eager to engage in volunteering to connect with their new communities, learn about Australian culture, give back through meaningful

service, build new skills, strengthen their English language confidence, and explore pathways to employment. Yet too often, this willingness and potential remain untapped. By intentionally connecting volunteer involved organisations facing recruitment pressures with Newly Arrived Migrants seeking purpose and opportunity, we can close a critical gap, creating inclusive, mutually beneficial pathways that strengthen organisations, and lift-up already vulnerable individuals.

An opportunity to learn from those with lived experiences, and hear their ideas on how to make volunteering more inclusive for Newly Arrived Migrants



The sectional Co-Design project (lead by the Volunteer West team) was intended to centre the voices of those who identify as Newly Arrived Migrants. The goal was to gain meaningful insights drawn directly from their lived experiences when first arriving in Australia, and how they found the volunteering experience. The individuals involved shared stories about how they navigated the challenges of joining volunteer organisations. The Co-Design project sought to surface barriers, unmet needs, and practical enablers (as identified and recommended by those with lived experiences). The insights and reflections gathered are intended to inform, guide, and support volunteer organisations to better understand these experiences and apply the learnings to create more inclusive, accessible, and effective volunteer pathways, especially for Newly Arrived Migrants.

PART

1

Challenges when seeking and applying for a volunteer role

Explored the challenges Newly Arrived Migrants experience when seeking and applying for a volunteer role highlighting the barriers such as:

- ***complicated and unfamiliar recruitment processes,***
- ***limited local networks and support/guidance,***
- ***language and contextual differences,***
- ***and uncertainty about eligibility of the volunteer organisation,***
- ***and/or recognition of overseas experience.***

These were common challenges which can lead to more inclusive recruitment practices if addressed, providing clearer pathways into volunteering, and greater participation from CALD diverse communities. The positive impact would be a broader, more representative volunteer base and increased confidence among Newly Arrived Migrants to engage meaningfully in their new communities.



PART

2

Challenges during onboarding (induction and orientation)

Explored the challenges Newly Arrived Migrants experience during onboarding with a new volunteer organisation which can help to identify gaps in the induction and orientation process. Things such as the following can create unnecessary barriers for new volunteers:

- **information overload,**
- **use of jargon (simple/easy English),**
- **or assumptions about prior cultural or organisational knowledge.**

By improving the induction and orientation processes, it can result in smoother transitions, reduce anxiety, and help with early and ongoing engagement. The benefit for organisations is higher volunteer retention and for Newly Arrived Migrants, who will have a greater sense of belonging, and readiness to contribute safely.



PART

3

Understanding roles, requirements, and expectations

Explored the challenges Newly Arrived Migrants experience when trying to understand what is required and expected of them in their new role as a volunteer. This aspect shed light on issues such as:

- **unclear role descriptions,**
- **unspoken workplace norms,**
- **and different cultural expectations around communication and initiative.**

By clarifying expectations clearly, it supports confidence, role satisfaction, and performance. This creates positive outcomes for both volunteers and organisations through reduced misunderstandings, stronger teamwork, and more effective collaborations.

PART

4

Knowing how to seek support or development opportunities

Explored the challenges Newly Arrived Migrants experience in knowing how to seek support or developmental opportunities revealed barriers such as:

- ***uncertainty about who to approach,***
- ***fear of “getting it wrong,”***
- ***or lack of awareness of available pathways.***

By addressing these challenges, it encourages help-seeking behaviours, skill development, and long-term engagement. The positive impact includes empowered and confident volunteers who have capacity to further grow and the volunteer organisation can benefit from more skilled and motivated volunteers.



Supporting Solutions for VIOS: purpose, vision, and mission

Explored solutions and ways forward for Volunteer Involved Organisations working with volunteers who identify as Newly Arrived Migrants to find purpose by understanding the organisation’s vision and mission. This was particularly in response to the application and onboarding challenges, which can include simple solutions such as:

- ***plain-language materials,***
- ***culturally inclusive messaging,***
- ***and values-based inductions.***

Individuals expressed that these approaches would help volunteers connect their personal motivations to the organisation's goals early on. The benefit is a stronger sense of purpose, alignment, and commitment from the beginning.

In addition to this, by understanding the organisation's vision and mission, particularly in relation to role clarity and access to support, this can involve simple solutions such as:

- **regular check-ins,**
- **mentoring/buddy system,**
- **and explicit links between tasks and the impact it has.**

These practices help to reinforce why the volunteer's role matters and how growth is supported within the volunteer organisation. The positive impact here is long-term sustained engagement, clearer development pathways, and a shared sense of meaning that benefits both the volunteer and the organisation.



Summary

This Co-Design experience highlighted a shared and pressing challenge across our volunteer sector: organisations are facing growing demand with fewer volunteers, while many Newly Arrived Migrants are eager but under-supported in accessing volunteering opportunities. The lived experiences from Newly Arrived Migrants revealed clear barriers across recruitment, onboarding, role clarity, and access to support. Importantly, these insights also point to practical, achievable solutions. By adopting more inclusive, plain-language, and culturally responsive practices, while clearly connecting roles to organisational purpose, Volunteer Involved Organisations can unlock a largely untapped volunteer cohort. Bridging this gap presents a significant opportunity to strengthen organisations, whilst empowering a vulnerable group of community members, Newly Arrived Migrants.



Description of images: CALD NAM Individuals partaking in group discussions in workshop breakout room activity.



Description of images: CALD NAM Group partaking in Q & A segment of workshop.

Author: Volunteer West
Consortium region: North-West Metro
Date: December 2025

This project was produced with funding provided through the Volunteer Management Activity 2022-2026 grant. You may learn more about the program by visiting this website:
<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>