

Submission for the Multicultural Framework Review

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OVERVIEW

This submission emphasises the role of volunteering in supporting Australian multiculturalism. It underscores the significance of recognising the breadth of multicultural volunteering through meaningful engagement with multicultural communities throughout the Review process. It also makes recommendations on how government and non-government organisations can support the activities of multicultural volunteers to build an inclusive and resilient Australian society.

Volunteering is a key indicator of social and emotional well-being in Australia. It provides opportunities for social connections, offers pathways to employment, and fosters a powerful sense of belonging to a place and community. Volunteering among multicultural communities helps facilitate their social and economic integration in society. It also supports the settlement journey of newly arrived migrants and contributes to building a more tolerant and respectful society in Australia.

This submission highlights that, overall, there is an abundance rather than a deficit of volunteering within multicultural communities. Their activities, however, can sometimes be informal in nature and conceptualised through alternative cultural referents such as community obligation, an act of service or religious duty. As a result, they may be under-reported in survey research. Informal community initiatives undertaken by multicultural volunteers can also suffer from insufficient resources, while structural barriers may exist for formal volunteering within volunteer involving organisations.

Given the significance of volunteering for multicultural communities, this submission proposes a set of recommendations to the Multicultural Framework Review. They are based on two pillars: 1) better recognition and 2) better support for multicultural communities in their formal and informal voluntary activities. The recommendations are as follows:

1. To recognise and promote the significance of multicultural volunteering in building an inclusive, cohesive, and resilient society, and to support further research and data collection.
2. To recognise different multicultural community networks- some of which may be informal or semi-formal in nature - as avenues for skilled volunteering, and conduits of information and resources for new migrants.
3. To support volunteer involving organisations to better engage multicultural volunteers and improve access and inclusion through cultural safety and inclusive practice training; flexible work arrangements; and opportunities to upskill the capabilities of multicultural volunteers who may be experiencing disadvantage.
4. To support informal community initiatives through infrastructural support, such as the provision of affordable venues, registration support (if required) and readily available information on grants and funding.¹

¹ Note on definitions of ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ volunteering: The ABS defines ‘formal’ volunteering as unpaid voluntary work through an organisation or group and collects data on ‘informal volunteering’ as a derived statistic based as unpaid work/support to non-family individuals outside the household. In another definition provided by the United Nations Volunteer Program, informal volunteering is defined as activity that “occurs directly between individuals and communities without being

INTRODUCTION

About the Multicultural Framework Review

The Multicultural Framework Review is a first principles review of multiculturalism in Australia. It is being conducted by Dr. Bulent Hass Dellal as the Executive Director of the Australian Multicultural Council, Ms Nyadol Nyuon as a human rights lawyer and an Order of Australia medallist, and Ms. Christine Castley as the CEO of Multicultural Australia, alongside a reference group of peak bodies, community service sectors, and grass roots civil society organisations. The Review will advise the Australian Government on institutional arrangements, legislative and policy settings to support the needs of multicultural communities and to build a cohesive and inclusive Australian society.²

About the Submission

This submission has been drafted by Volunteering Australia, as the national peak body for volunteering, in collaboration with the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies. We welcome the opportunity to provide a set of recommendations to the Australian Multicultural Review.

This submission is guided by the principles laid out by the Multicultural Framework Review, which include: 1) advancing multicultural Australia 2) supporting cohesive and inclusive society and 3) ensuring that the right settings are in place to harness the talents of all Australians. The submission responds to the following points highlighted in the Terms of Reference:

- Roles and functions of government and non-government organisations respectively in advancing multicultural, inclusive, and cohesive societies.
- Areas of reform to address any systemic barriers that prevent people from multicultural communities from fully participating in Australian society, including those barriers that exist due to racism and discrimination.
- Opportunities to define a modern shared Australian identity and strengthen public understanding of multiculturalism as a collective responsibility through education and public awareness raising.
- Opportunities for the Federal Government to communicate and engage with multicultural Australia more strategically, including in languages other than English.

mediated by an organisation.” Volunteering Australia currently defines formal volunteering as occurring within organisations and informal volunteering taking place outside of the context of a formal organisation or group. However, among volunteering peak bodies, it is increasingly recognised that there is not a hard binary between formal and informal volunteering. Volunteering can be seen as a spectrum across formalised and semi-formalised and semi-institutional environments. .

Volunteering Australia, *Common Languages Guide*, 2022, p. 2. <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Common-Languages-Guide-2022-FINAL.pdf>

United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme. *2022 State of the World's Volunteerism Report. Building equal and inclusive societies*. Bonn, 2022, p 33. https://swvr2022.unv.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/UNV_SWVR_2022.pdf

[Unpaid work and care | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au)

Volunteering Definition, Volunteer Australia website <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/definition-of-volunteering>

² Multicultural Framework Review

<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/multicultural-framework-review/terms-of-reference>

The submission follows on from our previous research on volunteering within culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia. It draws on the findings from *The Story Project: Australian Multiculturalism Through the Prism of (Informal) Volunteering* conducted by Volunteering Australia and funded by the Scanlon Foundation.³ The nine-month research project illustrates the relationship between volunteering, multiculturalism, and social cohesion through diverse stories of volunteering within multicultural communities across Australia. The submission also builds on a study conducted by Volunteering Australia and the Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) on the significance of volunteering for recently arrived migrants and the settlement sector.⁴ It also incorporates the findings of the *NSW Multicultural Volunteering Report* produced by the Centre of Volunteering with support provided by Multicultural NSW and the New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice.⁵

Currently, State and Territory volunteering peak bodies are funded by the Australian Government to implement the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA), which includes newly arrived migrants as one of the priority focus groups.⁶ This submission incorporates insights from their consultations with multicultural communities to improve access to formal volunteering and to mitigate structural barriers for newly arrived migrants in volunteer involving organisations.

The recommendations made in this submission directly relate to and support the strategic objectives laid out by the new National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-20233). The National Strategy for Volunteering was developed through a 12-month co-design process with members of the volunteering ecosystem.⁷ It provides a ten-year blueprint and strategic framework to enable safe, supported, and sustainable volunteering in Australian society.

Note on terminology:

The submission uses the term ‘multicultural’ interchangeably with ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’ communities. This includes those who were born overseas (recent and non-recent migrants), those whose parents (one or more) were born overseas, or who speak languages other than English at home. Some discussions and recommendations, however, are specific to newly arrived migrants, defined as residing in Australia within 5 years or less. This definition is aligned with that of the National Settlement Framework which provides support to eligible migrants and the guidelines of the Department of Social Services for the Volunteer Management Activity.⁸ The submission distinguishes

³ Al Adawy, Heba, *The Story Project: Multiculturalism Through the Lens of Informal Volunteering*, Volunteering Australia, Feb 2023, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/research/the-story-project/>

⁴ *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>

⁵ *NSW Multicultural Volunteering Report*, The Centre of Volunteering, 2022 <https://www.volunteering.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/NSW-Multicultural-Volunteering-Report-2022.pdf>

⁶ *Volunteer Management Activity Summary* | Department of Social Services, Australian Government An online survey circulated by the organisations (dss.gov.au)

⁷ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/the-strategy/>

⁸ *Volunteer Management Activity 2022-26: Project Guidelines*, The Centre of Volunteering, <https://www.volunteering.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/VMA-2022-26-Project-Guidelines-for-Applicants-1.pdf>

See also: [Humanitarian Settlement in Regional Australia \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/humanitarian-settlement-in-regional-australia)

the subcategory of newly arrived migrants, where needed, within the broader designation of ‘multicultural communities.’

Volunteering in Multicultural Communities

As an act that entails ‘time freely given for the common good,’ volunteering extends to different parts of Australian society. It exists both as a formal, role-based activity within volunteer involving organisations or in semi-formalised organisational structures, as well as an informal activity occurring within and outside organisations.⁹ Volunteering is also an important part of Australia’s domestic priorities. Different social sectors from disability support, aged care, and mental health to arts, heritage, and sport depend heavily on volunteer involvement. In times of emergency and crisis, the services of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations are a pivotal source of support for Australian society.¹⁰

According to the ABS General Social Survey 2020, 15% of recent migrants and temporary residents (categorised by the survey 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.¹¹ On the other hand, 37% of recent migrants, 31% of non-recent migrants have volunteered informally.¹² Recent statistics provide a glimpse of the multicultural volunteering by those who are born overseas, but the actual landscape of diversity combined with those born in Australia is likely to be more extensive.¹³ Since many forms of multicultural volunteering are conceptualised through alternative cultural referents, they are likely to also be under-reported in survey data.

Volunteering has important social and economic benefits. It is an important pathway to employment. Accumulated evidence from organisations and peak bodies suggest that volunteering can impart valuable transferrable skills and signal important capabilities to employers.¹⁴ It can also provide critical experience and professional exposure to first time jobseekers as well as returning and

⁹See footnote 1 for how the term informal volunteering is being used in this submission.

¹⁰ Crisis Heroes, Community heroes helping those in need, 2020. <https://www.crisisheroes.com>

Locke, S, Spontaneous volunteers the new face of helping out in times of emergency. *ABC Rural*, 2017.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-07/spontaneous-volunteers-change-face-of-volunteering/8882290>

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers. *Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection: Handbook 12*, 2017.

¹¹ General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 29/06/2021,

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release#voluntary-work-and-unpaid-work-support>

¹² Volunteering Australia, Key Volunteering Statistics, Jan 2021, https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Key-Statistics_2020.01.pdf

¹³ Dean, Jodi. "Informal volunteering, inequality, and illegitimacy." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 51.3 (2022): 527-544.

¹⁴ McDermott, J. Submission on the Future of Supported Employment: Discussion Paper, Volunteering Australia, August 2023; McDermott J, Submission to the Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services, March 2023

transitioning workforce, akin to the process of 'shadowing' or 'on-the-job training' in many organisations.¹⁵

Volunteering is also a powerful indicator of community well-being.¹⁶ It can mitigate social isolation, loneliness and is associated with better life satisfaction and improved physical and mental health.¹⁷ It also can foster social connections - as indicated in the annual 'Australia's welfare' reports by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - and contributes to building more resilient and integrated societies. Volunteering is used as a well-being indicator abroad and has also been included as an indicator in Measuring What Matters, Australia's First Well-being Framework.¹⁸

Significance of Formal Volunteering Among Multicultural communities

Volunteering plays a critical role in the delivery of key support programs and services within the settlement sector in Australia. In 2019, Volunteering Australia and the Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) conducted a National Survey among managers of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in the settlement sector. According to the National Survey, 65% of surveyed organisations recruited volunteers from a migrant or a refugee background, 23% recruited from only a migrant background, and 5% recruited only from a refugee background.¹⁹ The findings of the National Survey not only confirmed the importance of volunteering for the settlement sector, but also the unique benefits of diversity within the volunteer workforce. Many volunteers within the settlement sector were from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. With requisite linguistic and cultural knowledge, they were uniquely positioned to help settle individuals from humanitarian backgrounds into their new life in Australia.

Volunteering also carries specific opportunities for workforce participation and economic integration of newly arrived migrants. For new arrivals in Australia, gainful employment necessitates recognition and accreditation of prior skills and qualifications. Volunteering can be important in providing local work experience and an Australian referee for future employment.²⁰ The *Volunteering and Settlement in Australia Report 2019* affirms that volunteering is an effective way for newly arrived migrants to improve English skills. It also provides appropriate mentoring by staff and managers, immersion into the Australian workplace culture, and self-confidence for future job applications.²¹

¹⁵See for example, [Volunteering could be your pathway to employment](#), My Future, 2 June 2021; [Proof that Volunteering Pays Off for Job Hunters](#), Forbes, 24 June 2013

¹⁶ Submission to the Measuring What Matters Statement, Volunteering Australia, January 2023
Volunteering, Wellbeing and Wellbeing Budgets, Volunteering Australia, September 2022

¹⁷ Evidence Insights: Volunteering and Mental Health, Volunteering Australia, October 2021,
<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Evidence-Insights-Volunteering-and-mental-health-Final.pdf>

¹⁸ Australian Government, Measuring What Matters: Australia's First Wellbeing Framework, July 2023, [measuring-what-matters-statement020230721_0.pdf](#)

¹⁹ 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>

²⁰ See footnote 14 and 15.

²¹ Volunteering and Settlement in Australia: A Snapshot.

Volunteering by individuals from multicultural communities also brings a ‘diversity dividend’ to the Australian workplace. Research from McKinsey has found that companies that are more diverse are more likely to improve their customer orientation, employee satisfaction, and decision making.²² Through a survey of 366 public companies in Canada, US, UK, and Latin America, it found that ethnically diverse companies are 35% more likely to perform better than their industry partners.²³ The presence of multicultural volunteers in an organisation helps build a more respectful work culture and puts an onus on organisations to improve their Diversity and Inclusion Frameworks. It also fosters a sense of belonging for new migrants. For example, in the Volunteering ACT consultations carried with multicultural communities, one volunteer manager at a volunteer involving organisation expressed the benefits of formal volunteering as follows: “They [culturally and linguistically diverse volunteers] belong to this space [volunteering sector]. Their contributions are valued. It [volunteering] reinforces the idea that they are doing something worth it, rather than feeling lost. It is a gateway to belong to the community.”²⁴

Significance of Informal and Semi-Formal Volunteering Among Multicultural Communities

Since 2019, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has included data on informal volunteering in the General Social Survey. While existing statistics, based on this data, show a higher rate participation in informal volunteering by culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the actual landscape of volunteering may be even more extensive. In General Social Survey publications, data on informal volunteering is a derived statistic, which takes data collected on unpaid work and support provided to non-household members and excludes people who only provide this support to family members. By excluding family members and members of the household, General Social Survey data likely under-reports the rate of informal volunteering, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse and First Nations communities.

Emerging studies that use ethnographic research methods indicate that the breadth of informal volunteering within multicultural communities is likely to be more extensive and under-reported by participants. Research findings in *The Story Project* highlight how volunteering within multicultural communities can take place in the form of caring for community gardens, arranging cultural events through semi-formal cultural associations, organising religious festivals on an ad-hoc basis, and participating in forms of community led problem solving. Often these voluntary activities are understood through different referents such as cultural obligation, religious duty, an act of service or an extension of kinship ties. Even when the participants correlate these concepts with the terminology of ‘volunteering,’ they are inflected with cultural or faith-based attitudes that privilege collectivist forms of recognition (of a religious or ethnic community) over individualistic recognition of one’s activities.²⁵

²² McKinsey, Why diversity matters, McKinsey and Company, February 2015.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Volunteering ACT consultations with multicultural communities, September 2023.

²⁵ The Story Project, p 23.

Research indicates that volunteering contributes to building a resilient multicultural society. It establishes a strong sense of community and self-confidence in one's identity. The findings of *The Story Project* suggest that volunteering in cultural associations and religious networks allows individuals to forge a unique sense of belonging to Australia, where 'Australian-ness' could be commensurate with the uniqueness of one's identity and difference, rather than a homogenous assimilation into an Anglo-Celtic mainstream.²⁶

For new arrivals, religious and cultural associations are often the first sites of contact and connection. Volunteering within such sites, which are sometimes semi-formal and semi-institutionalised in nature, allows individuals to maintain their rituals and traditions. It also helps them to navigate their settlement journey, find appropriate accommodation and professional connections, fundraise for individuals in need, and learn about resources appropriate to their requirements such as Access and Centrelink Services.

Furthermore, voluntary activities within such cultural settings can often entail highly structured and skilled activities such as teaching language or scripture, administration, event management and accounting. Participants in *The Story Project* acknowledged the 'coincidental benefits' of their activities for employment, even when their motivations for pursuing such engagements were anything but personal. One research participant, who ran a community produce garden and served as a President of a South Indian cultural association, narrated that her 'hobbies' landed her a job when she returned to the job market after a long gap in her employment history. She described how her interviewer asked about her 'interests' and 'hobbies' as an afterthought. Her informal community engagements changed the conversation with her employer, who was left highly impressed with her organisational and time-management skills.

Existing research also highlights that community initiatives by culturally diverse communities can contribute to institution building. They can exemplify community mobilisation during periods of crisis, and present grass roots solutions to gaps in governance and service delivery. A research report by *Volunteer West* in 2021 presents a case study of Sikh volunteering within the Gurdwara during the bushfires and the Covid Pandemic. It highlights how the Sikh community in Melton conducted food relief operations and provided cooked food to local emergency services, such as the Country Fire Authority.²⁷

The Story Project also illustrates how culturally diverse communities identify gaps in service delivery to build culturally safe institutions, such as Chinese day care and aged care centres. Others engage in grass-roots mobilisation to establish radio services that represent Muslim traditions during Ramadan and engage in important conversations to dispel discrimination in society. Some informal community initiatives transition to formal registered charities, while others remain semi-institutionalised to provide nimble and ad hoc solutions in moments of crisis. While more in-depth case studies of multicultural community initiatives are needed in the Australian context, existing research confirms

²⁶ The Story Project, p 60-61

²⁷ Pathways to Culturally Diverse Volunteering: Towards Covid 19 Recovery, Research Report, Volunteer West, August 2021.

insights from international and local studies that informal and semi-formal community initiatives can increase democratic participation of otherwise marginalised communities.²⁸

Challenges for Volunteers from Multicultural Communities

Limitations of Data:

While statistics indicate that multicultural communities have higher rates of participation in informal volunteering in Australia, existing surveys may offer an incomplete picture of the breadth of this phenomenon. Studies on informal volunteering in the UK have highlighted the challenges of capturing activities that are 'under the radar' or undocumented in registration lists of organisations.²⁹ Often multicultural communities conceptualise their voluntary activities through alternative cultural referents and may not record their activities as 'volunteering' in survey research. As a result, data collection may be skewed and may require diverse methodological approaches to capture this phenomenon.

Multicultural volunteering can be a strong indicator of democratic participation, active citizenship, and grass roots governance in society.³⁰ However, in the absence of research that captures the breadth of this phenomenon, these contributions may be less visible in policy agenda and limit opportunities to support an inclusive and resilient society.

Structural Barriers in Formal Volunteering

Hidden Costs: Newly arrived migrants can experience several structural barriers that limit their participation in formal volunteering within volunteer involving organisations. Research indicates that income levels often influence participation in formal volunteering.³¹ In the context of Australia, screening checks and transportation expenses can serve as hidden costs for communities facing disadvantage.³² For individuals from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds, the process of obtaining screening checks can also be difficult, particularly if they are not familiar with the procedure or do not

²⁸ Crisis Heroes, Community heroes helping those in need, 2020. <https://www.crisisheroes.com>
 Locke, S. (2017). Spontaneous volunteers the new face of helping out in times of emergency. *ABC Rural*.
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-07/spontaneous-volunteers-change-face-of-volunteering/8882290>

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers. *Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection: Handbook 12*, 2017. <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5618/aidr-communities-responding-to-disasters-planning-for-spontaneous-volunteers-handbook.pdf>

Volunteering Queensland, Making it happen: A Volunteering Queensland project, 2018.
https://volunteeringqld.org.au/docs/Making_It_Happen.pdf

Hendriks, C. M and A. Dzur "Citizens' Governance Spaces: Democratic Action through Disruptive Collective Problem Solving". *Political Studies*, (2021).

²⁹ Soteri-Proctor, Andri, and G. Smith. "Tracing and Mapping: the challenges of compiling databases and directories." *Social Research Update Issue 42* (2003). Soteri-Proctor, Andri, and Pete Alcock. "Micro-mapping: what lies beneath the third sector radar?" *Voluntary Sector Review* 3.3 (2012): 379-398.

³⁰ Dean, Jodi. "Informal volunteering, inequality, and illegitimacy." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 51.3 (2022): 527-544; Fraser, Nancy. "Contradictions of capital and care." (2016).

³¹ Lee, Young-joo, and Jeffrey L. Brudney. "Participation in formal and informal volunteering: Implications for volunteer recruitment." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 23, no. 2 (2012): 159-180.

³² Submission: Indigenous Skills and Employment Program, Volunteering Australia, September 2021.
<https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/submissions/isep-sub-005-volunteering-australia.pdf>

have access to the required documentations. Some volunteer involving organisations can require a referee which can also be difficult for individuals from humanitarian backgrounds.³³

The findings of *The Story Project* also indicate that new arrivals often volunteer in cultural associations and religious organisations due to an ease of access, whereas the imperative for formal volunteering competes against other priorities of staying financially afloat. Those who pursue formal volunteering as a pathway to employability are also dissuaded when their voluntary positions do not match their interests or skills. Research participants from humanitarian and conflict-ridden backgrounds have noted the difficulty of starting from a 'blank slate' upon arrival and the need to 'up skill' their existing capabilities through appropriate placements in volunteer positions.³⁴ An undervaluation of the competencies offered by highly skilled migrants can have a negative impact on their sense of purpose and self-esteem.³⁵

Access: Volunteers from culturally and linguistically diverse communities may also experience language barriers, which can adversely impact their confidence in pursuing volunteering opportunities.³⁶ According to the study, *Giving and Volunteering in CALD and Indigenous Communities*, several research participants described that their personal desire to volunteer in organisations was constrained by a more immediate need to help in their own communities. Often women engaged in care work at home and for the family, which lessened their capacity or willingness to undertake formal volunteering.³⁷ Inflexible working arrangements and lack of childcare facilities further inhibited engagement in role-based volunteer positions at volunteer involving organisations. On the other hand, volunteer involving organisations can also suffer from resource constraints and effective strategies to recruit volunteers from culturally diverse backgrounds. Research also indicates 86% of volunteer involving organisations need more volunteers for their programs but lack the resources to recruit those from culturally diverse backgrounds.³⁸

Discrimination: Research also indicates that members from diverse cultural backgrounds can opt to volunteer in known environments due to racism and discrimination at workplace.³⁹ Several studies, including the *NSW Multicultural Volunteering Report*, have highlighted racism and discrimination as a cause of concern in workplace, with the effect of deterring multicultural volunteers from seeking volunteer positions in organisations.⁴⁰ Lack of support and cultural safety training in volunteer involving organisations can also result in multicultural volunteers being excluded from participation, recognition and decision-making. This can exacerbate a sense of exploitation or unappreciation among volunteers from culturally diverse backgrounds.⁴¹

³³ Insight from VMA consultations carried out by Volunteering WA and Volunteering ACT.

³⁴ The Story Project, p. 42, 43.

³⁵ This is also an insight from VMA consultations carried out by Volunteering WA.

³⁶ Collective insight from VMA consultations by State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.

³⁷ [Giving and Volunteering in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Indigenous Communities](#), The Cultural and Indigenous Research Center (CIRCA), June 2016.

³⁸ VA, PwC 2016 as cited in Carissa Jedwab, Volunteering Inclusion from people from CALD backgrounds, Volunteering Australia, https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/VRP_Volunteering-inclusionfor-people-from-CALD-backgrounds

³⁹ Kerr, L., Savelsberg, H., Sparrow, S. & Tedmanson, D, Experiences and perceptions of volunteering in Indigenous and non-English speaking background communities. Adelaide: Social Policy Research Group, University of South Australia, 2001; Volunteering Victoria, Community Giving in First Nations Communities in Gippsland, August 2021. [Community giving in First Nations Communities August 2022\[19499\].pdf](#)

⁴⁰ Ibid. NSW Multicultural Volunteering Report, The Centre of Volunteering, 2022. <https://www.volunteering.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/NSW-Multicultural-Volunteering-Report-2022.pdf>

⁴¹ Ibid

Structural Barriers in Informal Volunteering and Community Initiatives

Material Constraints: Unlike formal volunteering, informal volunteering and community initiatives can be easier to initiate due to an absence of red tape, but difficult to sustain due to a shortage of funds and resources. While some informal community initiatives transition into registered organisations and charities, others remain semi-institutionalised and ad hoc in nature. Due to a limitation of funds, such initiatives struggle with material resources and infrastructure to continue their activities.

Several research participants in *The Story Project* reiterated their struggle with finding appropriate venues to hold their events, the expense of hiring facilities, and unsuitability of public parks for weather-related and other logistical reasons. Some participants used public school venues to host their cultural activities but highlighted inconsistent policies across different states on the hiring of venues. As one participant put it:

“There are fees everywhere; for school venues, for public theatre. Even if there is a hall of the right size [for our cultural events], it is way too expensive for an association to bear the costs. Nothing is free. Only we, human beings, are free. Different states have different arrangements for hiring public schools (as venues) – some offer for free while others don’t. We need free access to premises – this way we won’t have to charge money from the members for additional ancillary costs. This way our voluntary activities can be truly free.”⁴²

The lack of public venues limited the engagement of the broader Australian society with diverse cultural festivals. On other occasions, research participants described receiving infrastructural support from churches or expert advice from more mainstream volunteer involving organisations, but such arrangements were often ad hoc and based on personal connections within the volunteering ecosystem.

Lack of Information and Burnout: Multicultural volunteers who engage in grass roots community initiatives to build culturally relevant and inclusive institutions - such as day care, a foreign language school, a cultural association, or a multicultural sports club – also struggle with the absence of readily available information. Participants in *The Story Project* highlighted their challenges in navigating government procedures to seek funding for their initiatives, as well as the lack of support in drafting grant applications. The process of applying and reapplying for grants at the expense of other commitments was onerous.⁴³ The report, *Giving and Volunteering in CALD and Indigenous Communities*, also highlights a risk of burnout among multicultural volunteers when they are approached as ‘trusted helpers’ to navigate Australian systems, to draft immigration appeals, file housing applications, and manage children’s schooling.⁴⁴

⁴² The Story Project, p 49-50.

⁴³ The Story Project, p 56.

⁴⁴ [Giving and Volunteering in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Indigenous Communities](#), The Cultural and Indigenous Research Center (CIRCA), June 2016, p 32.

The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-2033)

The new National Strategy for Volunteering (2023–2033) is a ten-year blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia.⁴⁵ Ensuring alignment with the National Strategy for Volunteering can maximize the potential of strengthening multiculturalism through volunteering and help facilitate a strategic approach to investment and policymaking.

This section highlights key strategic objectives of the National Strategy for Volunteering and outlines how our recommendations for the Multicultural Framework Review can support these goals.

1. *Recognise and promote the role of multicultural volunteering in building inclusive, cohesive, and resilient society* aligns with:
 - **Strategic Objective 2.1**, to increase knowledge and understanding of how volunteering takes place in different cultures and communities and ensure that all forms of volunteering are recognised, supported, and celebrated.
 - **Strategic Objective 2.2**, to expand public awareness of volunteering of different types across various domains and encourage participation.
2. *Recognise different multicultural community networks, including informal and semi-formal ones, as avenues for skilled volunteering, and conduits of information and resources for newly arrived migrants.* This aligns with:
 - **Strategic Objective 2.3**, to recognise the inherent value of volunteering and its ability to facilitate individual and community outcome.
 - **Strategic Objective 2.4**, to enable a community led approach and support communities to respond to their challenges and opportunities through volunteering.
 - **Strategic Objective 3.3**, to make sure the conditions that support effective volunteering are in place and sustainable into the future.
3. *Support volunteer involving organisations to better engage multicultural volunteers and improve access and inclusion practices.* This aligns with:
 - **Strategic Objective 1.2**, to make volunteering more inclusive and accessible.
 - **Strategic Objective 3.1**, to ensure that governments are consistently considering the needs of volunteers and supporting volunteering through comprehensive policy and investment.
4. *Support informal community initiatives through infrastructural support, including affordable venues, registration support (when required) and readily available information.* This aligns with:
 - **Strategic Objective 2.4**, to enable a community led approach and support communities to respond to their challenges and opportunities through volunteering.
 - **Strategic Objective 3.1**, to ensure that governments are consistently considering the needs of volunteers and supporting volunteering through comprehensive policy and investment.
 - **Strategic Objective 3.3**, to make sure the conditions that support effective volunteering are in place and sustainable into the future.

⁴⁵ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/the-strategy/>

Recommendations

The submission has highlighted the significance of multicultural volunteering in building inclusive, cohesive, and resilient societies. Based on this evidence, we make the following recommendations for government and non-governmental organisations. The recommendations are based on two pillars: 1) better recognition and 2) better support for multicultural volunteering in its breadth and diversity.

1. *To recognise and promote the role of multicultural volunteering in building inclusive, cohesive, and resilient society.* This includes:
 - A more expansive understanding of volunteering in survey research that considers cultural nuances and alternative referents associated with volunteering.
 - Broadening the scope of survey research to measure the relationship between volunteering (formal and informal) and social cohesion.
 - In-depth case studies through culturally sensitive qualitative and ethnographic research methods, where researchers can build trust and rapport with excluded and marginalised communities that may volunteer as a ‘way of life.’ Possible case studies could examine the following areas intersectionally: emergency volunteering and community mobilisation in multicultural communities; community-led problem solving in multicultural communities; volunteering among Australians from humanitarian backgrounds; the relationship of volunteering with well-being in multicultural communities.
 - Consideration given to whether some form of central register for volunteer involving organisations is needed, as highlighted in the *NSW Multicultural Volunteering Report*, to statistically record multicultural volunteering in order to facilitate targeted funding.⁴⁶
 - Supporting volunteer involving organisations that celebrate and acknowledge multicultural society. For example, in the ACT, the annual National Multicultural Festival is completely dependent on volunteers to run and provides an important and valued opportunity to celebrate and foster an inclusive multicultural society.
 - Supporting the promotion of the benefits of volunteering to multicultural communities, including volunteering as a potential pathway to employment. This should incorporate the development and dissemination of resources on volunteering in languages other than English.
 - Ensuring that migration services are aware of the multifaceted benefits of volunteering for new arrivals to Australia and promotes them as an integrated part of their migration and settlement support services approach.

⁴⁶ NSW Multicultural Volunteering Report, The Centre of Volunteering, 2022. <https://www.volunteering.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/NSW-Multicultural-Volunteering-Report-2022.pdf>

2. *To recognise different multicultural community networks, including informal and semi-formal ones, as avenues for skilled volunteering, and conduits of information and resources for newly arrived migrants. This includes:*
 - Recognising cultural associations and faith-based networks as important sites of volunteering that play a key role in the early settlement of newly arrived migrants.
 - Recognising the significance of informal community networks and initiatives in identifying community leaders and the role that they play as ‘trusted intermediaries’ between governments, volunteering peak bodies, volunteer involving organisations and members of local communities.
 - Recognising informal volunteering, which can involve skilled and structured roles, as pathways for employability.
 - Recognising informal and semi-formal networks as conduits of information and engagement with multicultural communities in Australia.

3. *Support volunteer involving organisations to better engage multicultural volunteers and improve access and inclusion practices. This includes:*
 - Supporting newly arrived migrants to access and connect with volunteering opportunities through appropriately designed connection services.
 - Supporting volunteer involving organisations to undertake cultural safety and inclusive practice training.
 - Encouraging flexible volunteer timings for volunteers who experience disadvantage and are unable to participate during work hours due to care work and other responsibilities.
 - Supporting new arrivals and individuals from humanitarian backgrounds to match their interests in volunteer positions and provide opportunities to build on their prior set of skills.
 - Providing professional networking opportunities to volunteers; providing skills support workshops (resume consultations) to add value to volunteer programs and identify transferrable skills through volunteering.⁴⁷
 - Building more proactive recruitment strategies to increase diversity within the volunteer workforce.
 - Providing support for volunteer involving organisations to translate key documents into languages other than English. Costs involved in this should be factored into all types of funding agreements (grants, competitive tendering, strategic commissioning, etc).

⁴⁷ Carissa Jedwab, Volunteering Inclusion from people from CALD backgrounds, Volunteering Australia, July 2023. https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/VRP_Volunteering-inclusionfor-people-from-CALD-backgrounds

4. *Support informal community initiatives through infrastructural support, including affordable venues, registration support (when required) and readily available information.* This includes:
- Providing convenient and affordable venues for grass-roots community initiatives in organising their events, with preferential/sliding scale fee structures for volunteer involving organisations and community organisations.
 - Encouraging public-private partnerships and creating incentives for businesses and volunteer involving organisations to support and assist informal initiatives through relational, in-kind, and infrastructural support.
 - Ensuring that multicultural volunteers in informal community initiatives have access to information on funding opportunities, and support for registration of organisations (if required) and grant application procedures.

Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.



Mr Mark Pearce

Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This submission has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.



About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia's vision is to promote a strong, connected, and resilient Australian community through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

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