

FEEDBACK ON THE NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY CONSULTATION PAPER

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What perspective are you bringing to the survey?

- Individual
- Non-profit organisation
- Local Government
- Government
- Private Sector
- Other, please specify:

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AMES brings the perspective of working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. AMES volunteers work with new and recently arrived refugees and migrants helping them settle in Victoria, learn English and understand workplace cultures. Within this volunteer workforce are significant numbers of CALD background volunteers. AMES is also familiar with high levels of volunteering within new and recently arrived communities.

If you are from an organisation:

On average, how many volunteers does your organisation engage in a year?

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| None | ☐ |
| Less than 20 | ☐ |
| 20-39 | ☐ |
| 40-59 | ☐ |
| 60 or more | ☒ |

How would you describe the size of your organisation?

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Small (less than 20 full time equivalent paid staff) | ☐ |
| Medium (20 to 49 full time equivalent paid staff) | ☐ |
| Large (50 or more full time equivalent paid staff) | ☒ |

At which level does your organisation primarily work?

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|
| National | ☐ |
| International | ☐ |
| Metropolitan | ☒ |
| Regional | ☐ |
| Rural | ☐ |
| Remote | ☐ |

How would you describe your organisation type?

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Arts/ Heritage | ☐ |
| Business/professional/union | ☐ |
| Community/welfare | ☒ |
| Education/training | ☒ |
| Emergency Services | ☐ |
| Environment/Animal Welfare | ☐ |
| Health | ☐ |
| International aid/ development | ☐ |
| Law/justice political | ☐ |
| Parenting/children/youth | ☐ |
| Religious | ☐ |
| Sport/physical recreation | ☐ |
| Other recreation/interest | ☐ |
| Ethnic and ethnic Australian groups | ☒ |
| Other | |

Questions outlined in the Consultation paper

What will a National Volunteering Strategy Achieve?

1. How can governments, community and corporate organisations best support volunteers?

Research and data collection and dissemination

Both volunteers and the organisations they work for can be supported by the provision of data and research on volunteers, their diverse profiles, motivations, range of volunteering opportunities and trends. This would support corporate and community organisations in sourcing and considering a new or changing volunteer base and methods of volunteering. It would support volunteers by assisting them to make informed choices about potential volunteering activities that are available in the community. Informed choices are important in retaining volunteers, particularly following investment by an organisation in training.

The Volunteering Australia website is an excellent example of this information and support service. (http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/html/s01_home/home.asp)

Contribute to costs of recruitment, retention and management of volunteers

Data and research could include calculation or estimates of the value of work undertaken by volunteers. The level of resourcing required to recruit, train, supervise, coordinate and manage a volunteer work force can then be described in relation to the value of the work contributed to the community. Recognition by governments of the resources required to provide these human resource, administrative and management skills and the need for dedicated roles in organisations with volunteer workforces would provide significant support to volunteers and volunteer based organisations.

Streamlining administrative, regulatory and compliance requirements

There are a number of essential administrative, regulatory and compliance requirements common to volunteering effort. These include OH&S, police and working with children checks, insurance, confidentiality and privacy requirements, and adequate recruitment and training processes. Streamlining the administrative, regulatory and compliance load on volunteers and volunteer based organisations is another way in which volunteers can be supported. See 5 and 6 below for more detail.

Promotion and recognition

Continued promotion and recognition through all forms of media (for example, print, radio, television, online) of the contribution volunteers make to their community is an important way of supporting and retaining existing volunteers and motivating new volunteers to take up volunteering roles. This promotion should reinforce the message that volunteering helps both the community and the individual volunteer. For example, the experience, knowledge and skills gained through a volunteering engagement can be beneficial in being considered for job opportunities and applying for recognition of prior learning as part of formal study programs. AMES experience is that volunteering can be a the first step into employment for new CALD members of the community, mothers returning to work and young people who have no previous work experience when applying for positions.

Engaging Volunteers

2. How can governments and the community work together to encourage more people to volunteer?

Target under represented groups

Government sponsored promotion campaigns which target the possibilities and personal benefits of volunteering to groups who have been identified as under represented in volunteering is one way of encouraging more people to volunteer. Promotion in the media of volunteers from these under represented groups encourages others from those groups to engage with volunteering. See 3 below.

Understanding the reasons for not volunteering by the identified under represented groups will also assist organisations to broaden, adapt and offer volunteering opportunities which match people's expectations, motivation and availability. This information could be gleaned through research and data collection referred to above at 1.1.

The GoVolunteer link within the Volunteering Australia website (referred to previously) is particularly useful support for potential volunteers finding organisations and activities with which they can engage. This could be the subject of a specific promotional campaign targeting the under represented groups.

Promote less well known volunteering activities

Promotion activities and campaigns should include the broadest possible range of volunteer profiles and activities, particularly those outside the traditional or well recognised volunteering roles.

For example, volunteering in aid, social or welfare assistance, and emergency support situations is well known in the community, as are activities relating to sports and health. Many volunteer talents may not be accessed in these traditional volunteer roles, nor may these roles attract people in the community who potentially would like to volunteer and have skills and experience to contribute.

An example of a less well known activity is mentoring. AMES has utilised volunteers in mentoring roles such as mentoring of younger people by older people in the Big Brothers, Big Sisters program described below or mentoring by professionally skilled people of newly arrived migrants and refugees as a way to assist new and recent arrivals into employment.

These roles tap into different skills than "traditional" or more well known volunteering and directly promote social inclusion and social cohesion by connecting people from areas of the community who may not meet as a matter of course.

Example 1: AMES and Big Brother, Big Sister Program

Since 2007 AMES has worked with the Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) organisation to provide volunteer mentoring for new and recently arrived young people, particularly those from refugee backgrounds. AMES was looking for ways to assist young refugees settle and link with the broader community and believed that mentoring could provide appropriate one-to-one support.

AMES facilitated the linkages and built trust with the different communities explaining what BBBS does as the newly arrived communities did not know about the program and mentoring more generally. AMES introduced the program to the wider Karen community via a consultation meeting. Karen community leaders met with AMES representatives, BBBS representatives, and mentors/volunteers. This helped raise awareness to the wider Karen community about the project.

AMES identified young people from the Karen and Ka'Chin backgrounds who would benefit from the mentoring program. AMES and BBBS jointly interviewed for staff members for the program to ensure appropriate selection of staff to manage the program with this new group of mentees. BBBS tailored mentoring services to the needs of young people from different cultural backgrounds. BBBS and AMES developed a briefing document to ensure both parties were in agreement about the objectives of the collaboration.

18 Karen youth (6 girls, 12 boys) were matched with BBBS volunteers to connect young people to services and gain information about services, help build their confidence, orientate them to Melbourne city (taking them on trips to the CBD), provide educational support and information about employment pathways.

The program was structured in a culturally appropriate way where groups of 3 young people were matched with a mentor so the young refugees could support one another and to address any mistrust or suspicion the Karen community might have with the concept of one-to-one mentoring of their young people by an older person from outside the family or community. In addition, the female mentors were matched with female refugees, and male mentors were matched with male refugees.

The parents were very happy with the outcomes as the program has helped their children to settle.

Example 2 Skilled Professionals Mentor Program

Refugees and migrants from professional / para professional backgrounds have many skills and much experience to bring to business and industry but face many barriers in accessing employment. These may be summarised as lack of workplace communication skills, lack of knowledge and experience of Australian workplace culture, lack of job search skills and knowledge, lack of local work experience and no local professional networks on which to draw.

AMES has conducted a Skilled Professionals Program since 1999 which assists people prepare for and enter the Australian workforce. As part of this program skilled refugees and migrants are linked with mentors from their professional field. Mentors are sourced from corporate organisations such as ANZ, Australia Post, IBM and NAB through their corporate social responsibility programs.

Mentors provide feedback and support, industry specific knowledge and access to professional networks. They assist with resumes and job applications customised to specific positions in specific industries. They participate in practice job interviews, providing important feedback to new arrivals on their interview skills. Frequently a mentor is able to source a work experience placement within industry providing contact with Australian workplace culture so essential in assisting new arrivals into employment.

Mentors frequently undertake the role as e-mentors, after initial face to face contact and relationships have been established.

Offsetting costs

There are out of pocket expenses for volunteers participating in volunteering activities. These may include for example, transport costs to attend the location of the volunteering activity. For people on low incomes these costs may be a disincentive from becoming involved. Examples of support for those on low incomes could include reimbursement for costs incurred, for example transport costs. Young people who are studying and volunteering in a formally recognised volunteering role could be offered a tax offset for HEC in recognition of this work.

Volunteer Resource Centres

AMES recommends expanding Volunteer Resource Centres to all regions. These centres are important in providing face to face support for volunteers and potential volunteers – an important factor for some under represented groups who may not have access to the internet or the skills required to access volunteering information provided online.

3. How can people with a range of needs and from different backgrounds be better supported to become volunteers?

CALD Volunteers

A common perception is that Australians from CALD backgrounds are not involved in volunteering due to the under representation of CALD profile volunteers in mainstream volunteering activities. Whilst it is true that many new and recent arrivals, particularly those with low or less than confident English language skills do not engage in mainstream volunteering, AMES experience with CALD communities shows that there are high levels of volunteering within on arrival communities.

Generally this is in the form of recently arrived communities assisting their own community members with settlement related issues and initial social connection into the community. Frequently groups are centred around faith based community groups such as mosques, temples and churches. Roles undertaken include guides providing orientation to local services and facilities, conducting homework clubs for children, tutoring in English and IT skills, as well as a broad range of welfare related activities such as accompanying people to hospital visits.

Community leaders also make very significant volunteer contributions in assisting their communities to establish community based organisations. These organisations strengthen and build capacity within the communities and as these communities mature, contribute more broadly in consolidating Australia's multicultural strengths.

A number of community groups run festivals and cultural events which bring the on arrival community together and provide opportunity for the "mainstream" community to join in. AMES has worked for many years with the Horn of Africa Network for example to run the Africa Live event in Melbourne – all arranged by community volunteers.

Over time many migrants and refugees move into more mainstream volunteering as a way of gaining experience in an Australian workplace, and/or increasing contact with people outside their immediate family or community.

AMES experience is that this transition can be supported by assisting new arrivals to determine what skills, knowledge and experiences they have that can be shared through volunteering engagements and provide information and, most importantly, introductions to organisations where these skills and experience can be utilised. AMES has actively promoted these opportunities through its existing networks with CALD communities and has approximately 452 volunteers from CALD backgrounds out of a total volunteer base of 1500 representing approximately 30% of the volunteer workforce at AMES.

Young Volunteers

Increased youth participation can be supported with more project-based volunteering opportunities that will fit into their timelines. This is acknowledging that long term volunteering may not be an option for this group who are balancing study and part time work which is often casual and / or irregular.

Another successful strategy AMES uses is to match young volunteers with other young people from CALD backgrounds. For example, AMES sources and trains young volunteers from Monash University and matches them with migrant and refugee background young people in South Eastern Melbourne region. The volunteering activity centres on assisting refugees and migrants with English language skills and conversation practice and often includes providing information about sporting and social opportunities in the area.

This is a good example of volunteering activity resulting in benefit for both the parties: the university students meeting new arrivals and hearing first hand of their experiences, and the new arrival meeting other young Australians to begin the process of participating in the broader community. The timing of the meetings is up to the individuals involved and so can be flexible to fit in with study and part time work commitments.

Promotion and marketing

Promotion of the benefits of volunteering and marketing of volunteer opportunities should include diverse profiles which are recognisable and familiar to people from a range of different backgrounds. Promotion activities and campaigns should include the broadest possible range of volunteer profiles and activities, particularly those outside the traditional or well recognised volunteering roles. Examples of two of these pertaining to the involvement of CALD communities are detailed at 2 above.

There are also costs incurred for volunteer based organisations in meeting regulatory compliance standards and in recruiting and training volunteers. For example, provision of financial support to organisations targeting CALD volunteers to produce information in languages other than English would be helpful.

Supporting emergency management volunteers and building resilient communities.

4. How can we best sustain and grow the pool of skilled volunteers in the emergency management sector?

AMES and its volunteers work with newly arrived refugees and migrants and as such, do not have experience in supporting volunteers in the emergency management sector.

Training and Protecting Volunteers from Risk

5. How can volunteer-based organisations be supported to comply with regulations designed to protect volunteers and the community?

There are a number of essential regulatory requirements common to volunteering effort. These include, for example, OH&S, police and working with children checks, insurance, confidentiality and privacy requirements, and adequate recruitment and training processes.

Volunteer based organisations could be supported in regard to these regulatory and compliance issues through provision of a range of relevant policies, documents, forms, checklists and fact sheets online. These need to be in plain English and readily adaptable to individual organisational contexts. An example is the database of policies and procedures compiled and administered by Communities in Control in Victoria for NFP organisations.

AMES experience with CALD communities is that the levels of compliance and regulations around many aspects of life in Australia is unfamiliar to many new arrivals, particularly those who have not come from westernised democracies. The concepts and rationale for the compliance and regulatory environments need to be explained to new arrivals. Materials in a range of languages other than English would be very helpful in supporting volunteer based organisations from CALD communities themselves, or mainstream volunteer organisations with CALD volunteers as part of their work force.

Volunteer based organisations are greatly assisted by having access to existing documents and information specifically designed for a range of sectors. Similarly Volunteering Victoria's Principles of Volunteering and Code of Conduct, although not regulatory requirements, provide guidance to volunteer based organisations and ensure all necessary areas are covered, without individual organisations having to administer requirements which are not be within their field of expertise. (e.g. Insurance or OH&S legislation).

A valuable opportunity is available to volunteer based organisations through groups such as the Leadership Victoria's Williamson Community Leadership and ExperienceBank Leadership Programs. Graduates of these programs offer a broad range of skills to NFP organisations and carry out their placements on a pro bono basis. New and existing volunteering groups can draw on mentors with high level leadership expertise across a broad range of sectors, to support volunteer based organisations to manage their regulatory and compliance issues in effective and efficient ways. Promotion of this Skillsbank to volunteer based organisations would be helpful. This resource is also extremely valuable for volunteer based organisations needing assistance with strategic planning and governance at board and management levels.

6. How can governments work towards better alignment and cooperation to support volunteering efforts and, at the same time, reduce red tape without compromising safety?

See Sector based framework described below.

Emerging trends

7. How can government, community and corporate Australia best respond to this changing volunteering environment?

Emerging technology

Emerging technology provides many opportunities for volunteering, such as the e- mentoring of migrant and refugee job seekers by skilled professionals described earlier. Social networking sites also offer potential for volunteers to reach and support people who are isolated either through geographic distance or compromised mobility due to health. Examples of these kinds of activities can be publicised to encourage volunteer based organisations to broaden potential opportunities along these lines.

Access to technology and training for volunteers will need to be supported in order for broad uptake of emerging technology as a vehicle for volunteering to become more widespread.

Multiple short term assignments: A sector based framework

The emerging trend of people volunteering for multiple organisations either simultaneously or within a reasonably short time span (project based volunteering) creates both administration and cost for the organisations for whom they work as training, regulatory and compliance checks need to be conducted by each organisation.

There is potential to look at volunteering organisations within a “sector based” framework. In this model, a number of volunteer based organisations working in same or similar space can be linked under a broad umbrella arrangement so that volunteers who work with volunteer based organisations within the same sector are covered by an agreed set of regulations, compliance standards and training acceptable to all organisations within that sector. Police checks and OH&S training for example would be documented and portable within the sector, relieving each organisation of the cost and duplication of administrative effort currently required. This would be particularly beneficial for very small community based organisations. An additional benefit would be ensuring consistent standards of compliance are in place across and number of smaller organisations working within the same field.

Recognising the contribution

8. How can governments and communities best recognise and celebrate the contribution of volunteers?

Publicise the extent of volunteering within the community – for example, data from ABS and census, the range of sectors in which volunteers work and the diverse profiles of volunteers and volunteering activity.

Events such as National Volunteer Week are important acknowledgements.