

# Involving Volunteers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

## Introduction

People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds make an important contribution to volunteering in Australia. While this remains a largely under-researched area, particularly in emerging communities, there is growing evidence that many thousands of CALD Australians volunteer both within and outside their communities<sup>1</sup>.

Many organisations would like to involve volunteers from diverse cultures, but some are unsure of how to engage with CALD communities. In this information sheet we will look at tips for engaging with CALD communities, and for recruiting and managing volunteers from diverse backgrounds.

<sup>1</sup> – Australian Multicultural Foundation and Volunteering Australia (2005) unreleased research

## Benefits for Organisations

Organisations effective at engaging CALD volunteers recognise the many benefits this brings. These include:

- Widening the pool of potential volunteers
- Volunteers from diverse backgrounds and experiences bring new perspectives
- Raising cultural awareness amongst both paid staff and volunteers
- Strengthening positive relationships with the local community
- Servicing clients or service users more effectively

## Handy Hints for Recruiting

It can be daunting for organisations to know the best ways to engage with their local CALD communities. The following handy hints form a good foundation for developing strong recruitment processes.

- Research your local demographics. Know who your local CALD community groups are and build relationships with them. Make contact with relevant community leaders.
- Recruit a CALD volunteer or a team of volunteers from different cultural groups to assist you in developing a CALD volunteering strategy for your organisation.
- The most effective way of distributing information into different ethnic-specific communities is face-to-face communication. Information presented in this format is often seen as being more trustworthy when a “person” rather than an “institution” delivers it. Work with your local CALD communities to provide information sessions on volunteering, and engage CALD volunteers in this process. There is no better ambassador for volunteering than volunteers themselves.
- Advertise your local volunteer jobs and information on volunteering in local ethnic community newspapers – these are often widely read within the different community groups.
- You can also advertise your volunteer opportunities free of charge on Volunteering Australia’s online volunteer matching service GoVolunteer – [www.govolunteer.com.au](http://www.govolunteer.com.au)
- Translate your promotional materials into the language(s) of local CALD communities.

- Streamline your recruitment processes. Make it easy for prospective volunteers to get involved. Cut down on the amount of paperwork required to complete, OR, include this as part of your interview process. Too many forms to fill out can be seen as a barrier to volunteering.
- Create networks with other mainstream community groups e.g. local council, Volunteer Resource Centre, Centrelink multicultural staff, and work together to support culturally diverse volunteers and communities.
- Be aware of your use of language – the concept of volunteering can be interpreted and understood in many different ways. Think of other ways you can describe (in plain language) what it means to be a volunteer e.g. use phrases such as “help your community”. Ensure your promotional materials reflect this. Enlist the help of your local Migrant Resource Centre to gain their feedback from a non-English speaking point of view. Seek feedback from community leaders.
- Think about what your organisation can offer volunteers and make sure you advertise and promote this. What you might think is obvious may not be obvious to people unfamiliar with your organisation. Remember volunteering is a three way process that needs to support the organisation, the individual volunteer and the customer.

## **Other Things to Consider**

- Ensure your workplace culture is one that embraces and is inclusive of diversity, and that this is reflected in your organisational policies and procedures. You may need to translate some of these into plain language to ensure all information provided to your CALD volunteers is understood.
- Consider whether you need to provide cross-cultural awareness training to staff (both paid and volunteer).

- Don't assume that all cultures are the same, especially concerning gender differences.
- Well-established communities will differ from new and emerging communities in the issues they face, their level of English proficiency, and their experiences with the wider Australian community.
- Be flexible in your management and support of CALD volunteers. This may include the need to provide extra support to these volunteers such as establishing a mentor or buddy system.
- Offer training to your volunteers – have a look at Volunteering Australia's National Volunteer Skills Centre for free training materials [www.nvsc.org.au](http://www.nvsc.org.au)
- Ensure that all volunteers are matched to a suitable volunteer role and are given a clear position description with agreed upon duties and levels of responsibility.


## Common Concerns

Organisations can sometimes feel that it's too hard to involve volunteers from diverse backgrounds. Some of the most common concerns and ways to overcome these barriers are outlined below.

### **People from CALD backgrounds do not want to volunteer for mainstream organisations**

Volunteering Australia's work on diversity within volunteering shows us that CALD volunteers are often seeking ways to connect with the wider community and to access skills and pathways to employment. They are also seeking volunteering opportunities that allow them to make a genuine contribution, rather than being made to feel a token participant from a CALD background.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> – Volunteering Australia's response to the Department for Victorian Communities discussion paper: 'Patterns of volunteering in emerging communities'



As outlined in the handy hints, make sure you are explicit about what your organisation can offer volunteers. For example, a reference, work experience, and the opportunity to practice English conversation.

### **Involving volunteers from CALD backgrounds is too demanding on organisational resources**

Remember that creating an environment that is inclusive of diversity and supported by organisational policies and procedures is a vital component of best practice in volunteer management.


Don't forget to network – consult with your local community (both mainstream and ethnic-specific organisations as well as your local council) as you may find that many of them have already developed internal organisational policies and strategies to assist them in their support and management of CALD volunteers. These organisations may be willing to share these resources, and allow you to use them as a guide for your own policies and processes.

Look at the skills within your existing volunteer pool and consider setting up a volunteer buddy system to provide additional support to new volunteers.

The organisations listed below under Further Resources will assist you in how to best engage and work with CALD communities.

### **Language barriers are too difficult to overcome. How do I communicate with CALD volunteers?**

Ensure volunteer orientation includes lots of face to face communication, and that you allow enough time to go through each aspect of your organisation such as internal policies and procedures. Have things provided in a written format as well, but remember that people have different levels of literacy.



Understand that some people from CALD backgrounds are hesitant to ask too many questions, in case they are seen as being impolite. Try and confirm volunteers understanding through seeking verbal acknowledgement. Another way of communicating with volunteers could be to incorporate the use of symbols and/or graphics into your orientation e.g. for occupational health and safety issues, a picture showing the correct way of how to lift can be used rather than a written explanation.

Remember to use simple English avoiding the use of jargon and acronyms, and that the most important framework on which to base all communication is one of mutual respect.

## **Remember**

Organisations that effectively involve volunteers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities are often successful because:

- they get to know CALD communities within their local area
- they recruit volunteers from these communities
- they recognise and respect difference and educate themselves about different cultures
- they have policies that are inclusive of diversity.

## Further Resources and Services

These organisations can assist you in developing strategies for linking into and building relationships with your local CALD community groups.

- **Migrant Resource Centres and other Migrant Settlement Services** work closely with newly arrived migrants to Australia. They are a good place to contact to find out who the relevant diverse community groups are for you to make contact with.

Contact details for your local migrant resource centre can be obtained from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

[http://www.immi.gov.au/grants/mrc\\_msa\\_b.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/grants/mrc_msa_b.htm)

- Your **local council** may be able to provide you with demographics for your area. The Australian Government Directory lists contact details for all the local councils across Australia. You can access the directory at:

<http://www.agd.com.au/browse/Government/Local>

- **The Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA)** is the Australian peak body promoting multiculturalism, community harmony and social justice. Their website also contains information on some of the larger multicultural communities in Australia. [www.fecca.org.au](http://www.fecca.org.au)

- Work with your **State Volunteering Centre or local Volunteer Resource Centre** to develop your recruitment and management of diverse volunteers. Contact details for your closest centre can be found at:

<http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/about/vanetwork.html>

- **National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI)** – database of accredited translators and interpreters, Australia Wide.

The database can be accessed at: <http://www.naati.com.au/>

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