



Engaging Newly Arrived Migrants in Volunteering

The Volunteer Management Activity aims to increase opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their broader community through volunteering. Volunteering Tasmania are using a co-design approach to work together with key stakeholders to help understand the challenges and needs of newly arrived migrants and identify and implement strategies to support them into volunteering.

Background

The project commenced in August 2021, and by the end of the year, initial stakeholder consultation had been undertaken with a total of 32 individuals and organisations State-wide. The consultation involved newly arrived migrants who were volunteering as well as those unsuccessful in gaining volunteer roles, volunteer involving organisations and specialist multicultural agencies.

At the same time, a Volunteer Network Group was established with State-wide representation from newly arrived migrants, specialist agencies who provide support for migrants, and volunteer involving organisations. The group has been meeting regularly since February 2022, following a co-design process to work through the challenges facing newly arrived migrants wishing to volunteer, and for volunteer involving organisations engaging and supporting those volunteers. This has involved group members sharing their own experiences as well as undertaking further community consultation.

The group designed a survey which was distributed in March 2022 and received 37

responses from newly arrived migrants and 34 responses from volunteer involving organisations. To gain deeper understanding of some of the common issues which started to arise, the group then undertook additional conversations with their stakeholders. At least 20 individuals, both migrants and organisations, were consulted through this process to share their experiences and thoughts on improving the experience of volunteering for migrants.

Information from all these sources was considered and discussed when the group met in Campbell Town in March 2022. During this process, common issues arose across all data collection methods and several themes were identified.





Common Themes

During the co-design process and community consultations, the following themes emerged when discussing challenges and opportunities:

- Terminology – definitions and understanding of volunteering
- Onboarding processes – recruitment, induction, training
- Expectations – by volunteers and volunteer involving organisations
- Motivations
- Resources and supports
- Systems, policies and procedures
- Racism, bias and prejudice
- Organisational culture



1. Terminology

- Misunderstanding what volunteering means in Australia, unfamiliar term for many
- Confusion between work experience, student placement, internship, and volunteering
- Context of first introduction into volunteering is key in understanding concept
- Informal volunteering not widely recognised
- Volunteering may be perceived as working for free, slave labour, exploitation
- English colloquialism, phrases, cultural context

time willingly
given for the
common
good and
without
financial gain

2. Onboarding

- Complex, time consuming and confusing processes
- Language barrier and digital literacy barrier
- Whose needs are being met through current processes?
- Are the stated requirements actually necessary e.g. Australian drivers licence
- Forms often only ask for country of birth and language spoken rather than heritage and ethnicity, so VIOs might not be meeting cultural needs of volunteers
- It's not clear how to look for volunteering opportunities, let alone apply
- Police check and WWVP application forms very hard to complete and costly. Sometimes need details from past 5 years including police checks from other countries
- Feedback is often not provided to unsuccessful applicants, which leads to discouragement
- VIOs need additional time (and cost) to onboard migrants and to provide ongoing support
- Too theoretical, not enough practical

3. Expectations

Volunteer Involving Organisations

- Reliability and commitment
- Code of conduct, acceptable behaviour
- Assume abilities based on ethnicity
- The 'right' level of English or a certain 'type' of volunteer
- Roles promoted with position descriptions and require high level applications
- Certain length of time committed before giving reference/certificate

Volunteers

- Training, mentorship
- To feel safe, basic WHS
- Sometimes feel exploited if too much is asked of them or if no flexibility
- Sense of belonging, to be included
- Meaningful volunteer roles
- To have qualifications recognised in Aust



4. Motivations of volunteers

- To gain a reference, a certificate of volunteering or points towards visa
- To access opportunities for paid employment
- Helping out in community, giving back
- To expand social networks and connections, friendships
- Opportunities to practice English and improve social skills
- To learn new skills
- Experience in Australian workplace culture
- It is okay for volunteers to seek personal benefit
- Motivations may change
- Can be values clash in motivations from migrants/non migrants
- Many migrants come from cultures with a more collective mindset and see giving back to community as everyone's responsibility (which we might call informal volunteering)

Volunteering can be a great gateway to Australian society – for those who understand what it actually is

5. Resources and supports

- Checks and requirements often expensive, time consuming and complicated
- Extra support needed to fill out forms – police check, WWVP, application, registration
- Volunteers shouldn't be out of pocket for costs e.g. transport - but what about consideration for time? Especially when being encouraged to contribute to an advisory group etc.
- Appreciation e.g. certificates, newsletters, mention at staff meeting etc
- Recognition e.g. award ceremony, significant milestones
- Identity and belonging e.g. pin, name badge, keyring, lanyard
- VIOs need support to know what to do with information around ethnicity and culture

6. Systems, policies and procedures

- Not asking about ethnicity assumes people need to adjust themselves to fit into that workplace and their norms
- Western culture/habit to fill out forms for everything
- Might be unclear what pathway is available for volunteers who may be interested in paid employment
- VIOs often set up to support a certain type of volunteer, now need to adapt

7. Racism, bias, prejudice

- There has been a significant increase in reporting racist complaints to Equal Opportunity Tas in past 3 years
- Invisibility felt by migrants if their needs are not recognised or met
- Blurred lines between volunteering and paid roles may lead to feelings of exploitation
- Organisations often don't measure cultural diversity so how do they know if improving
- Ignorance or not willing to try and understand/accommodate cultural needs of migrants
- Use phrases about feelings and behaviour rather than asking if someone has experienced racism
- Subconscious bias where people naturally prefer people from same background as own
- Migrants may feel need to change name to be more accepted and have access to opportunities
- How to name up some behaviours as racism?
- People perceive racism differently according to their culture and life experience
- Overt racism is no longer fashionable or easily observable, but it still finds expression and can still do long-term harm
- It is impossible that everyone knows everything about other cultures/backgrounds. It's okay to ask about ethnicity/origin country/tradition as long as people are friendly and open-minded
- When migrants are given unequal opportunities and access to resources, and less communication can make the volunteer experience a feeling of racism and bias


Subtle racism and bias is death from 1000 cuts



8. Organisational culture

Need to be open to a range of volunteering relationships, not just what VIO thinks it wants or needs, or what it has traditionally included

- Does the VIO prioritise the volunteer? e.g. induct in person, use plain English
- Need paradigm shift to recognise cultural diversity is a strength in workplace
- An individual needs to feel comfortable and safe to bring whole self to workplace
- Australian Public holidays are based on Christianity and not applicable to many cultures and religions
- Eating food in front of people in some cultures is not polite
- As more migrants are accepted into the volunteering community, the circle will become more diverse, inclusive and forward-looking




Respect us
and trust us

Next steps

Over the next few months, the Volunteer Network Group will continue to meet regularly to review the identified themes and develop solutions to address specific challenges. These solutions will be tested with communities to ensure they are effective and achievable, through a continual improvement process.

Ongoing support and connections will be provided to the Volunteer Network Group and broader interested community, through a Community of Practice which will be facilitated by Volunteering Tasmania. This process will inform the creation of resources and support systems change to improve the capacity of organisations to engage newly arrived migrants in volunteering opportunities.



Friendly greetings
and small talks within
the group make me
feel connected... and
willing to stay with
the organisation



Initial Ideas for Solutions

- A desirable workplace is friendly, patient, inclusive and flexible
- Information sessions to provide accessible overview of volunteering to improve understanding, outline the range of benefits, outline expectations and requirements of VIOs
- Promotional posters in language
- Recognise and celebrate significant events for other cultures
- Translated resources especially for key documents e.g. rights and responsibilities
- Visual reflection of cultural diversity to create welcoming environment where people feel comfortable
- Provide easy and well-supported entry point for first experience
- One-off group volunteer experiences
- Ideas and efforts of migrant volunteers should be treated equally valuable as non-migrant volunteers
- Invite volunteers to participate in decision making
- Minimise what you are asking of volunteers, only require what is essential for the role
- Allocate budget for reimbursement of volunteers out of pocket expense and other supports
- Language support through buddy system, interpreter, communication cards
- Recognise that everyone's ethnicity brings with it behaviours, values, norms
- Tick the box or dot point applications more accessible than paragraph responses
- In person often preferred over phone/online
- Cross cultural awareness or Diversity and Inclusion training for all staff/board/volunteers
- Awareness raising/ education needed for what racism and discrimination actually looks like
- Information or training for migrants about Australian workplace culture
- Allow a safe space for honest conversations around motivations and expectations
- Pathway to volunteering programs to run alongside study courses for international students
- Promote volunteering opportunities through avenues where migrants already engaged
- Referral service for one-on-one support to link migrant with volunteer opportunities
- Establish a collective of VIOs to share learning and resources regarding diversity and inclusion
- Organise social events which embrace cultures and share food
- VIOs should give feedback to volunteer applicants
- Include volunteers as part of the team
- VIOs need support to improve cultural safety
- Volunteers should receive training opportunities
- Make sure there is no "us and them" in workplace culture
- VIO be up front about eligibility requirements, selection criteria for roles etc
- Videos with captions
- Low English levels is such a barrier that often the most effective step towards volunteering is to attend English Conversation classes and improve English
- Provide all information in simple English
- Work with Government Departments to review forms using plain English, more inclusive
- Regular check-ins and ongoing communication to ensure needs met
- Support for migrants in writing selection criteria, completing application forms, applying for police check etc
- VIOs must educate themselves continually in cultural sensitivity and workplace inclusion
- A forum where past volunteers share their own volunteering experiences, which helps migrants to gauge how volunteering feels like and thereby encouraging us to make the first step
- Migrant Talent Connector [Home - MT Connector](#)
- Volunteer Passport [Volunteer Passport – weVolunteer](#)