

Volunteer Management Activity

Tasmanian Stakeholder Consultation Summary – Newly Arrived Migrants

December 2021



Background

Volunteering Tasmania has received funding from the Department of Social Services (DSS) to deliver the Australian Government's Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2026.

The Volunteer Management Activity aims to increase opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their broader community through volunteering, by:

- building effective volunteering practices and opportunities within organisations and communities
- increasing the diversity of volunteers
- improving access to information on volunteering
- providing access to the training, resources and support volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) need.

In particular, we will:

- build the capacity of VIOs through online services
- break down barriers to volunteering for three priority groups: people with disability; First Nations People; and newly arrived migrants
- consult and partner with relevant local organisations to develop and deliver the VMA.

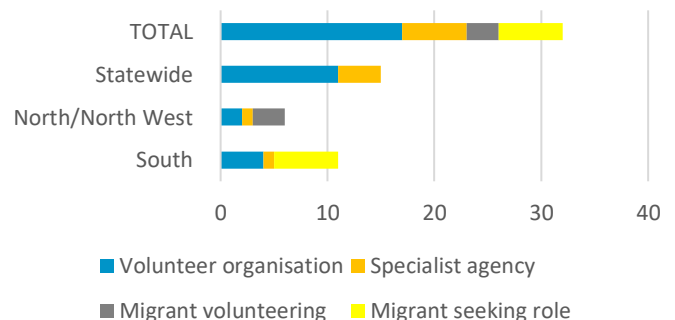
We will be using a co-design approach to understand the needs across each of three identified priority groups and work together with key stakeholders to implement strategies to support volunteering for these groups. The first priority group we are working with and supporting through a co-design approach is newly arrived migrants.

Stakeholder consultations

During November-December 2021, stakeholder consultations were undertaken with a total of 32 individuals and organisations State-wide. Overall, consultations were held with:

- nine newly arrived migrants who are actively seeking roles or currently volunteering
- 17 people representing 12 Volunteer Involving Organisations
- six people representing five specialist agencies

Stakeholder consultation summary





What we heard...

Newly arrived migrants are often encouraged to volunteer to support visa applications or secure employment, and they are also keen to contribute to the community, but often find it difficult to gain opportunities. Volunteer Involving Organisations demonstrated a strong commitment and willingness to engage newly arrived migrant volunteers, recognising the significant benefits to the organisation and to the local community. However, they said they experience operational challenges and often lack resources to provide the adequate supports needed.

The traditional model of volunteering does not seem suited to many migrants who are seeking volunteering experiences as a pathway to employment or permanent residency, suggesting that new approaches are needed to meet the needs of volunteers, as well as organisations.

Key themes

Newly Arrived Migrants

Reasons to volunteer

- To improve employment potential through work experience and job networks
- To expand social networks and connections and gain friendships
- For opportunities to practice English and improve social skills
- To support permanent residency visa or citizenship applications
- To gain a sense of belonging, be involved in and give back to their local community
- When an organisation provides training and allows flexibility in how and when work is undertaken, where everyone is approachable, and which feels comfortable

Challenges faced

- Some volunteer opportunities are only available to people with permanent residency
- Administrative requirements e.g., completing registration forms, induction processes, police checks, Working with Vulnerable People Checks, Australian drivers licence, etc.
- Not receiving any feedback or response when volunteer applications are unsuccessful

Improvement suggestions

- Very important to have welcoming environment where people feel comfortable
- Be aware of cultural differences and language used, tone of language
- Provide translated materials or posters in language, visual reflection of culture
- Hold information sessions to provide an accessible overview of volunteering

Specialist Agencies and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs)

Challenges faced

- Additional time (and cost) needed when onboarding and ongoing to ensure migrant volunteers have understood written information or verbal instructions e.g., requirements and expectations pertaining to a volunteer role
- For some migrant groups, especially refugees, the Hierarchy of Needs is especially pertinent, therefore securing a job, housing, and putting food on the table must come first
- Information is being provided by migration agents and amongst communities which promote the need to volunteer for visa/citizenship applications, without a deeper understanding of what volunteerism means in Australia



- High literacy requirement e.g., Volunteer roles advertised with PDs and selection criteria which makes it difficult to get volunteering role with poor English and low digital literacy skills
- Driver's licence requirement (often Australian licence is specified) and access to reliable transport
- Migrants will sometimes volunteer with an expectation it will lead to a job and leave when it doesn't; or volunteer to receive a certificate/reference and leave once they have received it
- Blurred lines between volunteer and paid roles, risk of migrants being taken advantage of and seen as 'free labour' if they volunteer, particularly if the primary motivation is to find employment
- Definite shift in volunteering profile from retiree to new migrants which reflects changing demographic of local residents and also a changing motivation where the majority of applicants are now seeking volunteering roles as a pathway to employment

Improvement suggestions

- If migrants feel accepted and welcome, can establish meaningful connections, and undertake work of interest to them, this will help ensure they continue volunteering
- Be very flexible, tailor volunteer activities, offer one-off opportunities, allow for family commitments and different cultural concepts of time
- Minimise administration and paperwork, provide a well-supported and easy entry point for first experience as well as extra support through training and induction process
- Prioritise overcoming language barriers- through interpreters (could be family members); pair with volunteer/staff buddy from same culture; communication cards/phrases in language; use accessible language and images of diverse volunteers
- Provide resources written in plain English and/or translated into various languages including resources about rights and responsibilities of volunteers
- Consider means of communication -tick the box or dot point applications are much more accessible than requiring paragraph responses; in person often preferred to phone/email
- Recognise and respect any cultural differences that may need to be taken into account, provide cross-cultural training to staff and existing volunteers
- Be clear and transparent about what the organisation needs
- Allow a safe space for volunteers to be upfront about true motivations and seek to meet those needs - if it's to practice English, place volunteers in roles where they can do this
- Introduce minimum number of hours volunteering required before volunteer certificate or reference is issued
- Establish pathways to volunteering or pathways to employment programs, to run alongside study courses for international students
- Promote volunteer opportunities through avenues where migrants are already engaged -Migrant Resource Centres, Connect Café, English Conversation Groups, sporting clubs, etc.
- Raise awareness and improve understanding amongst new migrants of the role volunteerism plays in Australian society, including formal and informal volunteering and the difference between volunteering and modern slavery
- Establish a referral service to provide one-on-one, targeted support to link migrants with volunteer opportunities
- Establish a collective of VIOs to share learning and resources regarding volunteer inclusion



Identified assumptions

- All people should be provided with the opportunity for a positive volunteer experience
- Volunteering has proven benefits to health and well-being of individuals and community
- The traditional model of volunteering is not accessible to, nor inclusive of, diversity groups
- Additional supports are required for migrants (e.g., needing additional time for induction, to check instructions have been understood)
- There is a need to engage with new demographics such as newly arrived migrants to recruit volunteers from, to fill the projected shortfall in volunteering
- Barriers exist for newly arrived migrants accessing volunteering including English language literacy, online literacy, cost, familiarity with Australian systems
- Newly arrived migrants have different motivations to volunteering than traditional volunteers; namely as a pathway to employment or to support permanent residency or citizenship visa applications
- There are different cohorts within the category of newly arrived migrants which will have different motivations and require different supports to volunteer i.e., refugees and humanitarian visa holders, migrants with skilled working visas, international students, partners and family of people with skilled work or student visas
- VIOs and group convenors may not have the capacity, not be willing or not understand the requirements to support migrants interested in volunteering
- There remains an element of racism in Australian society, along with conscious or unconscious biases and prejudices against migrants

Next steps: Helping shape the future of volunteering for newly arrived migrants

- Through the stakeholder consultation process, we identified suitable participants to join a Volunteer Network Group (VNG). The group includes representatives from volunteer organisations, specialist agencies and migrants wishing to volunteer, from across the state.
- Utilising a co-design process which will be facilitated and supported by Volunteering Tasmania, the group will meet several times between Feb-May 2022 to explore ways of supporting volunteer organisations to develop cultures that welcome and promote volunteering for newly arrived migrants, and to support people from newly arrived migrant backgrounds into volunteering.
- 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.
- It is intended that this process will progress the VMA outcomes, informing the creation of resources and supporting systems change to improve the capacity of organisations to engage newly arrived migrants in volunteering opportunities.