

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. The rate of volunteerism for CALD persons in Australia is 31.4 per cent, compared to 46.5 per cent for those born in Australia, and 41.7 per cent for those born overseas in an English-speaking country.ⁱ

Many organisations would like to involve volunteers from diverse cultures, but some are unsure of how to engage with CALD communities. This Information Sheet looks at tips for engaging with CALD communities, and for recruiting and managing volunteers from diverse backgrounds.

Motivations of Volunteers

Recent research has identified the below as key motivators for CALD identifying volunteers:

- Sense of responsibility to one's community
- A way to stay connected to community and/or culture
- Socialising benefit, allowing volunteers to learn about Australian society and secure employment.
- Giving back to the community
- Distressing past experiences, highlighting inequities and providing a catalyst for charitable behavioursⁱⁱ

Benefits for Organisations

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

- Widening the pool of potential volunteers
- Recognition that volunteers from diverse backgrounds bring new experiences and perspectives
- Raising cultural awareness amongst both employees 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 tips 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
- 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, or, include this as part of your interview process. Too many forms to fill out be a barrier to volunteering.
- Create networks with other mainstream community groups such as your local council, Volunteer Resource Centre, and Centrelink multicultural staff, to 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 ways. Think of other ways you can describe (in plain language) what it means to be a volunteer. For example, 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 community.

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.
- 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.
- 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.

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.

Do not 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

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 to 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 work 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

The below 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.

- Your local council may be able to provide you with demographics for your area
- 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
- Work with your state or territory's Volunteering Peak Body or local Volunteer Resource Centre to develop your recruitment and management of diverse volunteers.
- National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) – database of accredited translators and interpreters, Australia Wide. The database can be accessed at:
www.naati.com.au.