

BREAKING BARRIERS:

Unlocking volunteering opportunities for newly arrived migrants



Introduction



Volunteer numbers are reducing in Ballarat, exacerbated by COVID-19 and the resultant economic downturn. This has put pressure on both the supply and demand side of formal volunteering. Many people who used to volunteer can no longer afford to provide free time. Meanwhile additional pressure is being placed on volunteer organisations to deliver increased services to people impacted by the economic downturn. This has led to a deficit in formal volunteer numbers.

Organisations that rely on volunteers have to find new strategies and cohorts of people to target to keep volunteer numbers up. Migrants currently make up 11% of Ballarat's population. It is worthwhile for volunteering involved organisations (VIO) to know the barriers to volunteering for migrants and to find ways to address these barriers to encourage newly arrived migrants into formal volunteering.

This document is based on discussions with VIOs and members of the migrant community in Ballarat. It is a summary of common barriers faced with volunteering and some concrete actions that can be taken by organisations seeking volunteers.



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Understand the migrant journey

It takes time to settle into a new community where cultural norms, systems, and language may be different. Priorities for newly arrived migrants are 1) self, 2) family, 3) work, and only then would volunteering be considered. Newly arrived migrants are also often unfamiliar with the concept of formal volunteering.

- **Cultural awareness training:** Ensure VIO staff receive cultural awareness training on engaging newly arrived migrants.
- **Read up:** Use data to understand where the main migrant populations come from to gain a better understanding of their concept of volunteerism. This will help VIOs prepare suitable messaging and information material.
- **Target the right people:** Newly arrived migrants are more likely to volunteer after 12 months of arrival. It may be more appropriate to target longer term migrants who can encourage newly arrived migrants to join them in volunteering.

language barrier

Language proficiency is a barrier for many migrants and they struggle to comprehend information provided in English. This prevents migrants from fully understanding the requirements and expectations of volunteer positions

- **Be inclusive:** Translate information material into the most common languages used by the dominant migrant groups.



02

- **Onboarding services:** Work together with local multicultural organisations to see if there is access to a volunteer with the right language skills to assist with the application process and navigating through compliance requirements.
- **Use available resources:** There are resources available on the Volunteer Victoria website, including local language videos that talk about volunteering and what it means.
- **Leverage existing ESL classes:** Ask a local ESL provider if you can talk to their class about volunteering opportunities.



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Flexible and supportive environment

Migrants are reluctant to volunteer because they may have experienced discrimination and mistreatment after arriving in Australia.

- **Welcoming sessions:** Consider inviting migrant groups to join community welcoming sessions or ask local migrant community leaders or peak organisations if you can speak to their community to discuss volunteering and what it means
- **Culturally appropriate adjustments:** Be prepared to make adjustments to the workplace to take into account cultural differences, particularly related to religious and gender norms. For example, providing a quiet place for prayer breaks; having female-only volunteer activities; having a halal kitchen space; having flexible work hours.
- **Use a buddy system:** Provide a buddy to enable more one-on-one support.
- **Training on anti-discrimination:** As part of staff and volunteer induction, have a session on cultural awareness and include training on anti-discrimination supported by a clear anti-discrimination policy.
- **A safe space:** Be clear and transparent about the VIO's needs and allow space for migrant volunteers to express their own needs. Be creative and flexible in addressing those needs.

Leverage what's important

Most newly arrived migrants are anxious to get into the workplace. Volunteering is an excellent pathway to employment and this can be leveraged to encourage more migrants to consider volunteering. Volunteering also improves community connectivity and language skills required for the workplace.

- **Key messaging:** Adjust recruitment material to focus on what's important for newly arrived migrants.
- **Showcase success:** Highlight success stories that demonstrate how volunteering is an effective pathway to employment and stronger community networks.
- **Engage directly:** Don't wait for migrants to contact you - engage directly with multicultural groups, and migrant resource centres to promote volunteering opportunities as a pathway to employment.
- **Talk to employment agencies:** Consider partnerships with local employment agencies to include volunteering as a way for people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to gain work experience as a pathway to employment.



04



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Simplified Information and Application Process

Language difficulties and poor computer literacy can make the volunteer application and compliance process overwhelming, creating a barrier to inclusion.

- **Multiple formats:** Ensure information about volunteer opportunities is available in various formats including different languages or readable in different languages using AI capabilities through the website.
- **Clear communication:** Use plain language and avoid jargon in information about volunteering opportunities, including on websites, advertisements, and application materials.
- **Alternative application methods:** Offer options like phone interviews with a bi-lingual friend or family member present, or in-person assistance with applications and on-boarding particularly regarding compliance requirements.
- **Subsidies:** Consider providing subsidies for compliance requirements where a free volunteer option is not available.
- **Know the process:** Some newly arrived migrants may not have all the documentation required to complete compliance checks. Speak to the relevant agencies on what to do if some of the documentation is missing. Find the solutions ahead of time and know the answers before going too far down the process.
- **Be Open:** Ensure that information states clearly that people from diverse backgrounds are welcome.
- **Make roles flexible:** A common misconception is that newly arrived migrants have low skill levels, which is not always the case. Be open to adjusting or finding roles that will allow volunteers to use the full suite of their skills thereby providing opportunities for professional and personal development. This will engender greater job satisfaction and word-of-mouth referrals.

Transport

Transport can be a significant barrier for newly arrived migrants who wish to volunteer. Organisations need to consider how volunteers will get to and from their volunteering location.



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- **Take out the thinking:** Let people know how to get to the site. Have clear instructions with public transport routes, and clear instructions on stops and distances. Have this accessible on the website or when information is sent to prospective volunteers.
- **Flexible start and finish times:** Offer flexible start and finish times to align with public transport schedules.
- **Reimbursement for transport costs:** Consider providing reimbursement for transport costs, to encourage newly arrived migrants to volunteer.
- **Assistance with transport arrangements:** Help volunteers to plan their journey
- **Providing transport:** In some cases, organisations might need to provide transport directly, such as through a volunteer driver or by hiring a community transport service.



07

Use the gatekeepers

Newly arrived migrants tend to rely on members of the existing migrant community or faith-based organisations for information and guidance. The community leader will be the Gatekeeper for information and advice going to newly arrived migrants.

- **Know your community:** VIOs should be aware of who the faith-based and/or community leaders are in each of the migrant communities in Ballarat. This information will be available from local migrant resource centres.
- **Create relationships:** VIOs should make the effort to meet and become known to the relevant community leaders. This can be done by joining activities supported or hosted by multicultural groups in Ballarat.
- **Makes things relational, not transactional:** If the community gatekeeper gives their endorsement for a program or an organisation, many of the other contextual barriers will fall away, particularly those barriers related to different values. This requires building a relationship of trust with the migrant community, which requires time and effort.
- **Be active, not passive:** Passive recruitment processes will not work. Having accessible and clear information on a website is unlikely to draw in newly arrived migrants. The VIO will need to actively approach multicultural groups and engage in discussions regarding information sharing.
- **Consider incentives:** Ensure messaging focuses on mutual benefits and that these benefits are concrete rather than the usual “feel-good” outcome of volunteering. VIOs may also consider other non-monetary incentives common for volunteering in non-western countries, such as pick up and/or drop off (see transport) or the supply of lunch.

For more information regarding volunteering opportunities in Ballarat contact:

Lisa Hall
Volunteer Coordinator
lisa.hall@ballaratfoundation.org.au

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The Ballarat Foundation acknowledges the Wadawurrung people, the traditional owners of the lands and waterways in our region. We recognise their diversity, resilience, and the ongoing place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold in our communities. We pay our respects to the Elders, both past and present, and commit to working together in the spirit of mutual understanding, respect and reconciliation.

