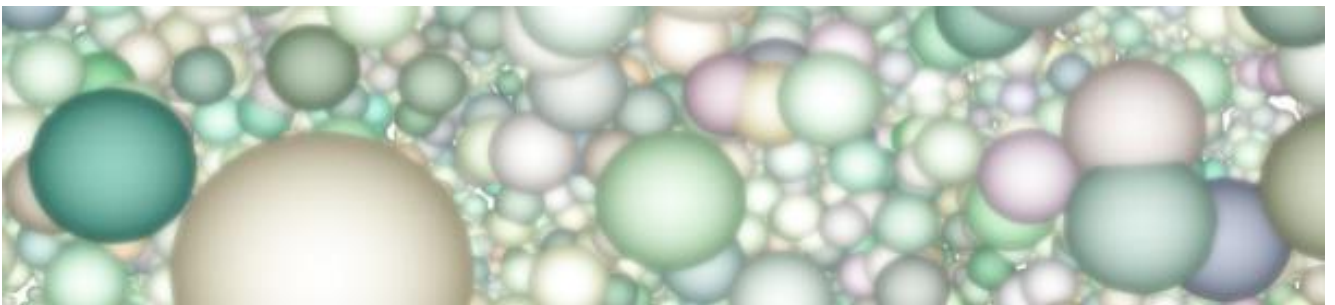


Victoria ALIVE
Gippsland Community Forum

FINAL REPORT ON CONSULTATION FINDINGS



Avise la fin Consulting

02 October 2019

Acknowledgements

Avisé la fin Consulting acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which this consultation took place, and pays respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the collaborators in this project – the Victoria ALIVE project team and Kate Stuart from Volunteering Victoria, and Department of Health and Human Services personnel from the Participation and Inclusion Division. Without their collegiate input, this event would not have achieved the significant outcomes that it has.

Several people volunteered on the day for roles that supported these consultations; we thank them for taking on their role on the day with grace, enthusiasm and skill.

Finally, a special thank you to our guest speakers on the day – volunteers Marnie Higgs, Rosalie O’Neill and Julie Lamborne, together with organisational representatives Jenna Chia and Eunice Donovan – whose powerful stories had such an impact on participants, and engendered rich discussions during and after the forum.

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Introduction

This brief report summarises the findings from consultations undertaken as part of the Victoria ALIVE Gippsland Community Forum held on Tuesday 20 August 2019 at La Trobe Community Health Service in Morwell.

A total of 27 participants registered for the forum, being:

- one volunteer
- one representative from Department of Health and Human Services' Participation and Inclusion Division
- four representatives from Victoria ALIVE project team, and one representative from Volunteering Victoria (who acts as a local resource and network coordinator for Gippsland region)
- nineteen representatives from eighteen organisations
- one student on placement.

Seven (37%) of the organisational representatives at the forum had volunteer coordination/management roles in their organisations, and two had roles in organisational governance. Two attendees came from outside the Gippsland area (one organisational representative and the student).

Methods

The consultation phase of this forum involved all participants in exploring issues and challenges in providing meaningful opportunities for volunteers with disability. A series of questions were designed to elicit information about the topic from a community organisation’s perspective and a complementary set of questions explored the issues and challenges from the perspective of a person with disability seeking a volunteering role (see Table 1). Tips were provided to aid discussion (see Attachment 1).

Table 1: Consultation questions exploring issues and challenges

Volunteer perspective	Organisational perspective
1. What difficulties might prospective volunteers with disability face in finding out about opportunities in the local area for them? What strategies do volunteers have for checking out organisational culture and values?	1. What challenges do organisations face in developing pathways for volunteers with disability? Consider organisational culture – how is it a driver or a blocker?
2. What makes volunteers with disability feel more confident about finding a meaningful volunteer role, and being successful in it? Could they progress their skills?	2. What challenges do organisations face in recruiting and matching volunteers with disability into meaningful roles? Are organisations able to best utilise the skills volunteers develop?
3. What contributes to a volunteer with disability feeling well-supported in an organisation, being ‘culturally safe’?	3. What challenges might an organisation face in supporting volunteers with disability in their roles?

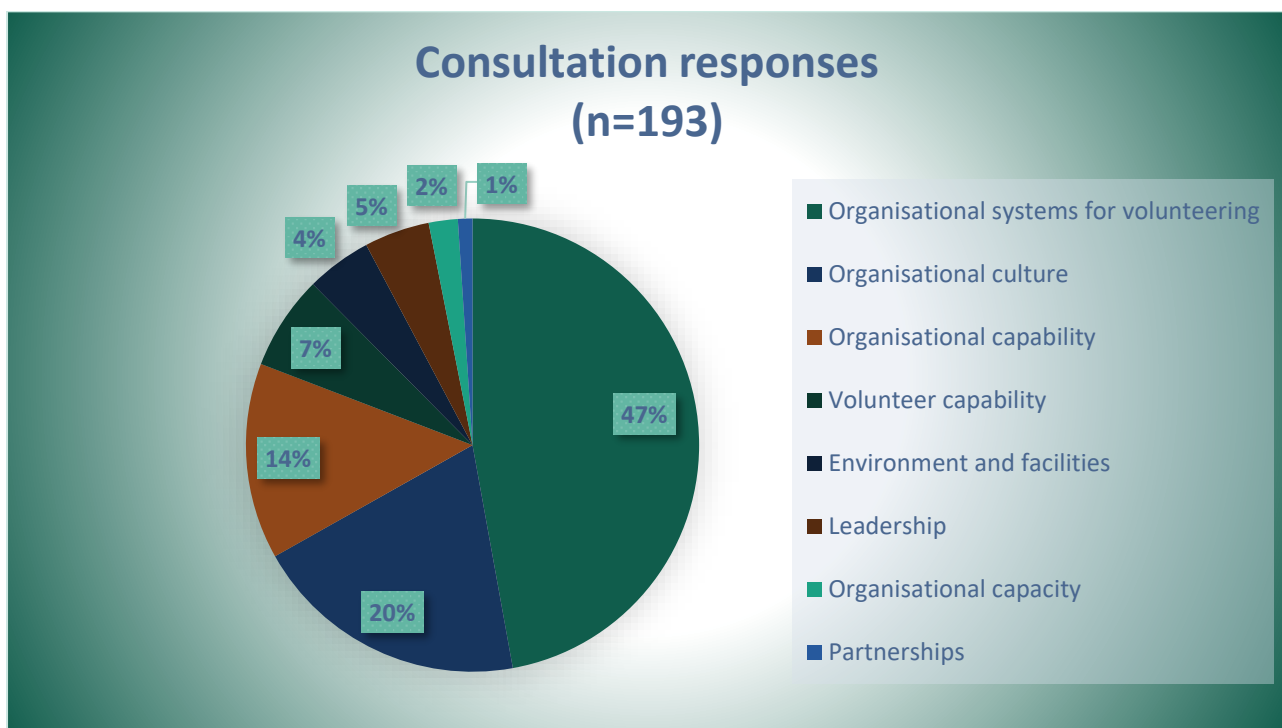
Following the forum, all discussion points were aggregated, analysed and themed. The thematic analysis is provided in this report, with issues from both perspectives consolidated under a number of domains, to inform future actions. For comparative purposes across the regional forums in this project, the domains identified in the first forum (Eastern Metro forum) have been used and additional themes considered, where relevant.

Findings

Across the issues identification consultation, a total of 193 responses were collected from consultations across all table groups. These responses reflected table groups' discussions against the series of questions asked from two perspectives: that of an organisation wanting to provide meaningful opportunities for volunteers with disability; and, that of a person with disability seeking a volunteering opportunity. As the questions explored similar concepts, *albeit* from those different perspectives, the data from both perspectives has been aggregated to provide a more coherent analysis, which may be useful in determining what recommendations and future actions Volunteering Victoria, local organisations and other stakeholders might consider meaningful.

The data from responses has been analysed and a series of domains created (see Figure 1), together with a summary of the issues under each domain area. The domains are: organisational culture; leadership; organisational capacity; organisational capability; volunteer capability; organisational systems for volunteering; organisational environment and facilities; and, partnerships. In consultations in other regions, measuring outcomes, consumer participation and other un-themed discussion also featured as domains.

Figure 1: Consultation responses - issues and challenges for meaningful volunteering opportunities for people living with disability



A summary of key points relating to each of these domains is reported below. For each domain, the data may be reported against several areas of interest.

Organisational culture

As with previous fora, organisational culture was one of the significant themes in participants' comments in this Gippsland forum (n=38). This domain has been broken down into a number of contributing dimensions – valuing volunteering by people with disability; organisational commitment; abilities-focused approaches; equity; transparency; and, cultural safety.

Valuing volunteering by people living with disability

This was the dimension of organisational culture which attracted the greatest number of comments in the forum (n=21). Participants spoke of:

- The need for organisations to adopt a broader culture of inclusion, where diversity is embraced and appreciated, backed by organisational policy and practice
- Having a cultural lens where the organisation sees people's capabilities, not their disabilities, and being able to see the potential in all people
- Not just seeing people with disabilities as clients or consumers, but as fellow workers, volunteers and indeed organisational leaders as well
- Organisational cultures that can be either a driver for or a blocker of positive change, and the importance of leadership in driving change
- Enabling cultural change to overcome stigma, negative attitudes, fear and preconceptions
- Seeing cultural change in action, so that volunteers with disability feel welcome and included.

Organisational commitment

While not a strong feature of discussion (n=1), participants reported that overt messages of inclusion and welcome were important ways to demonstrate organisational commitment – for example, through pictures, posters and banners that showed positive and diverse imagery and language.

Abilities-focused approaches

A small number of participants spoke of organisations adopting person-centred, abilities-focused approaches to working with volunteers with disability (n=2), where organisations had a culture of promoting freedom and independence, and supporting skills development.

Equity

Several participants spoke about equity in approach (n=5), with comments relating to people with disability being treated equitably and respectfully, and organisations seeing the potential in every individual - in turn reinforcing a culture of inclusion.

Transparency

A small number of participants (n=4) commented about the importance of organisations being transparent. In addition to signs and symbols that advocate inclusion in the workplace, participants suggested that potential volunteers with disability would welcome opportunities to explore organisational culture and values, and identified ways in which this could be achieved e.g. meeting with existing volunteers to discuss culture.

Cultural safety

Cultural safety for people with disabilities was not as significant a theme in this forum as in some other forums in this series (n=5). Comments included:

- The importance of organisations creating a safe space to support volunteers to achieve their goals, and to be recognised for success
- The importance of overt symbols indicating inclusion and cultural safety e.g. messages in email signature blocks, flags and other symbols and signs

- Cultural safety means the organisation has an awareness of and sensitivity towards an individual's unique needs
- Trust and sound relationships can only be built in an environment that is culturally safe
- Organisations having an awareness that paid staff can often be blockers of growth of a new culture.

Leadership

Although not a main focus of discussion (n=9), participants noted the importance of leadership in enabling cultural and systems change.

- Senior leaders enable change to build inclusion, and effectively manage risks and structural barriers that prohibit change.
- Leaders are accountable for cultural change and corporate social responsibility.
- It is important that leaders focus on cultural change that is inclusive of both paid and unpaid workers.
- Approachable leaders and managers promote communication and feedback from those less empowered in the organisation.
- Leadership in human resources may be required to strengthen focus on its volunteer workforce.

One group commented that the Victorian Government graduate program had not recruited any candidates with disability, which could be perceived as lack of leadership from government.

Organisational capacity

For the purposes of this report, organisational capacity is defined as the amount of time and (human and other) resources required to achieve a particular outcome or performance level.

This was a much smaller domain in the day's discussions (n=4). Participants commented broadly on lack of funding allocation and resources for managing volunteers and, in particular, lack of shared resourcing. One group spoke of budget limitations to fund equipment and modifications for volunteers with disability.

Organisational capability

For the purposes of this report, capability is defined as the competencies (skills, knowledge and strengths), attributes, attitudes and behaviours required, and the ability to use these to achieve a particular outcome or performance level.

This was a significant domain under discussion (n=27). This domain has been further analysed under these dimensions: commitment to build capability and cultural safety; training and professional development of staff; staff skills, competencies and behaviours; reflective practice; and, specific volunteer role/s.

Commitment to build organisational capability

Participants (n=6) commented on the need for policy to guide practice in building capability and of being able to demonstrate progressive change through policy implementation around diversity and inclusion in organisational activity and practice. One group highlighted programs such as the Rainbow Tick, which hold organisations accountable for building organisational capability (*albeit* in other areas of inclusion); could a similar program exist for people with disability, or inclusion broadly?

Training and professional development of staff

Training requirements for staff featured in some discussions (n=4), although not as strongly as in other forums. Staff training is needed to build knowledge around the many different types of disability and the potential needs that might arise in supporting a volunteer with disability; one group was quite specific in noting that some training may need to be tailored to meet the needs of an individual volunteer, to enable success.

One group again emphasised the need for human resource personnel to receive targeted training, to ensure that they understood legislative requirements and could apply these in practice confidently.

Skills, competency and behaviours

Building on training outcomes, improved staff skills and competencies featured in several comments (n=14).

The range of discussion included:

- Staff having the skills and confidence to have meaningful and respectful communications with volunteers with disability, to understand their motivations, aspirations, skills and needs
- Staff being aware of their own negativity, preconceptions, biases and prejudices, and actively seeking to address these, and organisations having strategies to manage negative attitudes and behaviours
- Actively working to change attitudes and behaviours about roles for volunteers with disability.

Reflective practice

One group commented on the importance of reflective practice in building an understanding of individual, team and organisational limitations, and to give these limitations context, in order to inform potential change and improvement strategies.

Specialist volunteer role

The need for a specialist role to support volunteers and staff working with volunteers was flagged by two groups in the day's discussions, through highlighting the need for a role which requires specific skills in managing volunteers, especially the skills to appreciate and bring out the best in people.

Organisational systems for volunteering

As may be expected, systems development, implementation and review featured strongly in the discussion, with 91 responses. These have been grouped under headings reflecting processes within systems for working with, supporting and managing volunteers: systems planning, implementation and review; accessibility and accessible application processes; recruitment, matching and onboarding processes; volunteers' experience and pathway; mentoring and support; performance management; and, feedback.

Planning/re-designing the system

Groups commented on the importance of developing and implementing a well-planned system for working with volunteers with disability, or review and re-design of an existing system that it is not fit-for-purpose for working with people with disability (n=10). A small number of participants spoke of organisations undertaking an audit or needs analysis, to better understand gaps in systems requirements and the process for building a fit-for-purpose system, although some acknowledged that they *'may not know what they don't know'*. To that end, some participants sought guidance and information, together with resources to effect change.

Participants also spoke of understanding and addressing potential risks associated with working with volunteers with disability, and having a systematic approach for managing their work health and safety, alongside managing their support needs.

One group spoke of the need to build into their system an evaluation /measurement component, so that they could know whether they were meeting their systems performance goals, and how consistently they were doing this.

Accessible information, opportunities and application processes

The number of comments (n=25) about building accessibility into the system underpins its importance in achieving successful volunteer and organisational outcomes. Several comments focused on strengthening information access for volunteers, strongly suggesting a preference for a centralised database and 'one-stop-

shop' for people with disabilities who were seeking volunteering opportunities, which could also benefit organisations seeking volunteers. They did caution, however, that care needs to be taken to ensure that information was accessible in terms of language and media, if this was to succeed, as many potential recruits had difficulties accessing information that was meaningful to them, and were put off even more when industry jargon was used. A range of media were suggested, including websites, social media, newspapers, radio and word of mouth. Further, participants encouraged organisations to think about the depth of information that could be provided in an accessible way, to streamline the process as much as possible (e.g. having information about next steps as part of an application form).

One group identified the challenges of living in a regional and rural area, especially if one lives outside of the three major centres – the tyranny of distance and limited transport options.

Recruitment

Participants made specific comments about the recruitment process (n=18), and some encouraged organisations to explore barriers and blockages in current recruiting processes to assist in building a better system. Successful recruitment begins with statements of inclusion in the recruitment documentation – as one participant put it, *'I need to see that I will be welcome'*. Role clarity, underpinned by a well-written position description, was seen as a critical early step.

Face-to-face verbal opportunities to discuss the process and the role were appreciated, as was supporting documentation. Volunteers spoke of the importance of being asked what they wanted from the opportunity, and valued transparency and accountability in the recruitment process, as well as having a key contact throughout the process.

Some queried why organisations did not think the same way about a thorough recruitment and onboarding process for volunteers, as they do for a paid workforce, while others criticised mainstream recruitment processes as being flawed.

Participants were keen to see a commitment to flexible approaches to volunteering embedded in the recruitment process, and in practice all along the volunteer pathway.

Matching

Comments about matching (n=9) confirmed the importance of this step in setting up the volunteer for success. Participants saw early skills development as a legitimate part of the matching process, along with modifying roles and profiling task and skill requirements to better enable sound matching with the volunteer. Again, a position description that clearly articulated skills requirements and role tasks underpinned successful matching.

Onboarding

The importance of onboarding processes was discussed by some groups (n=5). A fit-for-purpose induction program, guided by specific policy for volunteers, was thought essential to ensure success. Those managing induction need to be mindful of use of industry jargon.

One group suggested the benefits of a volunteer with disability developing a one-page information sheet for other workers, that helps to describe what they can and like to do, as well as ways in which other workers can best provide support and help them settle in to the role.

The volunteering experience - role, pathway and environment

The volunteer experience featured in several discussions about systems (n=10), with a key point being a system that empowers volunteers with disability. The system needs to consider:

- How the organisation actively involves volunteers, paid staff and community in strengthening inclusion
- How to involve volunteers with disability in the broader organisation e.g. team meetings, staff social activities, recognition practices
- Creating pathways for volunteers, to build their capabilities and to leverage the benefits to the organisation of a volunteer's improved capabilities
- How to ensure volunteers have access to human resources processes e.g. grievance, performance management
- How to recognise and reward volunteers, and acknowledge their contribution to the organisation and community
- How best to keep in contact with volunteers
- How to enable flexible approaches that take account of volunteer's with disabilities needs in other spheres of their lives.

Mentoring and support

The need for high quality mentoring and support of volunteers was discussed (n=8). Support needs to be flexible, tailored, and adequately resourced as part of normal day-to-day operations. Support could be provided through mentoring, buddying and having organisational champions whose role would be to *'support people with disabilities being able to access opportunities, present their skills and be seriously considered'*.

Managing performance

Participants (n=3) supported the application of performance management processes for volunteers with disability and saw this as an opportunity for formal positive feedback over and above informal feedback, as well as to set goals for the future.

Feedback

Comments (n=3) were included about feedback mechanisms in organisations. One participant queried if feedback is given routinely. Others saw this as a way of providing meaningful and regular feedback to volunteers with disability, and of encouraging two-way communication.

Organisational environment and facilities

Several comments related to concerns regarding constraints in respect of facilities, environment and equipment (n=9). Concerns were raised about the challenge of providing a fully accessible physical work environment in the absence of universal design approaches to facilities, as well as limited transport access, accessible print media and hearing loops, and meeting work health and safety requirements for people with disability.

One group spoke of creating inclusive environments for people with non-physical disabilities (e.g. quiet spaces for people with sensory disabilities). Another group spoke of the importance of making settings less clinical.

Volunteer capability

Several comments were made in this area (n=13), relating to building skills and competencies and the volunteer's experience of the organisation.

Building competencies

A major area with respect to volunteer capability related to building competencies and skills (n=6). Skills building related to:

- Accessible training opportunities – either in-house or external
- Knowing one's rights and responsibilities

- Being able to work confidently and competently with others, being part of a team
- Building communication and social skills
- Additional opportunities to use the skills that they bring to the job or learn on the job.

Volunteer experience and autonomy

The other dimension which contributes to volunteer capability is having a positive volunteering experience (n=7). Volunteer experience was enhanced by being able to follow their passions, having a key role in what they love doing, having stretch goals, and building skills. Volunteers want to feel valued for who they are (how they see themselves as well as how others see them) and for what they do. Volunteers want to be able to *'have a go'* and have the freedom to be their authentic selves. They want to be included, not excluded – this means in relation to their skills as well. Volunteers with disability are encouraged when they see other people with disabilities succeed in the organisation, as they can then see a pathway for themselves as well.

A great volunteer experience begins with being able to be confident that they see the real organisation from the outset – that is, they know the organisation's values and culture and choose to volunteer with the organisation because it is a great fit.

TOP TIPS FROM THE DAY

Ensure the work environment is inclusive of all people; organisations have a responsibility for enabling inclusion. Organisations need a policy on inclusion; volunteers need to see this in action.

Create a welcoming and non-clinical setting, with pictures and banners that celebrate diversity.

Build a workforce that has positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion; this means organisations need to invest in overcoming negative attitudes and stigma. Paid workers and other volunteers can sometimes create hurdles and barriers to an inclusive, safe culture.

Preconceptions about disability exist – organisations need to get past this, to see capabilities, not disabilities.

Ensure every volunteer with disability has an individualised, clear and comprehensive position description, undertakes a thorough induction process and has easy access to organisational information.

Each volunteer with disability can develop, with organisational assistance, a one-pager which outlines their abilities and the support they require, as a resource to support their inclusion in the organisation.

Skilled matching ensures best outcomes – for volunteers and for organisations.

Volunteers need supervisors and managers who know how to appreciate and bring out the best in people.

Maintain positive and open communication throughout the volunteer's pathway – this may need different processes and media for different volunteers.

Volunteers feel appreciated when they receive meaningful feedback.

Work towards having one centralised source of information about opportunities for volunteering e.g. Go Volunteer has a *disability* category to enable filtering for volunteering roles.

Build performance management systems for volunteers to enable positive appraisal.

ATTACHMENT 1

Consultation with participants

TAKING A VOLUNTEER PERSPECTIVE

You will have about 25 minutes to discuss 3 questions.

1. What difficulties might prospective volunteers with disability face in finding out about opportunities in the local area for them? What strategies do volunteers have for checking out organisational culture and values?
2. What makes volunteers with disability feel more confident about finding a meaningful volunteer role, and being successful in it? Could they progress their skills?
3. What contributes to a volunteer with disability feeling well-supported in an organisation, being 'culturally safe'?

When thinking through these questions, consider:

- the diversity of people with disability
- their different aspirations and needs
- the different types of organisations that might offer volunteering opportunities to them.

Before we move on, we will ask you to select your top two issues or challenges to feedback to the whole group.

TAKING AN ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

You will have about 25 minutes to discuss the following 3 questions.

1. What challenges do organisations face in developing pathways for volunteers with disability? Consider organisational culture – how is it a driver or a blocker?
2. What challenges do organisations face in recruiting and matching volunteers with disability into meaningful roles? Are organisations able to best utilise the skills volunteers develop?
3. What challenges might an organisation face in supporting volunteers with disability in their roles?

When thinking through these questions, consider:

- organisational culture and commitment to diversity
- organisational capacity
- staff attitudes and beliefs
- workforce development needs
- policies, systems and practices
- structural barriers
- leadership and commitment
- level of confidence

Before we move on, we will ask you to select your top two issues or challenges to feedback to the whole group.