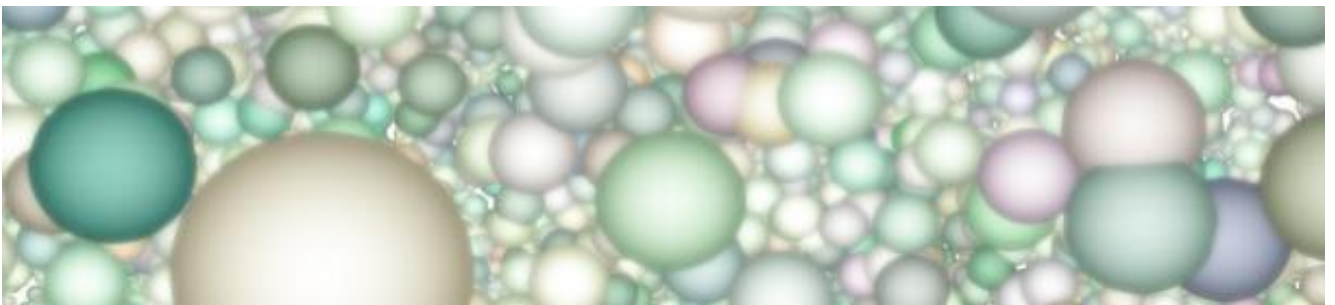


Victoria ALIVE  
Western Metropolitan Community Forum

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 also like to acknowledge and thank the collaborators in this project – the Victoria ALIVE project team from Volunteering Victoria, Volunteer West's Chief Executive and personnel, and Department of Health and Human Services personnel from the region and the Participation and Inclusion Division. Without their collegiate input, this event would not have achieved the significant outcomes that it has.

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

Finally, a special thank you to our guest speakers on the day – volunteers Julyne Ainsley, Jason Heagerty, Riki Domagalski, Jason Whiter and Judy Ingram, together with organisation representatives Christine Bell, Karin Haufe-Stellini, Nick Gabb and Laura Rouhan – whose powerful stories had such an impact on participants, and engendered rich discussions during and after the forum.

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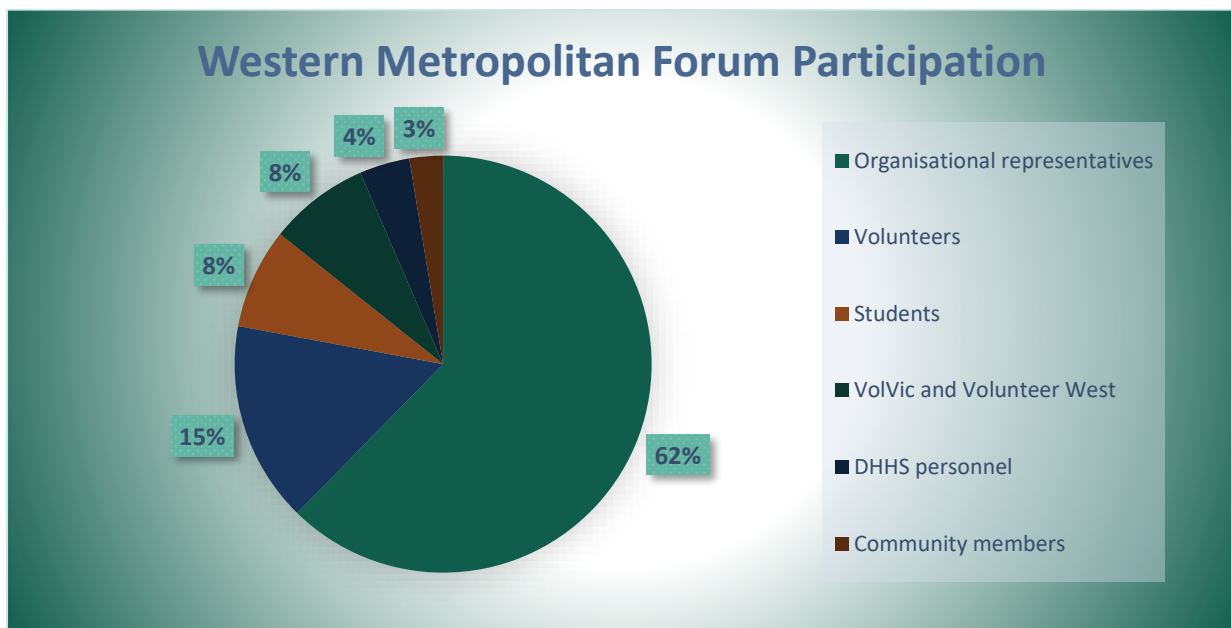
## Introduction

This brief report summarises the findings from consultations undertaken as part of the Victoria ALIVE Western Metropolitan Community Forum held on Tuesday 9 July 2019 at Brimbank Community and Civic Centre in Sunshine.

A total of 77 participants registered for the forum, being:

- twelve volunteers, from Annecto (7) and five other local organisations
- two community members
- five representatives from Volunteering Victoria and one representative from Volunteer West, the local Volunteer Resource Centre
- three representatives from Department of Health and Human Services' Participation and Inclusion Division
- forty-eight representatives from thirty-three organisations (representatives held a range of roles within organisations, with volunteer coordination being the main role for almost 40% of these participants)
- six students on placement, being mainly from Annecto's Speakers Bank (5).

Figure 1: Description of forum participants



## Methods

The consultation phase of this forum involved all participants in a world café style consultation, 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*

<b>Volunteer perspective</b>	<b>Organisational perspective</b>
1. What challenges might be faced in finding out about opportunities for volunteering for people with disability? How do volunteers find out about organisational culture and values?	1. What challenges might an organisation face in developing pathways for volunteers with disability? Consider organisational culture – how is it a driver or an inhibitor?
2. What might make volunteers with disability feel more confident about finding a meaningful volunteer role, and being successful in it? Can they progress their skills?	2. What challenges might an organisation 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?

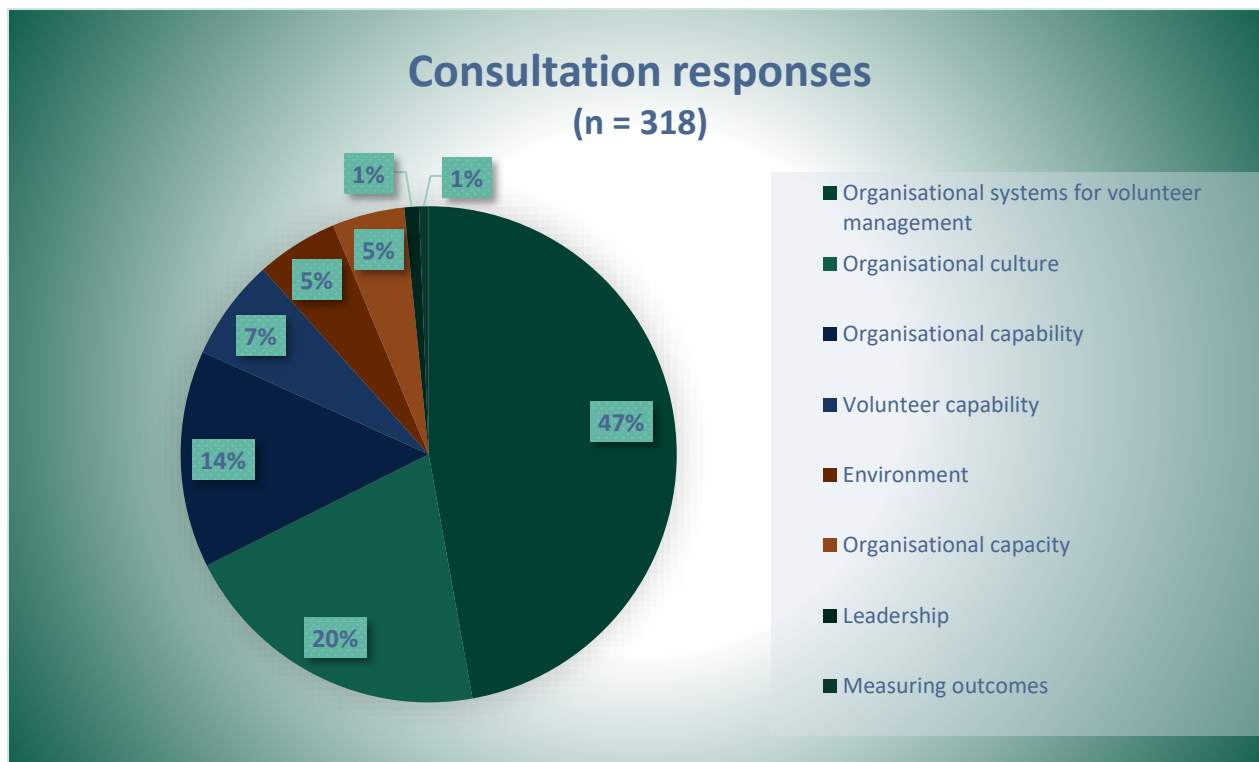
Following the forum, all discussion points were aggregated, analysed and themed. The thematic analysis is provided in this report, with issues from both perspectives consolidated under a number of domains, to inform future actions. For comparative purposes across the regional forums in this project, 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 318 responses were collected from consultations across ten 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, Volunteer West and other stakeholders might consider meaningful.

The data from responses has been analysed and a series of domains created, together with a summary of the issues under each domain area (see Figure 2). The domains are: organisational culture; leadership; organisational capacity; organisational capability; volunteer capability; organisational systems for volunteer management; organisational environment and facilities; and, measuring outcomes. In consultations in other regions, partnerships, consumer participation and other un-themed discussion also featured as domains.

Figure 2: 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 dominant themes in participants' comments in this western metropolitan forum (n=65). This domain has been broken down into a number of contributing dimensions – valuing volunteering by people with disability; organisational commitment; abilities-focused approaches; equity; and, cultural safety.

### Valuing volunteering by people living with disability

One significant dimension related to valuing volunteers living with disability, the cultural fit of this within the broader culture and values of the organisation, and of valuing diversity and inclusion (n=31). Participants commented on:

- Breaking down barriers to enable inclusion – including attitudinal barriers, staff perceptions and misconceptions, unrealistic organisational expectations, inflexibility, prioritising operational requirements and limited organisational capability
- A broader commitment to diversity and inclusion in the mission, vision and values of organisations
- Valuing the expertise volunteers with disability and contribution that they make to the organisation
- Demonstrating organisation-wide that volunteers' work is important and appreciated.

### Organisational commitment

Organisational commitment to valuing volunteers with disability was also discussed (n=12) and may be seen as a subset of valuing volunteers. Discussion ranged from *'Is everyone committed in the organisation?'*, to ways in which this might be demonstrated in practice:

- Being committed to a change process, without tokenism or reactivism
- Investing in volunteers with disability
- Overcoming risk averse thinking
- Clarity regarding the expectations of organisations and their volunteers with disability.

### Abilities-focused approaches

A number of participants supported organisations adopting person-centred, abilities-focused approaches to working with volunteers with disability (n=5). Participants spoke recognising people's abilities rather than disabilities, and challenging organisations to see beyond disability. Participants also spoke of normalising the language of disability, and how language can disempower. Yet another group cautioned against inequitable practices of valuing other volunteers over those with disabilities – clearly not seen as an abilities-focused approach.

### Equity

Several participants spoke about equity in approach (n=6), as might be embedded in human rights based approaches. Organisations were encouraged to explore the diverse perspectives of staff towards people with disability, examine practices that might give rise to inequity and discrimination, and raise awareness of inclusion and accessibility as organisational values.

### Cultural safety

Cultural safety for people with disabilities was a significant theme (n=11) in this domain of organisational culture.

- Cultural safety is enabled where organisations actively promote the value of diversity and inclusion, and recognise that welcoming difference enriches the organisation.
- Respectful and trusted relationships are built more easily in culturally safe environments and practices, where communications are positive, respectful and inclusive.

- Organisations need to be up-to-date with cultural awareness, especially regarding intersectionality and multiple identities, and building the capability of staff and reviewing systems and practices to ensure cultural safety.
- Overt signs and visual clues of inclusion and cultural safety are important e.g. a standardised logo to represent capability in disability-inclusive practice.

## Leadership

Although not a strong focus of discussion (n=3), participants noted the importance of:

- leadership from governance level of the organisation, to empower management and staff to act
- an explicit focus on volunteers with disability in the strategic directions of the organisation
- Disability Action Plans developed as an enabler for action.

## 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.

Organisational capacity to resource working with volunteers with disability was a significant discussion point (n=15). Although many comments broadly reflected lack of time and funding limitations, specific mention was made of the costs incurred in raising awareness of the needs of people with disabilities, possible costs relating to meeting the specific requirements of individuals, costs in improving access to inclusive information and signage, and the potential costs of legislative compliance.

## 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 in the day's discussions (n=50). This domain has been further analysed under these dimensions: training and professional development of staff; staff skills and competencies; respectful communications; reflective practice; and, specific volunteer role/s.

### Training and professional development of staff

Training requirements for staff featured in several discussions (n=12). The need for awareness raising activities and training relating to working with people with disabilities was recognised by several groups on the day, along with resources to augment training programs. Specialist training was recommended for those managing and providing support to volunteers with disability, over and above the broader staff training program.

### Skills and competency

Building on training outcomes, improved staff skills and competencies featured in several comments (n=24). The range of discussion included:

- Having a staff team with strong skills to engage with and support volunteers with disability, to ensure the organisation meets their needs
- Staff having the skills and knowledge to respond respectfully and appropriately to disclosures
- Staff who were aware of their own attitudes, assumptions and biases, and actively working to address these to improve their inclusive and cultural safe practice
- Staff having confidence to ask the right questions and respond to questions from volunteers in open, jargon-free and non-judgemental ways



- The importance of a flexible and responsive approach, recognising that volunteers with disability may have needs that require such flexibility
- Staff who are responsive to feedback from volunteers as they progress within the organisation.

### Respectful communication

Responses (n=3) in this area related predominantly to being mindful of the way in which organisations and staff communicate to give a message of welcome and inclusion. Volunteers spoke of the importance of being called by their name, having a name badge themselves, being acknowledged and welcomed in.

### Reflective practice

Although there was only one response in this category, it reinforced the need for staff supervision and reflective practice sessions to include topics relating to working with volunteers with disability. This was seen as important in promoting self-awareness of each staff member's strengths and potential, and how their personal values and ethics could enhance the volunteer experience.

### Specialist volunteer role

The need for a specialist role to support volunteers and staff working with volunteers was flagged by just one group in the day's discussions, through advocating for a specialist volunteer management role (note earlier comment about specific training requirements for such a role).

## Organisational systems for volunteering

As may be expected, systems development, implementation and review featured strongly in the discussion, with 147 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; communication; volunteers' experience and pathway; mentoring and support; performance management; feedback; and, measuring outcomes.

### Planning/re-designing the system

Most 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=26). Many participants spoke of organisations undertaking a needs analysis, to better understand systems requirements and the process for building a fit-for-purpose system – a system that will be responsive to a diversity of people with different disabilities – and understanding the barriers and challenges that have to be addressed in building the system. They spoke of the importance of having well-thought out policies, procedures, other documentation (e.g. position descriptions for volunteer managers/support people as well as for volunteers) and supporting resources to guide practice across the volunteer pathway. Participants also spoke of the need for the system to adapt and thrive in the face of change – legislative change, industry/sector changes, organisational restructures and staff turnover.

To enable the system to function well, organisations may need to invest in specific training for:

- Recruiting staff, to ensure effective and positive recruitment processes, especially at interview
- Supervision staff, to ensure that they can effectively support volunteers with disability
- Mentoring/buddying staff, to ensure optimal mentoring/buddying practices are in place to enable volunteer's professional growth.

Participants explored role scope and scalability, how these might impact on continuity of work for a volunteer workforce and understanding the resulting systems requirements.

## Accessible information, opportunities and application processes

The number of comments (n=32) about the importance of accessible systems underpins the importance of accessibility to achieving successful volunteer and organisational experiences. Participants spoke of the need to access information about volunteering for people with disabilities in a range of ways that cater for the way that people seek information – from internet searches, organisation's websites, mainstream volunteer organisations, job agencies, volunteer search engines, audible media, local newspapers, libraries and neighbourhood houses. Organisations had limited knowledge and confidence that they were promoting volunteer opportunities in the right ways and places, and were encouraged to be proactive in reaching out to community. Volunteers reported difficulties in finding out about volunteering opportunities for people with disability, and a preference for being able to have personal conversations to explore opportunities, outside of (or instead of) the application process.

Importantly, participants cautioned against total reliance on technology for access, as this disenfranchises volunteers without technology access or skills; one participant commented *'online ads are difficult, and people self-select out'*. Participants promoted using language that was inclusive and accessible to those with lower literacy, English as a second language etc. Some also noted the critical importance of positive responses to enquiries from volunteers with disability, especially in response to cold calling. Participants also spoke about the value of word of mouth recommendations and social media.

Place-based volunteering opportunities are vital where access to transport is constrained.

## Recruitment

A number of groups made specific comments about the recruitment process (n=16). Some flagged the need for changing recruitment strategies and perhaps trialling informal recruitment processes, while others suggested that there should be no different recruitment process for volunteers with disability to that undertaken for all volunteers. Many spoke of the importance of a transparent recruitment process to:

- understand the motivations, skills and passions of volunteers,
- identify support needs for success
- ensure clarity of role
- manage expectations of the volunteer and the organisation
- enable successful matching and managing dignity of risk for the volunteer
- identify opportunities for skills building
- create meaningful pathways for volunteers, where possible.

## Matching

Comments about matching (n=15) confirmed the importance of this step in the recruitment process, as this sets the volunteer up for success. Matching is underpinned by a clear focus on capacity, ability and skills building, and requires organisations to build a role around the attributes, abilities, skills, availability and aspirations of the volunteer. Participants commented that developing a good rapport with a potential volunteer was important to enable them to speak openly about their abilities, aspirations and support needs, to enable the best possible matching.

## Onboarding

The importance of onboarding processes was discussed by several groups (n=9). A number of participants strongly supported the need for mandatory and comprehensive induction processes, to ensure that the volunteer with disability understands the organisation and its operations, and has confidence of their role in the organisation. Some believed that onboarding is likely to include specific training for the new volunteer, delivered in line with their preferred learning style, and that accessible flow charts, policies and procedures can

augment this training. Regular contact with the volunteer in the early stages will be important to ensure successful outcomes for the volunteer and the organisation, and can flag any changes that need to be made to the role or how it is implemented, or supports required.

### **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 enabled volunteers with disability to progress their skills development. The system needs to ensure that:

- the expectation and aspirations of the volunteer with disability can be planned for and met
- volunteer roles can flex and change to respond to the volunteer's changing needs, other appointments/responsibilities, skills development, need for professional growth
- there are a range of ways to support skills development of volunteers with disability
- pathways for progression are enabled where possible
- volunteers with disability have a voice in providing feedback to the organisation, and enjoy self-determination.

### **Mentoring and support**

The need for high quality mentoring and support of volunteers was well understood by participants (n=24), although some organisations reported being time poor, or not having systems in place currently. Having dedicated staff roles for supervising, supporting and managing volunteers was endorsed. Support mechanisms and personnel can provide guidance while giving formal and informal feedback and positive acknowledgement of the work done by the volunteer. Mentoring and/or buddying were seen as good ways to support volunteers with disability, which may in turn aid in volunteer retention (see earlier note in Systems about the need to train staff/other volunteers for these roles). Those in supervision, mentoring and buddying roles will need opportunities for their own supervision and reflection on practice if they are to be effective; this may include additional training, debriefing, and reflection on the challenges, their values and expectations of the role.

Flexibility in the way support can be provided was important, to match the learning style of the volunteers and their support needs. Others spoke of having a 'go to' person for volunteers with disability. Participants promoted a tiered support structure for volunteers, more intensive in the early stages but reducing over time, and a multi-strategy approach to volunteer support; this might include face-to-face and phone checks, and regular supervision sessions for both volunteers and support staff.

Volunteer resource centres were mentioned as a source for support in developing strategies and providing resources for volunteer support, and systems development more broadly.

### **Communication**

A small number of participants (n=5) spoke of communications in relation to the system for volunteer management and support. These included ways in which to communicate change, build relationships, raise awareness and maintain open dialogue.

### **Managing performance**

Participants (n=5) supported the application of performance management processes for volunteers with disability as a way in which the organisation can recognise and reward volunteers, as well as to establish clear goals and workplans for volunteers, as for paid staff. One suggestion was made about offering rewards in terms of additional skills building opportunities.

## Feedback

Four comments were included about feedback mechanisms in organisations who provide roles for volunteers with disability. They spoke of the importance of feedback mechanisms to enable volunteers to have a voice, to be actively involved in informing services and systems improvements, and to receive positive and regular feedback about their contribution to the organisation's work.

## Measuring outcomes

Participants expressed few views about measuring outcomes (n=3). Nonetheless, those views underpin the need for systems to be evaluated to ensure they are achieving their purpose. Participants spoke of measuring the impact of organisational messaging about opportunities for volunteers with disability, conducting volunteer experience surveys and being able to demonstrate the positive impact that volunteers with disability makes in the workplace.

## Organisational environment and facilities

Several comments were made about the constraints of facilities, environment and equipment (n=17). Concerns were raised about the challenge of providing an appropriate work facility and environment when building design is inadequate to meet the full accessibility requirements of people with disability, whether they be physical, sensory or psychological; this may be more difficult to address when the organisation does not own the space. Participants also identified challenges in having the know-how, sourcing and resourcing to change facilities and workspaces and provide equipment (such as computer magnifiers and special printers) that meets the reasonable adjustment requirements that can make their workplace accessible.

Participants also noted that public transport limitations may make opportunities inaccessible for some volunteers with disability.

## Volunteer capability

This was another key area for comments (n=23) and covered competency/skills building, autonomy, volunteer experience and self-esteem.

### Building competencies

The major area with respect to volunteer capability related to building competencies and skills (n=11). While some volunteers had little confidence that their skills were sufficient to be attractive to an organisation (e.g. from being isolated, having limited IT skills), others spoke of anyone having the capability to volunteer. This depended on being well-matched, and potentially enhanced if they were able to volunteer in an area where they were passionate, or for some, if they saw skills development assisting in their job readiness.

Volunteers were more likely to build skills where on-site training was embedded in induction processes, and where the organisation was prepared to be flexible in enabling the volunteer to work at their own pace. Skills development was also more likely when the organisation was flexible about other needs, taking volunteer stress out of the situation (e.g. flexibility about working from home at times, changed hours of work to accommodate other needs or responsibilities). Reducing the barrier of jargon was another way of improving skills building.

### Volunteer experience and autonomy

A small number of comments were made in this area (n=5). Volunteer experience was enhanced by being able to follow their passions, and by having a sense of belonging. Autonomy could be gained by succeeding in a role with a good fit – the right role for them – and by reducing isolation; however, autonomy meant volunteers also needed to be prepared to undertake the required checks.

## Self esteem

A number of groups (n=7) highlighted the value of successful volunteering experiences in building self-esteem. Participants felt that self esteem grew when volunteers with disability overcame their fears and self-imposed barriers, improved knowledge, developed skills, engaged in trusting relationships and built confidence.



## TOP TIPS FROM THE DAY

- Organisations need to invest time and resources in volunteer management;  
this means sufficient funding to do so.
- Organisations need to be committed to welcoming diversity,  
and having an inclusive culture and policies.
- Organisations need to develop/strengthen systems for working with volunteers.  
Organisations need to be flexible and adaptable.
- Organisations need to develop great skills in matching volunteers with roles.
- Organisations need to commit to developing their volunteers with disability in holistic ways.

## ATTACHMENT 1

### World café discussion

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Each table group will have the opportunity to consider a series of questions from an organisational perspective **and** a volunteer's perspective, about the issues and challenges that arise in making meaningful opportunities available to volunteers with disability. Your table group will be advised which set of questions you will start with at the beginning of the session.

Halfway through the session, table hosts will swap tables, and each table will commence discussion on the other set of questions. That is, if you started with questions from a volunteer perspective, you will change over to discuss things from an organisational perspective, and *vice versa*.

When you are in this second part of the session, you will be building on and adding to the discussion from another table group, and finishing any questions they have not covered.

At the end of the session, you will be asked to confirm the top 2-3 points for each question from this second group of questions, from your discussion.

We have about an hour for this activity, so everyone needs to keep focused on adding new information, rather than going over ground already covered. It is not so much about analysing why issues or challenges occur, as identifying what those issues and challenges are. Of course, if time permits, please feel free to get into analysis!

We trust you enjoy the conversation, and take the opportunity to be bold and free-thinking.

*Please turn the page over to find the discussion questions.*

## TAKING A VOLUNTEER PERSPECTIVE

You have about 30 minutes to discuss the following 3 questions.

1. What challenges might be faced in finding out about opportunities for volunteering for people with disability? How do volunteers find out about organisational culture and values?
2. What might make volunteers with disability feel more confident about finding a meaningful volunteer role, and being successful in it? Can they progress their skills?
3. What contributes to a volunteer with disability feeling well-supported in an organisation, being 'culturally safe'?

At the end of each question, please pick out the top 2-3 responses, i.e. what the group considers priority points.

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.

## TAKING AN ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

You have about 30 minutes to discuss the following 3 questions.

1. What challenges might an organisation face in developing pathways for volunteers with disability? Consider organisational culture – how is it a driver or an inhibitor?
2. What challenges might an organisation 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?

At the end of each question, please pick out the top 2-3 responses, i.e. what the group considers priority points.

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