

## THREE THEMES FROM 17 FEB 2010 FORUM - WORKING TOGETHER TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF VOLUNTEERING

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On February 17, close to fifty representatives from not-for-profit and community organisations met for a whole-day forum organised by Volunteering Victoria at the City of Melbourne Bowls Club.

This gathering is one of a number we are planning throughout 2010 as part of Volunteering Victoria's commitment to have regular and meaningful engagement with our stakeholders. Having open lines of communication keep us all informed about the situations and scenarios within and around our environment. This helps all of us in our endeavour to understand our community better and as we aim to articulate well our needs, our strengths, our plans and what we would like to see for our future. The knowledge and information we gain from each other equips us in raising the voice of volunteering, especially to decision makers whose actions impact our community.

Most, if not all, of the organisations represented at the event work with volunteers. This included peak bodies; Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs); Volunteer Resource Services (VRSs) and volunteer units within shires and councils from metropolitan Melbourne as well as regional / rural Victoria. There was also representation from the Department of Planning and Community Development and emergency services.

Policy and Advocacy Officer James Wilson presented on the key structural issues that challenge the growth and sustainability of Volunteering in Victoria. Dianne Embry, Volunteering Victoria's Chief Executive Office, spoke about the drivers and instruments of change that affect the volunteering community now and into the future. There were opportunities for group discussions and reporting back to the whole group during plenary sessions throughout the day.

Participants notes have been collated, attached here as **Appendix A**, and from the discussions and outcomes during the day, we have identified three main themes which will form part of our priorities for 2010. The themes are -

### 1 STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION AMONG NETWORKS

#### Objectives:

- To promote widely the volunteering networks - what each network group is about; your membership; terms of reference, activities, programs, events and other information you wish to circulate about your group
- To explain the value of networks to a wider audience, including decision makers and the broader community
- To build the capacity of the networks and to enrich the benefits of network membership

#### How:

We have offered in the past - and continue to do so - the opportunity to promote networks through our website. Some have taken up this chance and have information about their network on our website. The frequency of meetings, details of convenors, etc are featured on our website. Networks can use the special calendar on our website to advertise details of upcoming meetings and other events. This especially helps new managers and co-ordinators of volunteers to identify which groups they can join. Because Volunteering Victoria is usually one of the first ports-of-call for new practitioners, having network information lodged with us means that we are equipped to give networks exposure.

Volunteering Victoria has helped promote network programs and activities. A recent example of this is an article we wrote about the participants of the Cultural Volunteer Co-ordinators Group's (CVCG) Cultural Volunteers' Visiting Program, displayed on our [website](#). We will be highlighting this excellent story of volunteer development which the CVCG group designed and implemented for their volunteers in the next edition of our eBulletin.

Our National Volunteer Week event launch this year puts the networks in the spotlight. We are inviting representatives for the different networks to attend our launch on May 12 so that they can be introduced and identified to others in the volunteering community and beyond. Minister for Community Development, Lily D'Ambrosio MP will be the keynote speaker and she will be available for informal conversations with network representatives during morning tea. A networking expert will also be speaking to start us on the path to building the capacity of the networks through knowledge and information. More details on this event will be distributed soon.



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### 2 BUILDING CAPACITY FOR THE FUTURE

#### Objective:

- To equip those in the volunteering community with knowledge to face the challenges of the future

#### How:

In the second-half of the year, Volunteering Victoria will launch stage 2 of our website which will see it bolstered and built-up with additional resources such as tip sheets and how tos. We will also commence a Knowledge Management project with a consultant who will conduct an audit of our knowledge management system; offer recommendations and set-up systems and processes for enhanced collection, storage and use of information crucial to our peak function.

Knowledge, information and training are the ways by which we equip the volunteering community with tools to enable them to meet the challenges and to make the most of opportunities for the future. We are continually refining our training program which is a combination of online and face-to-face opportunities for learning and professional development.

We also strengthen the voice of the community through our advocacy work. Evidence is clear especially from our recent work that we are more strongly advising governments and other decision makers about the nature, needs and capabilities of volunteering. In some ways, we are beginning to make a difference as we are increasingly consulted on more issues. The engagement between us and different levels of governments is broadening and deepening. We plan to continue our constructive, proactive advocacy work in the future but we can only successfully do this with the continual input of the volunteering community. The stories, case studies and comments that you give us substantiate and strengthen our arguments.

Through advisory groups, we hope to identify the issues on the ground and we can take these up to the appropriate levels. Those who signed up to be part of the advisory groups at the end of the forum, expect to be contacted by program managers assigned to the specific areas you have expressed interest in joining by late May.

### 3 COMMUNICATION

#### Objectives:

- To articulate clearly Volunteering Victoria's peak role and functioning
- To facilitate communication and knowledge sharing across the sector

#### How:

We will seek the views of our stakeholders and the Victorian volunteering networks, particularly through the reference groups that we will be convening beginning in May, after National Volunteer Week.

We will maintain regular communications with our stakeholders through communications tools such as our website, the eBulletin, communique's, articles, traditional and new media to spread information.

We will conduct face-to-face forums, as we did in February, focus groups and other stakeholder consultations as we seek full statewide representation.

Finally, we have not obviously sought to address each and every item brought up at the forum and it is certainly impossible to do so in the immediate future. All the participants' comments form part of our thinking and they serve as vital reference points for us as a peak body. We appreciate and see it as an important part of our role to always be aware of the issues of the volunteering community so we hope that you would quickly and frequently communicate with us.

We welcome your comments and feedback as they are very important to us.

#### Volunteering Victoria

**Appendix A: PARTICIPANTS' NOTES: WORKING TOGETHER TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF VOLUNTEER FORUM 17 FEB 2010**

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**PRESENTATION 1**

**1 What other elements of the challenge should be added to the six presented? What are the opportunities and challenges? We need to focus on causes, not symptoms.**

- Lack of communication across volunteer agencies
  - ↳ We're all doing our own thing
  - ↳ Working in isolation
- Competition for funding and the 'competition tension'
  - ↳ Need for co-ordination of arguments for support
- Communication and Advocacy strategy with general public and sector
- Lack of data / evidence to understand where we are at
- Inability to accurately identify issues to better identify ways forward / strategies
- Need to improve relationships with state and national volunteering bodies (for individual organisations)
- Clarification of roles of Volunteering Victoria and Volunteering Australia
  - ↳ Who does what/where do we go
- Nationally accredited training can move volunteering
- Resources sharing; best practice; joining up to do tasks
- Recognising and harnessing existing infrastructure; joining up the elements and the efforts
- Communication and awareness of the programs
- Cost and quality frameworks
- Knowledge and capacity to position sector strategically – it exists now
- Purpose of voice is broad based

**Specific questions raised:**

-How do we support networks? Individuals?

**2 How can we develop a clear rationale for support so that we can achieve with the right resources and infrastructure?**

- Articulating strength of contribution
- Developing at employer level the value of volunteers

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- Having a volunteer policy; using successful models
- Data collection for evidence – lots of data but not a response as to how it will be used effectively; clear strategy with data delivery; good data!; consistency of data recording to enable us to articulate the qualitative impact; qualitative vision and a case for our ability to valued-add
- We are skilling/training people for future employability
- Acknowledgement of building social capacity
- Evidence-based
  - ↳ Length of time of time in community
  - ↳ Community representation at all levels of organisation
  - ↳ How to evaluate the recipient of service
  - ↳ Costs
- Clear common vision
- Build our strength as a sector; build muscle to ask and demand
- We just do what needs to be done because it just needs to be done so government presumes we will and does not ensure funding to do it
- Funding for us to be included at policy development through to implementation
- Preventative value of intervention at personal level
- How to link what we each do to apply for every little grant as a full expression of the evidence base and having it in one place
- Closer consultation between government and community to develop relationship between funding criteria and need to avoid mission creep; Volunteering is not free and this needs to be reflected in partnership with government

### 3 How can we, the volunteering community, develop a focus true to volunteering, its principles and aims?

- We need to be very clear about **WHY**
- Re-aligning infrastructure that is clear, network-aligned
- Framework for networks connecting to representation from the different sectors (peak body) and locations
- Volunteer “union”; giving them an identity and voice; volunteers on ‘strike’ {Is this true to volunteering?}
- Volunteer sector needs to recognise the importance of coming together; more collaboration
- Promotion from the peak body to sectors of the development of the framework
- Framework provides opportunity to focus on the bigger issues
- Change perception that ‘free’ means it’s not valued – the “fluffy stuff”
- National Standards – mandatory; resourced; supported; simplified
- Standard for volunteer managers – training; salaries; PDs

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- Valuing diversity and supporting it
- Network infrastructure working with other structures
- Volunteer workforce issues

### Specific questions raised:

- Do standards and principles need to be reviewed? Are they current in new environment?
- Is JSA volunteering?

## PRESENTATION 2

### 1 What other drivers of change are important to consider for the strong future of volunteering? Again, focus on causes over symptoms.

- Current interest/focus on **respect agenda** (by Brumby government) – to include respecting communities
- Clear understanding of social, health, employability and their benefits linked to volunteering
  - ↳ Transitioning of youth to work to adulthood
  - ↳ Transitioning back into the workplace
  - ↳ Health and well-being benefits
- Mobility of the population
  - ↳ Transferability and transportability of skills
  - ↳ A “whole lifestyle of volunteering”
- Tap into cultural diversity of volunteering; diverse volunteer groups and the different ways they help
- Aging population
- Regulations and KPIs from funding
- Need for professionals i.e. volunteer managers and succession planning; turnover of community sector which causes the loss of knowledge (related to mobility of population above)
- Changing work and volunteer culture
- People’s busy lifestyles which may mean that volunteering drops off their activities
- Climate change and greater focus of local (backyard) community; drought

### 2 Why is volunteering a crucial element of the social inclusion agenda?

- It is in practice, on the ground, but not in policy; not articulated; not recognised; a ‘free’ input?
- Key tool/vehicle/mechanism/pathway towards social inclusion
- Twofold – what volunteers **provide** and what they **receive**
- Social Inclusion is narrowly interpreted as employment; economic participation only

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- Volunteers tell us why they volunteer: to give; meet people; maintain/develop skills/relationships
- Those who volunteer in the true sense know what they are in for and what they are seeking; those who do it out of compulsion are effectively excluded, we need to know what they need
- Helps reduce health cost; positive impact on physical and mental health
- Adds to the economy
- A stop-gap in services e.g. carer roles in disability; age care; child rearing
- Opportunity for those not 'job ready' or able to participate in mainstream
- Connectedness; self-worth
- Preventative role; proactive solution
- Service system response required volunteers for delivery – formal and informal
- Grass-roots, volunteer-driver development of organisation to address needs/gaps
- Organisations have the skills/knowledge to meet holistic needs of disadvantaged; service providers cannot provide/support all needs
- Service system only part of; need to contribute to the community as well

#### Specific questions raised:

- Local importance so where should the voice come from?
- What else comes under the social inclusion agenda that doesn't include volunteers?
- If volunteering is not there, who is?

### 3 Why should the volunteering community drive the volunteering strategy?

- We know what we're doing so consult with us!
- We have the knowledge to make the strategy relevant to the volunteering community
- Give the volunteering community ownership of the strategy
- Strengthen and focus local leadership
- Ensuring our needs are articulated in a way needs of the sector are understood
- Fits with social inclusion agenda and resilience building
- **Challenges to volunteering community:**
  - ↔ communicate the more difficult to measure outcomes
  - ↔ need to define the volunteering community
  - ↔ has to be realistic; workable

#### Learnings:

- We don't have a strong enough voice right now
- There are no adequate structures and there is lack of co-ordination
- Importance of sharing issues and solutions as a group



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- Communication is key; which is why a peak is important
- Meeting new people; networking is valuable
- Realisation of what Volunteering Victoria actually does and what it does not do
- We have been complacent and need to be more politically aware
- Feel commitment and vision (of whom, not specified)
- Value the diversity of attendees; people who are not normally in these forums
- Helps to think outside the square
- Think bigger and it will happen
- Able to look beyond our role today

**-ENDS-**

**PROMOTE | STRENGTHEN | SUPPORT | SUSTAIN VOLUNTEERING**

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