

REGIONAL WORKSHOP II
for the development of a strategic plan to strengthen volunteering and civic participation in the Eastern Metropolitan Region

Thursday, 13th September 2007, 10am – 4pm

Workshop Summary

To: Participants in the 2nd Regional Workshop (and others who could not attend)
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Date: 17th October 2007

Introduction

Please accept our apologies for taking so long to get this summary of the various sets of notes taken at the second workshop for the project. The workshop was held at the Karralyka Centre, Ringwood East, which proved to be an excellent venue.

These notes outline the main themes raised and discussed at the regional workshop. It's been hard to summarise the notes as discussion ranged rather broadly beyond the focus on implementation strategies.

If you wish to have a copy of the notes written on butchers' paper by participants or the notes taken at the small discussion groups, please get in touch with us at Borderlands Cooperative.

Preparation prior to the workshop

Participants were asked to read a document entitled '*Building a conceptual and strategic framework: Regional volunteering stakeholders workshop #2*' in preparation for Workshop II and to bring it with them to the workshop (also available on the Borderlands website; www.borderlands.org.au and follow the links to the EMR project).

Purpose of the workshop

The purpose of the second workshop was to provide an opportunity to:

- Review where we were in the project
- Discuss how strategies (listed under each principle in the Tables contained in the document participants were asked to read prior to the workshop) could be implemented in a sustainable way.

The workshop was organised around three plenary sessions and two small group discussions in which strategies and suggestions for implementation were discussed. The 6

small groups were organised according to municipalities, with tables for: Knox (7 participants), Yarra Ranges (5 participants), Boroondara (8 participants), Manningham (9 participants), Maroondah (7 participants), and Monash and Whitehorse constituting a table as there were insufficient numbers for a Whitehorse table (7 participants).¹

Main themes of workshop

These notes indicate which strategies people broadly supported, what further strategies were proposed, and what other comments and questions were raised.

Federal Government

- Federal Government's responsibility re. funding and otherwise supporting volunteering/civic participation needs to be identified.

State Government

- Need a whole-of-government approach to volunteering/civic participation and an overarching policy statement from the State Government about it.
- All State Government departments are associated with volunteer-involving programs and clarification of their respective roles and responsibilities, including funding sources, is essential with a clear leadership role ascribed to one department, most likely to DPCD.
- General support for the idea of DPCD EMR Local Team being assigned to specific areas of the EMR (e.g. as currently exists) but impractical to assign one worker per LGA.
- State Government needs to resource and support VRCs (or their municipal equivalent) to support community organisations.

Eastern Metropolitan Region

- Primary audience for the projects Implementation Plan is the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Managers' Forum. The RMF is made up of State Government EMR departmental senior officials with presence in the region and the 7 local government CEOs. The RMFs support will add significant weight to the projects recommendations.

¹ These numbers add up to a total of 44 participants but a number of people arrived later in the day bringing the total number of participants to 51.

- One group suggested that there needs to be 2 separate regional meetings about volunteering/civic participation. One deals with operational matters and the other shares information about best practice.

VRC/volunteering resource service/local government

- Broad, in principle agreement to a municipality-based volunteering resource service/Volunteer Resource Centre, working closely with its respective local government, to lead the way in providing a coordinated system for volunteering/civic participation planning. In some LGAs (e.g. Boroondara, Knox, Monash) this is already happening. (A fall-back option is for VRCs to operate across municipalities according to the Inner/Outer east configuration.)
- Broad recognition that relationships, systems and processes need to be developed so that there is a two-way flow of information into each municipality and out of each municipality to the Regional Managers' Forum and lead State Government department on volunteering/civic participation.
- Agreement that there should be a community/municipality-based representative and consultative network body in each LGA, which meets to discuss volunteering/civic participation. Some networks like these exist but they may need to be strengthened, their focus on volunteering/civic participation made prominent and possibly their membership diversified. Local government should be represented in these network bodies as should community organisations that operate across multiple municipalities/regions. The representative and consultative body for each municipality probably needs to meet quarterly i.e. not just annually.
- General support that networks and volunteering resource services need to be more inclusive and investigating barriers. Some are/have already done this (e.g. Monash, Boroondara, KCV). VIM would be the potential body to do this with support from DPCD and MCC but it needs to build a stronger interest group than it currently has to undertake this work.
- BVRC & MVRC already doing clearing house, networking & publicity functions. KCV and KCC developing clearing house functions via Virtual Volunteer Hub project. VIM and EVRC limited in their capacity to do this work owing to inadequate funding and need for trained CD staff. There is a need to identify where each of the VRCs are in terms of their development, particularly given their infrastructural differences. EVRC is in a 'special' situation in terms of its future development in that it services parts of 3 municipalities.
- Strong support for VIM to be recognised and funded as a VRC but who confers VRC-status?
- VRCs need to develop a diverse funding base.

- General agreement that we need an outline of what a strong VRC or equivalent service/clearing house looks like. Both Monash and Boroondara provide different but good examples of a service that functions as a clearing house and has established good networking re two-way information sharing between community and local government activities. Monash is a good example of a VRC with a recurrent funding base, strongly supported by a mix of paid and voluntary staff within the centre. Each municipality needs to conduct discussion about how to achieve such a resourcing service.

Relationships and Communication

- Agreement that active links between NGOs etc. and VRCs need to be maintained and strengthened e.g. through the regular consultative, representative network meetings, as proposed.
- Organisations will benefit from further involvement in strategies, e.g. ideas for sharing resources, training, e.g. CFA might be able to expand resourcing opportunities through partnerships; neighbourhood houses and Community Learning Centres are well placed to deliver training and resources to other NGOs etc.
- One group proposed that there needs to be some means of reporting the extent of volunteer services by community groups and that an accreditation system is developed to ensure that the interests and needs of volunteers are being met.

Dedicated Resources

- General support for the idea that CD workers dedicated to supporting volunteering/civic participation should 'sit' in multiple places, including: DPCD regional engagement team, LG (working across different areas of Council), each VRC, and other community organisations, such as Neighbourhood/Community Houses.

Awareness Raising

- It will be important to make sure that 'informal' volunteering (e.g. when a person volunteers but not through an organisation) is recognised in media campaigns and receives adequate resourcing (when needed) and recognition in government planning processes.
- Motivations for being involved and recognition that these change over time needs to be incorporated into community education.

- One group proposed that the spirit of volunteering/civic participation needs to be encapsulated in stated values of all organisations utilising/supporting/coordinating volunteers.
- Educational institutions have a role in educating young people about the importance of community and civic participation. A number of groups spoke about this.

Interactive website

- Link the Implementation Plan with Knox’s Virtual Volunteer Hub website. This is an important way of sharing information (e.g. about region-wide training and events calendar) and providing an online forum for volunteers and organisations.

Other comments/questions

- There is concern that there is no mention of the peak-body in the proposed strategies but it was acknowledged that it is hard to include them when they are so under-resourced. What is their role? What is their relationship with the State Government? Who confers VRC-status on a volunteering resource service?
- The strategies in the tables, as presented for discussion, did not always link well with the principles and some strategies were too specific.
- MAV’s role and responsibilities re. volunteering/civic participation needs to be explored.
- Community Leadership Program to target disadvantaged groups (e.g. CALD, Indigenous etc.) and focus efforts on building the capacity and support for ‘community leadership’.
- To increase volunteering/civic participation activities in some areas will require lower travel costs and increasing access to public transport, especially in the Yarra Ranges.
- The Strategic Plan needs to outline a framework which takes into consideration the diversity of LGAs across the region.

Where to from here?

We are drafting an Implementation Plan (for strengthening volunteering/civic participation in the region), which will be discussed at the next Project Team meeting later this month. This Plan is, arguably, the most important document of the project, and as such, your feedback is critical.

Your feedback to the draft Implementation Plan (Nov 2007)

Once the Project Team members have commented on the first draft Implementation Plan, we will rework it and send it out to you – all the participants in this project, to date - in the hope that you will provide us with any comments or feedback.

Production of a Strategic Plan (Nov-Dec 2007)

We will be producing a **Strategic Plan**, the full report of the project, which will include final versions of documents you have previously had the opportunity to read and comment on:

- the **Profile** of volunteering/civic participation in the region and municipalities
- the **Strategic Framework** (the conceptual and strategic document)
- the **Implementation Plan**

As well, the final report will include a comprehensive conceptual discussion of the various developments in thinking and practising re. volunteering and civic participation and an extensive collection of literature which has been collected and assembled in a database in the context of this project.

All final documents will be available by end-January 2008, the anticipated endpoint of this project.