

What is Diversity?

The term Diversity refers to the presence in one population of a wide variety of cultures, opinions, ethnic groups, socio-economic backgrounds, religions, languages, ages, political beliefs, gender, family/carer status, sexual orientations and disabilities. Diversity is about being inclusive of a wide variety of people.

The concept of diversity is based on an understanding that individuals are unique and different. Diversity is about valuing difference. It's about acceptance and respect for a wide variety of differences amongst individuals within the programs, operations and events of any group, small or large.

Why do volunteering groups need to worry about being inclusive?

The Australian population of approximately 20 million is made up of people from more than 200 countries. Australia today has a rich and diverse cultural mix. Rural regions are not immune to these changes and small community groups and organisations even need to be prepared to manage a much more culturally diverse volunteer base.

Are we obligated by law to include a Diversity policy?

Legally, equal opportunity legislation (EOL) requires groups and organisations ensure that their management practices don't discriminate against anyone for any of the reasons listed above.

A group or organisation needs to demonstrate that it values and supports all people with different backgrounds, attitudes and experiences, recognising that they bring fresh ideas and perspectives. In regional and rural areas, being inclusive and practising diversity

also means that small groups may be able to significantly widen their pool of prospective and available volunteers.

What are the advantages of increasing the diversity of our group?

A group or organisation that is representative of its community will be inclusive of the many different groups and people that make up that community. The benefits to your organisation include new perspectives, new ideas, fresh approaches and insights into how and why you do what you do. Groups and organisations that include diversity will be able to respond to the needs of community more effectively. This benefits the community as more people will feel confident that your services can – and will – meet their needs.

How do we become an inclusive group?

- Ensure that Volunteer Codes of Conduct and agreements include diversity and anti-discrimination standards of conduct and behaviour.
- Promote your Board and Governance positions widely in your community, stating clearly that you are open to being an inclusive, non-discriminatory agency or group.
- Be particularly conscious of including young people into the mix of your group or organisation whenever possible. Their voice and perspective is a valuable contribution even if it may not always be comfortable for older generations.
- Regularly review your regular meeting times, venues and meeting formats so that most people are able to easily access them.
- At the very least, make connections with your local Indigenous and multi-cultural communities and do what you can, to learn how to be inclusive of these persons. Many can contribute as volunteers within your group or organisation, bringing new

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☑ Diversity - continued

skills and ideas. Be prepared to provide any extra supports, if necessary, to make that possible.

- Review your written materials so that language is clear and easy to understand or translate.
- Train current committee members, staff and volunteers in how to relate to people from non-English speaking backgrounds. The Wimmera Skilled Migrant Initiative: Migrant Mentor Program may be able to assist with this.

In conclusion

Being an inclusive group or organisation can pose some difficulties for some committees as decision-making processes can be more drawn out when it includes many differing perspectives; however, it will make your organisation more open and effective and representative of your wider community.

The information contained in this information sheet is generic. Please contact your volunteer resource centre if you require further assistance.