DRAFT WHITEHORSE VOLUNTEER

&

CIVIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

2009 - 2013
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Introduction

The City of Whitehorse has a healthy and vibrant volunteering culture. Council recognises and values the contribution that volunteers make to our local community, and the vital role that these volunteers play in community strengthening and enhancing community connectedness.

Volunteering is an integral dimension of community participation and capacity building and there is increasing recognition of its strong links with social inclusion. Volunteering and civic participation plays a crucial role in addressing local issues of social connectedness and belonging and subsequently, finding local solutions. Much of it still takes place at a grassroots level and therefore impacts the community in a locally significant way.

The development of a Whitehorse Volunteer and Civic Participation Strategic Plan aims to strengthen and build upon existing volunteer programs within the Council and the community, whilst responding to a new and broader interpretation of volunteering that encompasses a community strengthening approach. As stated in the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) Report, Tracking What Works 2007, “Within the local government sector in Victoria new thinking about voluntary activity is emerging against the backdrop of ‘community strengthening’ as a public policy framework. Councils are thus in the unique position of approaching voluntary activity in the context of a wider strategic focus upon building strong and sustainable communities”.


In addition to the social benefits connected with volunteering, it is noted in Victoria’s Volunteering Strategy 2009 that “in 2002, the value of volunteering in Victoria was estimated to be the equivalent to 7.6 per cent of Gross State product or around $10 billion.”

The development of a Whitehorse Civic Participation and Volunteering Strategy aims to achieve the following:

- Foster and strengthen civic participation and volunteering
- Highlight current trends and the changing face of volunteering
- Identify current and emerging issues
- Determine needs and priorities in relation to voluntary activity
• Define Council’s role in supporting and encouraging voluntary activity

• Provide support to community groups and organisations who engage with volunteers

• Encourage collaboration between groups and organisations

• Increase the number and diversity of volunteers across Council and the community

• Strengthen the strategic coordination of volunteers across the municipality

New models of volunteering are now emerging, reflecting changing demographics, and community interests, expectations and priorities. Whilst traditional volunteer roles are still critical, volunteers now want to undertake broader and often complex tasks. It therefore makes sense to widen the scope of volunteering to include more than just the traditional formal volunteering approaches and responses.

As stated in a joint report by The World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS), the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) and United Nation Volunteers (UNV), “Volunteering and Social Activism”, “good volunteer management is a prerequisite for increasing the value of the volunteering experience – both for volunteers and to strengthen the impact of volunteering of development and social change”. The (background) study suggests that this is important to ensure that people are engaged, feel valued for their contribution and are integrated into organisations – these are factors that make volunteers more likely to sustain their participation over the long-term.

In addition, a number of key publications and reports, including the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) document “Tracking What Works” and the Borderlands Cooperative Report “Strengthening Volunteering and Civic Participation”, identify local government as having a key role to play in this area. As stated in the MAV Report “voluntary activity provides pathways to the achievement of personal and collective goals, to building community networks and to generating democratic participation in communities and society at large”. (MAV Report p 5)

The City of Whitehorse provides a number of services that employ a significant number of volunteers on a regular basis. These include Food Services and Social Support in Aged and Disability Services; Walking School Bus in Engineering and Environmental Services; Cruzin’ Study (Multicultural Homework and Study Help) in Youth Services; and the Whitehorse Arts Space; A number of Advisory Committees also operate at Council including the 14 Parkland Advisory Committees in Arts and Recreation Development and the Reconciliation Advisory Committee and Disability Advisory Committee in Community Development. Members of these Committees are all volunteers. In addition to the regular programs, volunteers are employed for short-term projects in the Council, such as assisting with the Whitehorse Spring Festival. Furthermore, the 10 elected representatives (Councillors) for Whitehorse participate in extensive civic participation activity.
Recruitment and management of volunteers is becoming more complex and it is critical that Council develops and manages its own Volunteer program in line with best practice and in accordance with the National Standards developed by Volunteering Australia.

In addition to its own Programs, Council is also closely engaged with community members acting in a voluntary capacity in a variety of roles. Council provides support to many not-for-profit groups providing programs and services to the community eg counselling services, social support, children’s activities, disability services, and sporting and recreational activities. A significant number of these rely heavily on volunteers for the effective delivery of their services. Whitehorse City Council also recognises the value of partnerships between local Council and non-government organisations in relation to voluntary activity.

The City of Whitehorse has an important role to play in terms of encouraging and supporting volunteering and civic participation in the broader community. Through both the further development of its own Volunteer Program and by supporting broader volunteering opportunities in Whitehorse, Council seeks to build and strengthen civic participation and voluntary activity throughout the City.

Defining Volunteering and Civic Participation

Volunteering

The Municipal Association of Victoria, in its Report “Tracking What Works” employs a broad definition of voluntary activity as an activity that:

- Is of benefit to the community;
- Is non-obligatory and undertaken without coercion;
- Is without monetary reward

Volunteering Australia has a similar definition that includes additional criteria, that relates to work undertaken in designated volunteer positions only. It should be noted that this definition particularly applies to “Formal Volunteering”.

As is noted by the MAV Report, formal volunteering “is a concept which excluded, by definition, a number of spontaneous, informal and extra-institutional activities....”
The World Alliance for Citizen Participation, the International Association for Volunteer effort and United Nation Volunteers, in a joint Report “Volunteering and Social Activism” categorise volunteering in four ways:

1. Mutual aid or self-help
2. Philanthropy or service to others
3. Civic participation, and
4. Advocacy or campaigning

“Understood in this way, volunteering encompasses a wide range of actions such as participating in a support group for people living with HIV/AIDS, organising a fundraising event, distributing food and blankets in the aftermath of a natural disaster, engaging in local development planning, advocating for the rights of indigenous populations and campaigning against gender violence.”

**Principles of Volunteering**

Volunteering Australia developed the following principles in 1997 and these provide the basis for many organisations that engage volunteers:

- Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer
- Volunteer work is unpaid
- Volunteering is always a matter of choice
- Volunteering is not compulsorily undertaken to receive pensions or government allowances
- Volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community
- Volunteering is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs
- Volunteering is an activity performed in the not-for-profit sector only
- Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work
- Volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers
- Volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others
- Volunteering promotes human rights and equality
**Civic Participation**

A broader view of volunteering encompasses the notion of civic participation. There are many ways in which community members participate that are not officially recognized or counted as volunteering, for example, participating on boards and committees, activism, being involved in a local sporting group or association etc.

“Approaching voluntary activity from a community strengthening perspective means taking into account the widest range of voluntary activities which can contribute to outcomes such as building trust, developing strong networks, developing and realizing collective goals and community driven governance structures” (Tracking what Works MAV p 9)

The term “Voluntary Activity” as used in the MAV Report, includes the following:

- **Service Delivery.** This involves individuals giving to recipients.
- **Activism.** This involves collective community self-management.
- **Decision-making.** This can involve community planning.
- **Community Management of community resources, such as facilities and people.**
- **Networking and Learning exchanges, such as book clubs or ‘philosophy in the pub’.**
- **Mobilising and celebrating resources and people through community festivals.**
- **Emergency assistance such as bushfire relief.**
- **Particular identity groups organizing and caring for their own members.**

This definition encompasses a view of volunteering that includes activities that are broader than those normally associated with traditional examples of volunteering. Volunteering Queensland provides examples of new models of volunteering that are being developed. There is an increasing recognition that volunteering is far more encompassing than merely people volunteering in traditional programs. Rather it is viewed as a “highly personal form of contributing to the world we live in and recognises that Australians are keen to contribute in ways that provide real results for the causes they care about”. (Volunteering Queensland – Leading the Volunteer Revolution. September 2008). The “Volunteering Engagement” Model, developed by Volunteering Queensland, identifies 5 areas of volunteering activity:

- **Formal**
- **Governance**
- **Non-formal**
- **Social Action**
- **Project**
This Model identifies that formal volunteering is just one way of volunteering and is complemented by many additional ways.

The exploration and development of different models happening throughout all communities reflects the depth and pace of change occurring in volunteering, community engagement and participation.

These new, more flexible models will reflect these changes and will continue to challenge the traditional notions of volunteering and recognize the value and strength of all sectors of the community.

They will challenge the public perception of volunteering, break down barriers and reflect the new pathways for volunteering and civic participation in our community.

The adoption of a far more holistic approach is needed if we are to be in a position to respond to the challenges presented and move forward.

**How was the strategy developed?**

A variety of consultation methods were utilised in the development of this strategy.

- A one day workshop was held in March 2009 with representatives from a number of locally based organisations that engage and work with volunteers. Participants were asked to identify issues, strengths, challenges and barriers, gaps and opportunities in relation to the future of volunteering in Whitehorse.

- A survey was sent to community based organisations that engage volunteers, to obtain data and information relating to issues, barriers, opportunities and priorities regarding civic participation and volunteering.

- Individual discussions took place with staff and volunteers of community based organizations to identify what they would like to be included in a strategy.

- A survey was sent to Council officers that engage and supervise volunteers to identify what is working well, issues and barriers regarding recruitment, ideas for the acknowledgement of volunteers, new opportunities for engaging volunteers and priorities for inclusion in the strategy.

- A survey was sent to current Council volunteers that explored the areas of motivation, recruitment, promotion, recognition and acknowledgement, information and support.

- An internal working group, consisting of Council officers that supervise volunteers, has been established, with the aim of gathering information to improve and standardize the process of recruitment and management of volunteers within the Council.
• Information was extracted from the extensive research and consultation undertaken by the Borderlands Cooperative for its Report for the Eastern Region, “Strengthening Volunteering and Civic Participation”.

• An extensive literature review was undertaken

It is important to note that consultation will continue beyond the development of this strategy in acknowledgement of the changing trends in volunteering, and the need for ongoing engagement with the Whitehorse community.

There will be opportunities for the community to take a lead role in driving and facilitating the discussion around civic participation and volunteering, and in the further development of the Strategy in its future iterations.

**Outcomes of the Consultation Process**

The community consultation process reinforced the existence of a strong and vibrant culture of voluntary activity within the municipality. It highlighted the strengths of the local networks and the unique characteristics of Whitehorse such as its diverse demographics.

Many of the issues and challenges related to the recruitment and management of volunteers – keeping abreast of the trends, juggling limited resources – both financial and time, increasing complexity in areas such as regulatory demands, etc.

An example of this was the high interest in setting up a local network balanced with the anxiety about the time it would take out of the day to attend.

The ways in which organisations respond to these increasing pressures and the changing trends was central to the discussions and feedback.

Exploring ways to adapt and respond to these challenges – to be able to successfully recruit and retain volunteers, attract younger people, offer innovative opportunities was also central to all of the discussions.

Requests for assistance with promotion, development of central and integrated systems, support for networking, and innovative ideas reflected a collaborative spirit and desire for a strong and sustainable future for voluntary activity in Whitehorse.

Some of the Identified Priorities:

• Effective recruitment and management of volunteers

• Development of networks and partnerships

• Integration of recruitment systems

*Please refer to the appendices for a detailed summary of the results of the consultation.*
Linking Voluntary Activity to Community Strengthening

LITERATURE AND POLICY REVIEW

Much of the literature establishes strong links between volunteering, social capital and democracy.

The American researcher, Robert Putnam stated that “By social capital, I mean features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam 1995)

Putnam argues that the cornerstone of social capital is reciprocity. “I’ll do this for you now, without ever expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favour” (Putnam 2000) The Social Policy Research Centre suggests that “sociability refers to the general features of relationships that enable us to build trust and make connections with others. When we extend this conduct towards other people we don’t know, we transform sociability into a capacity for democratic organizations – which is precisely what social capital means”. (Volunteering: The Human Face of Democracy January 2002)

There is no doubt that volunteering helps to build social capital. Volunteering has the capacity to build links and enrich civic participation.

However as it is noted by the Social Policy Research Centre in their summing up, “There is more at stake in the volunteering experience than a sense of delivering and receiving fair treatment from strangers. Rather, what counts here is the capacity for compassion, kindness and caring. In bringing these human qualities into the human domain, our understanding of civility to include caring for generalised others, volunteering show’s democracy’s human face”

Volunteering can help to build an inclusive society. The frameworks developed at a Federal and State level acknowledge the links between voluntary activity and community strengthening.

The Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) describes community strengthening as “a sustained effort to increase involvement and partnership among members of a community to achieve common objectives. It involves local people, community organisations, government, business and philanthropic organisations working together to achieve agreed social, economic and environmental outcomes.”

As stated in the MAV Report, “approaching voluntary activity from a community strengthening perspective means taking account of the widest range of voluntary activities which can contribute to outcomes such as building trust, developing strong networks, developing and realising collective goals and community driven governance structures.”
Three principles underpin the Victorian Government’s approach to strengthening communities:

- The importance of investing in community strengthening activities
- The need to develop integrated local approaches to planning and delivery of services
- The requirement to change the way government works, both within government and with the community sectors

Supporting volunteers is recognized by DPCD as one of the approaches of community strengthening in Victoria.

The MAV in its Report “Tracking What Works” acknowledges the “leadership exhibited by local government in supporting voluntary activity for community strengthening outcomes” and outlines a number of examples where councils “have successfully integrated approaches to voluntary activity with community strengthening outcomes”.

The Report identifies four approaches to voluntary activity as community strengthening based on:

- Discrete categories of voluntary activity
- Capacity building and trust
- Community participation and building strong networks
- Social and political empowerment

One of the ways that the MAV suggests that local government can approach the development of voluntary activity is by adopting a community development approach.

“Voluntary activity as a community development imperative involves people organizing their own communities through democratic involvement in decision making (for example sitting on council committees), organising Council supported community festivals and developing community-to-community links with disadvantaged groups internationally. Thus it can include both formal volunteering and other forms of voluntary and civic participation activity."

This is a broad all-encompassing approach that values and recognizes the broad range of community assets.

As the UN stats in its Report “Volunteering and Social Activism, “the goal of deepening and sustaining participation depends on creating new, diverse and varied opportunities for involvement....Investments in good volunteer management and the recognition of volunteers can result in more impactful change. Government, civil society, the private sector and international agencies all have a role to play in fostering an enabling environment for people’s participation."
**The Federal Context**

The Australian Government, through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), funds a number of programs to assist the work of volunteers:

**Volunteer Grants Program**

The Volunteer Grants Program provides funding to help community organisations to purchase equipment to assist their volunteers in their activities and to reimburse volunteers for their fuel costs.

**Volunteer Management Program**

The Volunteer Management Program (VMP) funds Volunteer Resource Centres to assist people to participate in volunteering through the provision of training to volunteers and community organizations throughout Australia.

Organisations that utilise volunteers can also seek advice and training about volunteering management through the Volunteer Resource Centres throughout Australia.

**National Volunteer Skills Centre**

The National Volunteer Skills Centre, which is being managed by Volunteering Australia, provides organisations and volunteers with access to training materials. Through the development of accredited general and specialist training materials, a resource library and a national peer network, the centre supports voluntary organisations to address their volunteers’ training needs.

**Volunteering Australia (VA)**

Volunteering Australia is the peak Australian body for volunteering. They work towards policy and program outcomes that best support volunteering and facilitate research into volunteering through the Australian Journal on Volunteering and other initiatives. VA also provides the “GoVolunteer” website for those interested in becoming a volunteer.

[www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)

As previously stated, Volunteering Australia has developed National Standards for “Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations”. They describe the elements that should exist in a best practice system for the engagement, participation and management of volunteers.

These standards are designed “to ensure that volunteers are not exploited because of their commitment, work in healthy and safe environments, and have the comfort of knowing what their role is”. The standards are also designed “to help organisations involve and retain the services of volunteers on whom they so depend.”
The National Standards focus on:

1. Policies and Procedures
2. Management responsibilities
3. Recruitment
4. Work and workplace
5. Training and development
6. Service delivery
7. Documentation
8. Continuous improvement

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement provide a systematic approach to volunteer management and provides an essential framework for not for profit organisations involved in providing a volunteer service.

The State Context

The Victorian Government’s Action Plan “Strengthening Community Organisations”, released in April 2008, builds on the Government’s previous policies and commitments. Through this Plan, the Government expresses its support to the sustainability of non-profit organisations so they can continue to contribute to the economic and social life of Victoria.

The Plan states that “voluntary work in this (not for profit) sector is also significant. ……there are thousands of associations with a primarily local focus, led and used by volunteers to pursue many different interests and forms of recreation.”

The Plan outlines a series of Actions designed to build the capacity of community organisations:

Action 15: increasing the skills and engagement of volunteers

“The Government recognizes that volunteering is the life blood of the overwhelming majority of community organizations, with more than 90 percent of incorporated associations reliant on the contribution of volunteers. …….. Through the development of a comprehensive volunteer and participation strategy, the Government will continue to assist community organizations so they are better able to attract, retain and train volunteers”.  

The Victorian Government has recently released Victoria’s Volunteering Strategy 2009. This $9.3million strategy is aimed at sustaining volunteering in Victoria by providing support to volunteer- based organisations and volunteers across the State. It also aims to promote the benefits of volunteering to communities and to those who volunteer their time. The
development of the strategy is a key item in the Victorian Government’s Action Plan Strengthening Community Organisations.

The Victorian Government, through the Department of Planning and Community Development, supports volunteering in a number of ways. These include Volunteer Support Grants, and the Victorian Volunteer Small Grants.

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering. This organisation is funded by both the state and federal governments.

The Local Context – Eastern Metropolitan Region

Through the Victorian State Government’s Report “A Fairer Victoria”, released in 2005, 8 Regional Management Forums (RMF) were established to guide local initiatives aimed at better linking local government, state government and local communities. One of the three priority projects identified by the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) Management Forum was “Regional Opportunities in Volunteering and Civic Participation”. The Borderlands Cooperative was subsequently commissioned to develop a Strategic Plan to strengthen the commitment to volunteering in the EMR, in ways that would support communities, especially the vulnerable, and also strengthen the civic participation and social connectedness of residents in the region.

An Outcomes Framework for Volunteering and Civic Participation was agreed to by participants at a Regional Volunteering Development Workshop held in February 2007, relating to four key elements:

1. volunteering growth and diversity
2. enhanced volunteering capacity for more sustainable volunteering outcomes
3. volunteering in the region better linked to other relevant sectors
4. increased profile of volunteering and its contribution to the community

The Report was released in 2008 and determined the following:

“Voluntary work and civic engagement is alive and well in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. The face of voluntary and civic activity is changing however, and understanding the transformations and supporting them strategically is critical to meet the key challenges facing governments – both local and state – and the communities in the region.”
Furthermore, the report explored changes in the nature of people’s civil society work including:

- a shift away from some types of formal voluntary ‘care and support work’, such as delivered meal services
- a shift towards short-term, ‘community development’ and activist civil society engagement
- a high demand for (short-term) voluntary administrative work (but less demand for IT-related work) as a pathway to paid employment or as general skills development
- Centrelink clients seeming to be increasingly opting to volunteer to satisfy their Mutual Obligation or Welfare to Work requirements.

Changes in life patterns including:

- People working for longer hours and until later in life
- The demands of being in a ‘sandwich generation’ (caring for children and for ageing parents)
- Time-poor families with both parents in employment
- Seasonal northward migration of retirees.
- Traditional ideas about duty, responsibility and giving

The Report also listed a number of barriers to engagement in civic participation in the EMR:

- People of diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds (including Indigenous people), those living with disabilities and the young are underrepresented in many forms of voluntary activity.
- There is insufficient access to community and public transport, which limit people’s access to participation.
- Fear of litigation and over-governance in many volunteer-involving community organisations with government programs eroding some people’s willingness to offer their skills and time.
- Insufficient opportunities in manual, maintenance and outdoor tasks for those who like to be active and involved in physical work (especially men).
- Disillusionment amongst participants working in under-resourced service-delivery programs has led to people exiting programs.
The subsequent Implementation Plan outlines a number of strategies for strengthening volunteering/civic participation in the EMR:

1. Increase, strengthen and sustain capacity building and material resourcing for volunteering/civic participation

2. Create and sustain awareness, relationships, practices and a culture of – and for – volunteering/civic participation

3. Establish and resource systems and processes for sustaining and maintaining volunteering/civic participation

**Eastern Volunteers**

Eastern Volunteer Resource Centre Inc. (Eastern Volunteers) is a not for profit organisation established in 1976, that provides volunteer assistance and community transport to people living in the cities of Whitehorse and Maroondah and the Shire of Yarra Ranges. Eastern Volunteers works in partnership with all levels of government, peak volunteer organisations other volunteer resource centres and a wide range of community service organisations and local businesses.

The Centre receives its core funding from the Federal and State Governments and also receives funding from the City of Whitehorse through its Community Grants Program to assist with its operations.

**The City of Whitehorse**

**Links to Council Plans**

As detailed in the City of Whitehorse Council Vision 2006 – 2016, Whitehorse will continue to:

- Be a vibrant, active community;
- Boast a regionally significant economy;
- Be recognised as the most livable part of Melbourne; and
- Become a leader in sustainable practices

**Whitehorse Council Plan 2009-2013**

Council’s Strategic Objectives over the next four financial years 2009-2013 that will progress the Whitehorse community towards this vision are;
1. **Serve and strengthen our diverse community to be inclusive, vibrant and engaged**;

2. **Promote, protect, enhance and respect the quality of our natural and built environments**;

3. **Deliver organisational excellence, visionary leadership and strong governance, through dedicated people, to ensure the best possible contribution to our community; and**

4. **Support a prosperous, diverse and healthy local economy that contributes to the wellbeing of our community.**

Whitehorse is a rich community with many great examples of civic participation and voluntary activity currently taking place which can be built on and expanded; however there are also a number of challenges facing the Whitehorse community as it strives to achieve this vision, are also identified:

- **An ageing population**
- **Higher density living**
- **Changing lifestyles and their impact on the provision of services and facilities**
- **Conservation of our natural environment**
- **Building a strong civic community**
- **Creating a sustainable economy**
- **Expansion of the amount of open space**
- **Improving transport choices**

One of the key result areas in the Council Plan, “**Serve and strengthen our diverse community to be inclusive, vibrant and engaged**”, is of particular relevance to the area of civic participation and volunteering:

Our vision for 2016 is that **“the Whitehorse community will be a socially diverse and inclusive community, actively participating in a range of activities that contribute to their physical, mental and social well being”**. This Strategy and other Council Plans and policies with a “wellbeing” focus will progressively, as they are implemented, work towards realising this vision.

**Whitehorse Municipal Public Health Plan**

The Whitehorse Municipal Public Health Plan is Council’s key strategic document that outlines our commitment to improving the health, safety and wellbeing of the local community.
The actions in the plan are based on a social model of health and include strategies that build social capital and strengthen the local community.

The Whitehorse Health and Wellbeing Profile uses a range of data sources and reports to identify a number of key issues across a number of broad areas that influence people’s lives.

One of the significant health priorities identified through the development of the Plan is “Improving community connectedness and strengthening partnerships with relevant organisations to reduce the rates of mental health illness such as depression.”

Encouraging volunteering and civic participation will clearly contribute to the achievement of this priority.

Several of the goals identified in the Plan also relate directly to volunteering and civic participation in our community:

- Improve overall health and wellbeing of the Whitehorse community
- Increase social connectedness and celebrate our community
- Promote community engagement

In the Action Plan, under the Objective of “Supporting healthy connected communities”, the following strategy is listed: “Continue to promote and celebrate volunteering within the municipality”.

The new Whitehorse Municipal Health Plan which will be released in November 2009 will also work towards strengthening the community, increasing social capital and building the capacity of the community to be more inclusive, including that which relates to voluntary activity and civic participation.


It is critical as the population of Whitehorse ages, opportunities are provided for older people to fully participate in community life. Volunteering and civic participation provides one such means for this to happen, with benefits to both the individual and the community.

As is stated in the Strategy, “It is important that older people are viewed as a resource and solution in paid employment, as volunteers, and /or in the role of caregivers or supporters to family and friends, rather than as a burden to the health care system”.

“While many people retire from formal work, they continue to contribute actively to family, community and society. Many engage in volunteering with reciprocal benefits to those who engage in it, contributing to the growth and maintenance of health and wellbeing.

A number of recommendations are of particular relevance to the development of a Volunteering and Civic Participation Strategy:
• Encourage social connectedness and community engagement

• Maintain and develop volunteer engagement and retention

• Encourage participation in healthy lifestyle activities

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

Socio Demographic Summary

Results from the national 2006 Voluntary Work Survey undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show that 5.2 million people (34%) of the Australian population aged 18 years and over, participate in voluntary work. These people contributed 713 million hours to the community across diverse activities.

Whitehorse has a population of approximately 151,000 residents with almost one-third born overseas. The 2006 Census data shows that residents of the City speak more than 110 different languages. The most common languages other than English are Cantonese, Mandarin, Greek, Italian, Vietnamese, Hindi, German, Sinhalese, Korean, Indonesian and Arabic.

The 2006 Census data also reveals that approximately 66% of Whitehorse’s residents are aged between 18 and 69, 21% are aged less than 18 years, and 13% are aged over 70.

In 2006, participation in voluntary activity was measured by the Department of Planning and Community Development, through the Community Strength Survey. According to the Report, the number of volunteers in the community is a direct measure of community engagement and social connectedness. “As well as the economic value of the services volunteers provide, there is much interest in the role volunteers have in building social networks and increasing social cohesion (ABS 2002)”

Source: http://www.communityindicators.net.au/metadata_items/volunteering

In the survey, respondents were asked whether or not they helped out as a volunteer. 42.2% of persons living in Whitehorse reported that they helped out as a volunteer, as compared to 41.0% in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. The Metropolitan average was 38.4%.

Source: http://www.communityindicators.net.au/wellbeing_reports/whitehorse

Because information collected by the ABS through the census, differs from the methodology in regard to how DPCD collects information, it should be noted that the 2006 ABS Census indicates a different figure.

Analysis of the voluntary work performed by the population in City of Whitehorse compared to Melbourne Statistical Division (SD) shows that there was a larger proportion of persons
who volunteered for an organisation or group. Overall, 20.5% of the population reported performing voluntary work, compared with 15.5% for Melbourne SD.

**Figure 1**

*Volunteering for an organisation or group, City of Whitehorse and Melbourne SD, 2006 (Enumerated data)*

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census of Population and Housing (Enumerated)

**Figure 2**

*Number of Persons* doing voluntary work for an organisation/group by age group, *City of Whitehorse, Census 2006*
Demographic trends will have a significant and direct impact on volunteering in Whitehorse. In 2007 the highest rates of volunteering were for those aged 34 -44 years and 45 – 54 years. As the population of Whitehorse ages, these groups will move into groups where the rate of volunteering decreases and into groups heavily reliant on volunteer services.

One of the challenges will be to increase volunteering amongst the younger population and new and creative methods will need to be developed to successfully do this.

**Role of Local Government**

David Penman in his article “The Baby Boomer Wave – Exploring Opportunities for New Volunteering in Victoria” states that whilst overall rates of volunteering in Victoria are stable, there is evidence of a shift away from traditional forms of volunteering eg “increasing preference for episodic opportunities rather than on-going commitments”.

Attitudinal changes are also taking place with people “seeking a volunteering experience as a pathway to acquiring additional skills and employment, with people more interested in using their professional skills for community benefits”.

Local government, along with all other levels of government, has an important role to play in leading and supporting the community to adapt to these changes.

Local government is in an ideal position to support volunteering and civic participation as it is the tier of government closest to its constituents.

As stated in the MAV Report, “Tracking What Works”, “Local Government in particular, is positioned to shape and support the conditions in which voluntary organisations and social networks develop and thrive. It interacts with the wide array of associations, community groups, business and the formal and informal settings in which participation occurs. Local government is also able to support “whole of community” approaches by facilitating leadership, strategic partnerships, collaboration and planning within the community.”......“The move to explore more contemporary approaches to supporting and sustaining voluntary activity as part of strengthening communities will inform and indeed underpin, the directions being taken by local government in community engagement, community capacity building, community planning and community development.”
THEMATIC AREAS – What the City of Whitehorse can do to support volunteering

The Strategy is a fluid document with continuing opportunities being developed for community input, contributing to the building of a strong, connected and inclusive community.

Each of the priority, thematic areas as detailed below: Managing Volunteers; Valuing Volunteers; Promoting Volunteering; Supporting Organisations; Embracing Innovation; and Expanding Opportunities, will form the basis of and guide the development of annual action plans that will work toward achieving the goals and aspirations of the City of Whitehorse, over the four year period, in regard to strengthening civic participation and voluntary activity within the municipality.

1. Managing Volunteers

- Review City of Whitehorse Volunteering Policy and Procedures in line with the National Standards for Involving volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations developed by Volunteering Australia

- Develop a cross-Council working group of Officers responsible for the day to day management of volunteers

- Provide support, information and training to Council staff who manage volunteers

- Explore options for establishing a central volunteer register on Council’s website

- Work towards increasing the number and diversity of volunteers across Council and the community through strategic partnerships and collaboration

- Support organizations to implement the National Standards for Volunteer Management

2. Valuing Volunteers

- Establish a Volunteer Award Scheme for the City of Whitehorse

- Hold events during National Volunteer Week each year that celebrate and acknowledge the work of volunteers in Whitehorse

- Hold events that acknowledge and celebrate the work achieved by Council volunteers
3. **Promoting Volunteering**

- Promote the economic and social benefits of volunteering within the local community
- Explore and develop new initiatives for National Volunteer Week to raise the profile of volunteering in Whitehorse
- Explore the feasibility and interest in holding a Whitehorse Volunteering Expo to raise the profile of volunteering
- Link in with other Council and Community Events e.g. Whitehorse Spring Festival to raise the profile of volunteering
- Review and strengthen information about volunteering on the Website
- Develop a Voluntary Activity section on the City of Whitehorse website
- Submit regular media releases to promote the benefits of volunteering
- Undertake community Education around a mutual understanding of civic participation and volunteering
- Explore the development of an annual forum to raise the profile of volunteers and strengthen networks and partnerships
- Develop promotional materials e.g. banners, posters etc. to use at events

4. **Supporting Organisations**

- Facilitate access to information and support for community organisations
- Convene a Whitehorse Voluntary Activity Network
- Review the current training options available for volunteers and managers of volunteers
- Provide assistance to small not for profit groups in developing policies and procedures around volunteering
- Disseminate information that will support and assist not for profit groups that manage volunteers
- Support agencies and groups to provide consolidated training
- Support community organisations to access funding opportunities to increase their capacity
Advocate on a Federal and State level for increased funding and support

5. Embracing Innovation

- Keep abreast of current research, trends and new approaches in volunteering both nationally and overseas and disseminate this information to key stakeholders
- Explore the development of an incentive and recognition program for new and innovative volunteering programs
- Explore new IT technology that will support and strengthen volunteering eg blogs

6. Expanding opportunities

- Explore opportunities for project based or episodic volunteering
- Benchmark with other local councils and community organisations in relation to establishing new volunteering activities in Whitehorse
- Explore the development of opportunities for Family volunteering
- Develop a youth engagement strategy to assist organisations to attract, recruit and retain younger people as volunteers
- Develop links with schools and tertiary institutions to encourage more younger people to volunteer and increase the number of volunteers in Whitehorse
- Build relationships with the Business sector and explore opportunities for Corporate volunteering
- Work with the CALD community to increase opportunities for people from diverse cultural backgrounds to volunteer
- Work with the disability sector to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to volunteer

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Strengthening of Whitehorse’s volunteering sector
- Best practice within Council in relation to volunteer management
- Enhanced profile of volunteering in Whitehorse
- Improved capacity of agencies in Whitehorse to support volunteers
- Increased diversity in volunteering in the Whitehorse community
- Growth of volunteering in Whitehorse
• The not for profit sector better placed able to respond to the changing nature of volunteering
Appendix 1: Developing a Strategic Approach - Summary of Workshop

Strengths:

- “Local” is the key word in volunteering – volunteers get to know each other / building networks
- Volunteering and working together is an investment in community
- Volunteering is a way of helping isolated people get back into the community
- Organisational investment in volunteers
- Cultural diversity of Whitehorse
- The high number of volunteers in Whitehorse, with associated social and health benefits
- Established organisations – wisdom, experience etc.
- Promoting people’s personal experience – using experience to promote volunteering
- Migrant Information centre working to break down the barriers and perceived stigmas around CALD, disability. Louise Multicultural Centre also looking to practical ways of addressing this
- Volunteer involvement in caring for our parks and gardens
- Council acceptance of the importance of volunteering
- Dedicated Council officer position will help communication

Issues:

- Communication / connections (all avenues inc. technology etc.) – knowing where and how to access resources
- Location of resource centres – regional vs local
- Attracting volunteers is becoming more difficult – baby boomers a different generation
- Changing demographics eg more young females working, ageing population
- Reliability of Volunteers - taking holidays for periods of up to 3 months at a time – expectations around flexibility
• Difficult to get a casual pool of volunteers – existing volunteers or staff need to step in to cover gaps

• Compliance issues - Police checks expensive and onerous

• Regulations at many levels (government, local, organisational) take too much time – stops some program delivery

• Service duplication – groups working in isolation – information needs to be kept up to date

• Expectations of volunteers – understanding the motivation eg as a pathway to employment

• Different cultures = degrees of volunteering / also genders / age

• Dynamics of volunteering

**Challenges and Barriers:**

• Changing demographics & changing trends in volunteering eg more females working, ageing population etc.

• Economic downturn – more people seeking to volunteer as a pathway to employment

• Increased need for volunteers and respond to how people want to volunteer

• The 20% of people undertaking voluntary activity are doing the majority (approx80%) of voluntary work in the community- leading to volunteer fatigue

• The question is, how do we tap into the other 80% of the population who don’t currently volunteer?

• We need to link into people’s personal experience

• Organisations working in isolation

• Understanding multicultural differences

• Appropriate referrals to organisations – importance of screening

• Knowing what resources are available to access

• Time taken to train volunteers and associated regulations

• Corporate volunteering and episodic volunteering – important for organisations / corporations to build a rapport for ongoing arrangements
- Student placements
- Having the resources to set up new programs and explore all opportunities and possibilities
- Organisations can often get initial funding for new programs but then have to take on ongoing costs
- Volunteers come with costs – it is not a free resource and this needs to be recognized and acknowledged
- Attracting volunteers to the disability sector
- Finding confident volunteers who use their initiative

## Gaps and Possibilities:

- **IT** to help connect and share information. Look at “Our Community” – compile a list of NGO’s that do volunteer work
- Dedicated website – volunteers – a resource for the community and a resource for access by organisations only
- Opportunity for participants to access activities of other organisations – establish agreements and links
- Coordinating effort around management and training
- Bringing groups and organisations together on a 6 monthly basis – provide information, speakers etc.
- Establish specific networks eg volunteering and disability
- Look at where and how to advertise and communicate eg a section in the Whitehorse News every month
- Promotion – altering focus to attract changing demographics
- A network could have dilemmas organisations face as a regular agenda item – need to keep revising what the challenges are
- How and where to engage effectively with diverse groups in the community – understanding cultural identity and important values / issues, motivations etc.
### Appendix 2: Community Survey Results (Not for profit Organisations)

### Activities that volunteers are engaged in (drawn from survey)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration / Office Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee of Management / Board membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in op shops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support Program for older people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support in programs for people with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly visiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness Friendship Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information / Referral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of Library material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording of talking newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical - Heritage / Cataloguing / Displays / Preservation / Speaking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Opportunities for Episodic Volunteering:

- Conducting Courses
- Special Projects
- Events – annual and one off
- Students on work experience
- Emergency Teaching
- Analysis of surveys
- Heritagecare Victoria
- Sub-Committees
- Computer Refurbishment
- Christmas Hamper Packing
- Maintenance
- Fund Raising
- Day Trips

### Issues / Barriers in relation to recruiting volunteers?

- Shortage of volunteers/Ageing volunteers
- Matching volunteers with the skills / interests / time requirements of the organization
- Timing – getting volunteers at the time that you need them
- Communication / publicity
- Poor language skills
- Volunteers not wanting to stay long
- Time taken to support and train volunteers
- Finding space in the organisation
- Corporate volunteers require completion of specific projects within a specified time
### Type of Assistance needed for recruiting volunteers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistance</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistance with Promotion</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Register / referral and matching service</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking in with Corporate Volunteers</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in local volunteer network</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from Council’s Civic Participation and Volunteer Officer</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise and Support from Volunteer Resource Centre</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External funding</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with another organisation</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for volunteers</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Resources</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toolkit</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The ways in which Council could assist volunteering at your organisation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistance</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of volunteers</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising workshops / training sessions</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on grants / funding available</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a central register</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convening a local volunteer network</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to other organisations</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Challenges that a Civic Participation and volunteer Strategy needs to address:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased community interest in volunteering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs – many volunteers on shrinking incomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exorbitant fees charged to train volunteers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


• Economic situation – especially in relation to people on fixed incomes

• Childcare duties for retired people

• Competing priorities – networking valuable but time available limited

• Resourcing – to be involved in events / festivals etc. takes resources away from core business

• The ability of the Council to effectively communicate its strategy and getting organisations to see its value

• Integration of existing networks

• Increased community interest in contributing by volunteering

• Personal engagement for people not otherwise associated with groups

• Financial support for activities involving people on a low income

• Suitability for people with physical disabilities

• The ability of the Council to be able to effectively communicate its strategy to people and getting them to see its value

• The need to listen to volunteer groups to understand their needs

• Promotion for Committee members for not for profit groups

Priorities for your organisation for action over the next 4 year for inclusion in a strategy:

• Organising volunteers better

• Better prepared volunteers

• Regular training of volunteers

• Corporate engagement

• Funding for social engagement

• Enabling community members to be engaged with their library and the wider community

• Raising awareness of the library and its place in the local community
• Effective recruitment, training and management of volunteers
• Enhance partnerships / networks
• Increase volunteering
• Participation on committees
• Wider integration between existing networks
• Resourcing of agencies
• Continued commitment of short term volunteers
• Training of volunteers with some incentive to commit (eg reimbursement of travel expenses)
### Appendix 3: Internal Survey Results (Volunteer Supervisors)

#### What is working well in relation to Engaging Volunteers?

- Advertising in Schools
- Plenty of Church volunteers for Carols
- Ensuring volunteers feel a valued part of the Team
- Being available to support and listen to volunteers
- Volunteers can assist tutors, increasing the ratio of adult assistance for young people

#### Barriers in relation to recruiting volunteers

- No strategic overall plan in regard to recruiting volunteers – planned response needed
- Work left to a few volunteers, leading to burn-out
- Need for continual recruitment to the program
- High turnover (nature of the program)
- Matching volunteering interests to actual competency to undertake tasks, without risk or harm to self or without supervision

#### Types of assistance required in recruiting volunteers

- Additional resources
- Assistance with Promotion
- Central register / referral matching service
- Streamlining the recruitment process
- Linking in with tertiary institutions
- Engaging Corporate volunteers
Types of assistance required in relation to management of volunteers

- Induction Program / manual
- Assistance with training volunteers
- Training for yourself
- Support with individuals volunteers when required
- A volunteer management handbook
- Events to acknowledge the work done by volunteers

Ways in which you would like to see your volunteers recognized and acknowledged?

- Training opportunities
- Celebration event for all Council volunteers
- Informal “get-togethers”
- Thank-you letters
- Certificates for years of service
- Volunteer Awards
- Expression of Council’s appreciation for time given and use of own vehicles by volunteers – acknowledgement of the difficult jobs done

Priorities for Action for inclusion in a Strategy

- Central pool of volunteers which programs could access
- Centralised recruitment strategy
- Uniformed approach in relation to paperwork
- Volunteer registration
- Volunteer training
- Volunteer acknowledgement
The Volunteer and Civic Participation Strategy was prepared by the Community Development Department of the City of Whitehorse