



**ethnic
communities'
council of
victoria**

A Guide to Welcoming Committees and Activities for Regional Skilled Migrants

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Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc



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Introduction

As part of the Victorian Government's Regional Migration Incentive Fund (RMIF), the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria is concentrating on researching and sharing information about the ways in which 'welcoming communities' can be fostered in regional Victoria.

The guide aims to assist regional communities in establishing welcoming committees and activities for skilled migrants and their families in regional Victoria. This helps make new migrants feel welcome in their new communities. It is a key strategy in retaining skilled migrants in regional areas for the benefit of all.

Regional Ethnic Communities Councils have a great deal of experience and expertise in extending a warm welcome to new arrivals in Victoria, including skilled migrants. This guide contains general information about welcoming committees, and also some examples of welcoming activities that have meaningfully supported skilled migrants and other new arrivals in regional communities.

Our aim is to provide practical advice about establishing welcoming committees and to share examples of some programs that have worked well in regional Victoria. While this guide is focused on welcoming skilled migrants and their families, many of the programs outlined within have been developed for a broad variety of newcomers, and much of the information in this document is also relevant to welcoming other groups of new arrivals.

Regional welcoming committees and activities are important to the wellbeing of new arrivals and are also part of a broader strategy aimed at retaining skilled migrants in regional Victoria.

Welcoming Committees

What is a welcoming committee?

Ideally, a welcoming committee is a group of dedicated individuals who regularly meet and work collaboratively to develop and implement welcoming activities for skilled migrants. A model welcoming committee will have a diverse membership, with representatives from many sectors of the community.

What is the purpose of a welcoming committee?

The aim of a welcoming committee is to establish and sustain programs that provide new arrivals with local information, social support and access to community networks. A welcoming committee will also strengthen communication between the community and business sectors that work closely with skilled migrants. Setting out the goals of a welcoming committee by developing terms of reference can play an important role in establishing and achieving local objectives, in both the short and long terms. Migrants who feel welcomed and well supported in a region are more likely to settle in that region permanently. By engaging and supporting skilled migrants and their families, a welcoming committee can play a significant role in increasing the level of migrant retention.



Who might participate in a welcoming committee?

The membership of a welcoming committee is ideally diverse. A committee might consider finding members from community sectors such as ethnic associations, local councils (including RMIF coordinators), primary and secondary schools, TAFE colleges and universities, as well as representatives from the fields of community development, settlement and health care. The participation of culturally and linguistically diverse members of the community is also highly desirable. A broad membership is important for identifying the skills and resources that already exist within a community and also for reducing the likelihood of program replication. Some of the skills and resources members might bring to a committee include experience supporting new arrivals and a knowledge of their needs; expertise in delivering culturally sensitive services; as well as funding, space or other resources for welcoming activities.

How often should a welcoming committee meet?

The interval between committee meetings will vary from region to region. Meetings might occur weekly, bi-monthly, monthly or on a flexible basis depending upon what the committee finds useful in achieving its aims. Regular meetings can provide momentum in the transition between the conceptualisation of welcoming activities and their implementation. It is a good idea to determine how frequently a committee will meet early on in its development, though this frequency may change over time.

How might a welcoming committee be structured?

The organisational framework of a welcoming committee can vary considerably, ranging from fairly informal to highly structured. As a guide only, those establishing a committee might find the following checklist useful:

- Identify all potential partners and members
- Establish terms of reference
- Elect a Chairperson and Secretary
- Determine regular meeting times
- Distribute accurate minutes from each meeting
- Ensure that all committee activities are
 - (a) informed by appropriate cultural and religious sensitivities, and
 - (b) take place at times which take into account members' working hours, family and other commitments.

Welcoming Activities

For new arrivals, welcoming activities work to expand social networks and to provide opportunities for friendships to emerge. The networks and connections that welcoming activities establish also help to build a sense of community attachment among skilled migrants and their families. Welcoming activities also allow new arrivals to share their knowledge, skills and talents in a supportive environment. Activities often have an informal and social atmosphere within which participants feel comfortable sharing their concerns and raising issues.



The benefits of engaging new arrivals through welcoming activities are significant and often extend beyond skilled migrants and their families and into the community itself. Regional communities have much to gain from meaningful engagement with new arrivals who bring with them new skills, resources, opportunities for friendship, cultural celebrations, traditions and ideas.

What makes a successful welcoming activity?

A successful welcoming activity will tend to be inclusive, friendly and have a social atmosphere.

Though it may be difficult to measure the success of a welcoming activity in a quantitative way, an activity's success might be indicated by the informal feedback of participants and volunteers.

One way of ensuring that activities are useful and responsive to the needs of new and emerging communities is to respond to the regular feedback of participants gathered either by informal means, such as a chat, or more formal mechanisms like interviews, focus groups or surveys.

When developing a welcoming activity it may be useful to draw inspiration from existing models that have been implemented in other regions. This guide contains short examples of welcoming activities implemented throughout regional Victoria. However, it is important to compliment rather than replicate existing services for new arrivals in a particular region.

Recording the contact details of the participants in welcoming activities—with permission—is useful for disseminating information on future activities. Keeping a database which records the gender, age and interests of new arrivals may also assist in tailoring welcoming activities for skilled migrants.

Food for thought: If food is a part of a welcoming activity it is important to be sensitive to different cultural, religious and dietary requirements. For example, when hosting a welcoming barbeque for new arrivals including Muslims it would be culturally appropriate to provide Halal meat.

Who should participate in a welcoming activity?

Welcoming activities should be open to anyone who would like to participate. Participants may include newly arrived migrants as well as those who have been in the area for an extended period of time.

When implementing programs and activities it is important to offer support and services which are not only directed at skilled migrants themselves, but also engage the partners and families of skilled migrants. Partners of skilled migrants who are not employed tend to feel higher levels of social isolation unless linked with community networks. Activities developed specifically for the partners and children of skilled migrants work to decrease the levels of social isolation experienced. This increases the likelihood of retaining the skilled migrant and their family in a regional area over the longer term.

As well as utilising existing networks and contacts, participation in activities may be increased through placing advertisements in local newspapers or newsletters. Some local newspapers will list community events for free—and may even be interested in printing an article on community initiatives for welcoming new arrivals.



How should volunteers be involved?

The recruitment and training of volunteers is an important aspect of welcoming activities. Although many people may express good intentions and an enthusiasm for volunteering it is a good idea to screen volunteers through an interview process and also to obtain a police check. The screening process ensures that volunteers have realistic expectations of what volunteering entails and are well suited to the role. When recruiting volunteers for programs and activities it is important to encourage culturally and linguistically diverse members of the community as well as members of the mainstream community to become involved.

Once volunteers have been selected, training volunteers will ensure that both volunteers and skilled migrants get the most benefit out of activities and programs. Issues which training may cover include cultural sensitivity, program orientation, occupational health and safety, risk management and also volunteer expectations and boundaries.

The benefits of welcoming activities extend beyond the skilled migrants they are targeted to. Volunteers who participate in welcoming activities are given the opportunity to enhance their intercultural communication skills, confidence, and knowledge of other cultures and also form friendships.

What about the traditional owners and custodians of the land?

It is important to acknowledge and include the traditional owners and custodians of the land in regional welcoming strategies. Incorporating Indigenous Australian perspectives assists new arrivals to better understand the history and cultural composition of contemporary Australian society.

Wherever possible, it is good practice to have Indigenous members of your community provide information for new arrivals on Indigenous cultures, histories and contemporary contexts.

Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV) provides a comprehensive list of contacts of Indigenous communities in Victoria. The contact details for AAV are listed at the end of this document.

Examples of Welcoming Activities in Regional Victoria

The following examples represent just some of the welcoming activities for new arrivals that have been implemented in regional Victorian communities. These examples may provide inspiration for the development of future activities in your community.

Woven Lands Arts Project (Warrnambool)

This ten week project brought together local, Indigenous and migrant women and saw them work on traditional and contemporary woven pieces. Warrnambool City Council provided a letter of support for the project grant application, and provided in-kind support throughout its duration. As a part of the project, the local Koori community invited the broader population in Warrnambool to a special 'welcome to country' celebration with traditional Indigenous and Sudanese dancing. The Woven Lands Art Project also saw weekly meetings for the women involved emerge, and these meetings provided those attending with opportunities for fun, socialising and a sharing of experiences.



Multicultural Ambassador Program (Ballarat)

This program was instigated by the City of Ballarat as a part of their overall regional skilled migration strategy, and saw Multicultural Ambassadors nominated and selected from the community. Multicultural Ambassadors are elected for a two year period in which they promote multiculturalism in the region through public speaking engagements and working collectively on community development projects.

Bendigo Newcomers Club (Bendigo) <http://www.bendigonewcomers.com>

The Bendigo Newcomers Club organises social activities for new arrivals in Bendigo and works to expand social networks and allow friendships to develop. Membership is open to anyone in the region who would like to join, and as a result the club boasts a mixture of new arrivals as well as long term members of the community.

WEAVE Program (Shepparton)

The WEAVE program—*a community Welcome to Ethnic families through Assistance, Volunteer, orientation and Education*—works to match new arrivals with a volunteer and assist in orientation and settlement processes. The WEAVE program was developed through City of Greater Shepparton and trains volunteers to assist new arrivals in a variety of tasks associated with settlement. The tasks volunteers assist new arrivals with include locating local places of interest, service providers, linking to local sporting and service clubs and also undertaking daily activities such as using public transport and shopping. Volunteers for the WEAVE program received training on cross cultural awareness and other issues pertaining to volunteering from the local Equity and Access worker.

GV Ethnic Professionals Association (Shepparton)

This association emerged from a partnership between the Local Council and the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District and works to provide members with social support, networking activities and assistance. The case study in this briefing note contains more detailed information on the association.

Wahines Women's Singing Group (Bendigo)

Established in 2000, the Wahines Women's Singing Group emerged from the Bendigo Regional Ethnic Communities' Council. The singing group meets every second Monday to sing songs from all around the world. The singing group is a fun social activity for the women who participate and also a good opportunity to share experiences and seek advice in a welcoming environment. The Wahines have performed on many occasions within Bendigo and also travelled to perform at other Victorian festivals.

'My Story' Writing Class (Bendigo)

The Bendigo Regional Ethnic Communities Council (BRECC) initiated the 'My Story' writing class and invited migrant members of the Bendigo community to record their life stories. BRECC provided funding for an English teacher to work in partnership with migrants as a part of the program. The 'My Story' writing class has been positively received and the next step for the program will be to secure funding to publish the stories as a collection—highlighting the multicultural character of Bendigo.



Confidence Building Workshops (Bendigo)

The Bendigo Regional Ethnic Communities Council organised separate confidence building workshops for men and women in the region over weekends. The workshops gave participants the opportunity to identify issues facing their communities and collectively consider strategies to overcome such issues.

Establishing Incorporated Associations (Shepparton and other regions)

The Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District has provided practical advice and guidance, assisting several ethnic groups in Shepparton to establish incorporated associations. The most recent community to be assisted in this process is the Congolese community and they are soon to be established as an incorporated association. Incorporated associations work to foster strong networks which members can draw upon for support and advice. In addition, incorporated associations are well structured to advocate for the needs of members and also receive relevant information from the broader community.

Inclusive Games Project (Geelong)

The 'Inclusive Games' project developed to expand the social networks of refugee young people in Geelong. Diversitat (formerly the Geelong Ethnic Communities' Council) implemented the project with the support of Barwon Health, Leisure Networks and North Geelong Secondary College. Over the twelve week period of the program each of the fifteen participants sampled different sports, including cricket, hockey and sailing. At the end of the project each participant received a DVD which recorded their experiences undertaking new sports.

Case Study: GV Ethnic Professionals Association

The GV Ethnic Professionals Association was formed in October 2005 and is just one example of a welcoming strategy in regional Victoria. Recognition of the need to support skilled migrants and new arrivals in the region led to the organisation's development. The GV Ethnic Professionals Association emerged from a partnership between the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District and the City of Greater Shepparton. Part of its success can be attributed to the effective partnership between the two organisations.

Membership of the GV Ethnic Professionals Association is open to anyone who would like to join. As a result the association includes many new arrivals as well as members of the community who have been in the region for some time. A model of inclusiveness, the association also has members from the mainstream community in Shepparton.

The association provides an array of services including mentoring, conflict resolution, cross cultural training in the workplace, advocacy and sessions on community strengthening.

The association strives to create a welcoming environment and families are strongly encouraged to attend meetings. The GV Ethnic Professionals Association meets in the first week of each month and the informal environment provides opportunities for socialising, networking and a sharing of ideas, experience and advice.



Useful Contacts – By Region and Organisation

The following contacts may be useful if you are interested in learning more about any of the welcoming activities or information listed in this guide.

Ballarat

Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council (BRMC)

Barbara Fong
Coordinator, BRMC
Email: barbaraf@brmc.org.au
Phone: (03) 5337 0700

City of Ballarat

Narelle Hibbard
Executive Officer, Ballarat Migration Project
Email: narellehibberd@ballarat.vic.gov.au
Phone: (03) 5230 5180

Bendigo

Bendigo Regional Ethnic Communities' Council (BRECC)

Maria DiCicco
Ethnic Communities Telelink Officer
Email: m.dicicco@bendigo.vic.gov.au
Phone: (03) 5337 0700 (BRECC)

Bendigo Newcomers Inc

Email: bendigonewcomers@netconnect.com.au
Phone: (03) 5448 1680
Web: www.bendigonewcomers.com

City of Greater Bendigo

RMIF Coordinator
Email: info@bendigo.vic.gov.au
Phone: 03 5434 6000

Geelong/Colac

Diversitat

Pamela Rodreguez
Diversitat
Email: pamela.rodriquez@diversitat.org.au
Phone: (03) 5221 6044

City of Greater Geelong

Helena Buxton
RMIF Coordinator, Economic Development
Email: hbuxton@geelongcity.vic.gov.au
Phone: 03 5277 0866



Gippsland

Gippsland Ethnic Communities Council

Rene Sundermann
Deputy Chair, Gippsland Ethnic Communities' Council
Email: admin@egipps.net
Phone: (03) 5154 2885

Horsham

Wimmera Development Association

Dianne Baillie
Project Manager, Regional Migration Incentive Fund
Email: admin@wda.org.au
Phone: (03) 5381 1744

Mildura

Sunraysia Ethnic Communities Council

Colleen Tarrennt
Settlement Worker, Sunraysia Ethnic Communities' Council
Email: colleen@nwimmi.com.au
Phone: (03) 5022 1006

Mildura Rural City Council

Donna Gardner
Coordinator, Skilled Migration Strategy
Email: donna.gardner@mildura.vic.gov.au
Phone: (03) 5018 8265

Melbourne

Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV)

Phone: (03) 9208 3292
Website: www1.dvc.vic.gov.au/aav/
AAV has a comprehensive list of Indigenous groups and contacts throughout Victoria, and can be accessed via:
www1.dvc.vic.gov.au/aav/info/com_contacts/

Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria

Molly Peterson
Regional Skilled Migration Officer
Email: molly@eccv.org.au
Phone: (03) 9349 4122 or 0439 664 338

Shepparton

Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District

Chris Hazelton
Manager, Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District
Email: ecmanager@mcmedia.com.au
Phone: (03) 5831 2395

Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District

Sigrid van Fondern
Regional Executive Member, ECCV
Email: evergee@cv.quik.com.au
Phone: 0417 129 171



Greater Shepparton City Council

Natalie Purcell
Goulburn Murray Regional Migration Coordinator
Email: Natalie.purcell@shapparton.vic.gov.au
Phone: (03) 5832 9710

Swan Hill

Swan Hill Rural City Council

Deborah Quin
Employment and Settlement Facilitation Officer
Email: dquin@swannhill.vic.gov.au
Phone: (03) 5032 3033

Wangaratta

North East Multicultural Association (NEMA)

Peter Sunderland
Project Officer, (NEMA)
Email: nema@wangarratta.vic.gov.au
Phone: (03) 5722 0726

Rural City of Wangaratta

Wendy Mitchell
Skilled Migration Coordinator, North East Region
Email: w.mitchell@wangarratta.vic.gov.au
Phone: (03) 5722 0774

Warrnambool

Warrnambool City Council

Trevor White
Migrant Strategy Coordinator
Email: twhite@warrnambool.vic.gov.au
Phone: (03) 5559 4853

Wodonga

Albury/Wodonga Ethnic Communities' Council

Sinthong Tounnheun
President, Albury/Wodonga Ethnic Communities' Council
Email: Sinthong@netmatrix.com.au
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City of Wodonga

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