

# All aboard – building inclusive volunteering

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A review and summary report of CALD volunteering at Puffing Billy Railway

*December 19, 2022*



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## Introduction

### Background

AMES Australia (AMES) is a settlement agency and has worked alongside people who have arrived as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers for over 70 years to facilitate their successful settlement in Australia, motivated by our vision of full participation for all in a cohesive and diverse society.

Our range of services span Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, Western Sydney and Darwin and include:

- Initial settlement and case management
- English language education and vocational training
- Employment services
- Disability support
- Social participation programs including volunteer programs
- Skilled migration solutions.

AMES was approached by Puffing Billy Railway (PBR) staff in July 2022 to support their submission to the Victorian Government's Emerging Stronger Grants Program. This grant supports local partnerships and innovation projects to re-engage volunteers, broaden the volunteer base, and strengthen volunteering in local communities.

Volunteers are integral to the day-to-day operations of Puffing Billy however; as a result of COVID-19 they have lost over 50% of their volunteers. This grant is an opportunity for them to diversify their volunteer team/s by offering volunteering to local community members from a migrant and refugee background who have had limited exposure or opportunity to volunteer with Puffing Billy historically.

PBR is operated primarily by volunteers and has a range of roles that could provide opportunities for AMES clients and communities including engine maintenance, engineering roles and customer service. There is also the opportunity for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) volunteers to build professional networks.

If successful AMES would be engaged to provide advice to the project on culturally inclusive volunteering and to design and conduct focus groups to engage current Puffing Billy CALD volunteers, local community service providers and networks. The proposed project was successful in receiving funding from the Emerging Stronger Grants Program with project commencement in August 2022.

### Purpose

The purpose of the project was to rebuild the PBR volunteer base by:

1. Growing and diversifying the PBR volunteer workforce by increasing the number of CALD volunteers.
2. Re-engaging with CALD volunteers who are currently inactive.
3. Strengthening capacity to attract and recruit CALD volunteers across the sector.

### Scope of work

The agreed scope of work for AMES contribution to the project was:

1. Survey current PBR CALD volunteers.
2. Design and conduct three focus group sessions with existing CALD volunteers, community groups, and services.
3. Design and deliver training for up to 150 staff and current volunteers at PBR and other participating railways.

4. Prepare a summary report with key recommendations to recruit and support CALD volunteers.
5. Document sector-specific good practice guidelines for engaging, recruiting and supporting CALD volunteers to be shared by PBR with 21 organisations in other similar sectors.
6. Participation in a project steering group.

## Project delivery

### CALD volunteer survey

PBR has a pool of 300 volunteers (active and inactive) with approximately 10 volunteers (0.03%) identifying as CALD. This low CALD participation rate does not reflect the diversity of PBR neighbouring communities. According to the 2021 census, 18% of Cardinia Shire, 29% of City of Knox and 8% of Yarra Ranges Shire residents spoke a language other than English at home.

To develop an understanding as to why there was an under-representation of CALD volunteers a survey of existing CALD volunteers was undertaken. The survey covered the following topics:

- Personal aspirations
- Barriers to participation
- Onboarding/recruitment processes
- Ongoing recognition and benefits
- Continued engagement with PBR when they no longer volunteer.

Survey participants were also asked to indicate whether they would be interested in participating in a focus group to further explore the topics of the survey.

The survey was distributed to PBR and partner railway CALD volunteers with 8 responses received. Refer Appendix 1 for the survey question set.

#### Personal aspirations

When asked what their motivation for volunteering at Puffing Billy Railway (PBR) or Partner Railways responses received included: ‘Giving back to community’ (6) and ‘Interest in steam trains’ (5) were the main reasons. Those who responded ‘Other’ mentioned ‘Bring tremendous joy to wide eyed kids and wide eyed kids at heart’ and ‘Help PBR develop further as a tourist attraction’ (fig.1). (Note that respondents could choose more than one option).

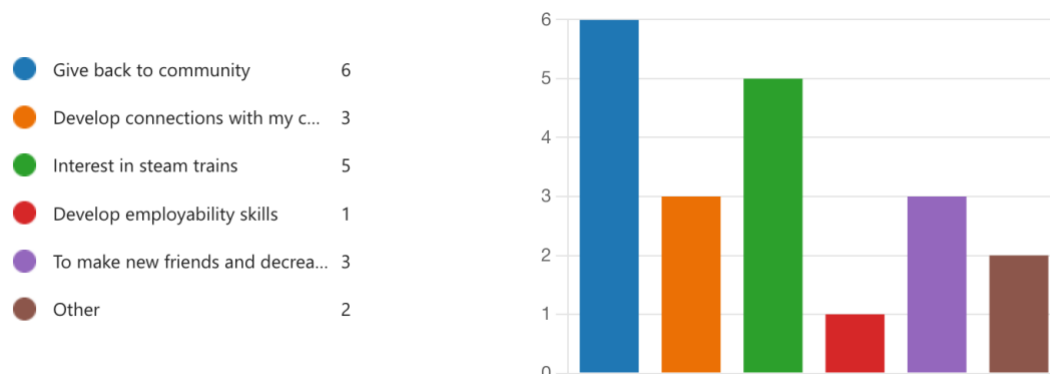


Figure 1. Motivation for volunteering

The majority of respondents would like to gain ‘Improved communication skills’ (5), ‘Build social networks/make friends’ (5) and ‘Gain work experience’ from volunteering. ‘Other’ responses included ‘Further my interest in railways’ and ‘Make those I meet happier than

they were when they met me' (fig.2). (Note that respondents could choose more than one option).

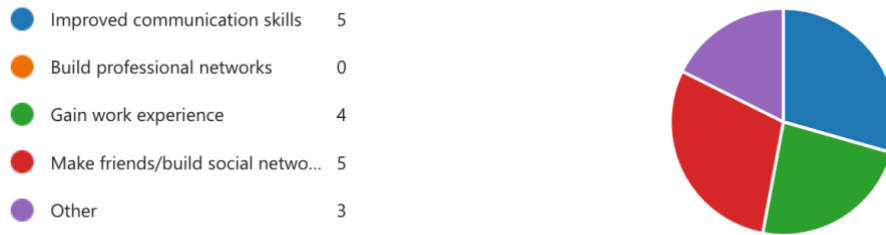


Figure 2. What respondents would like to gain from volunteering

**Onboarding processes**

Respondents were asked how they heard about the volunteering opportunity. Three people found out via the railway website, two through friends or family and others mentioned 'local knowledge', 'while seeking volunteer opportunities at the local council' and 'personal interest' (fig.3).

The majority (7) thought the recruitment process was easy or very easy to understand and participate in. Only those who answered *difficult* or *very difficult* were asked to elaborate. The one respondent who believed the process was difficult said: "Timeline of selection process unclear and slow. Definition and application of selection criteria was opaque" (fig. 4).



Figure 3. How respondents heard about their volunteer role

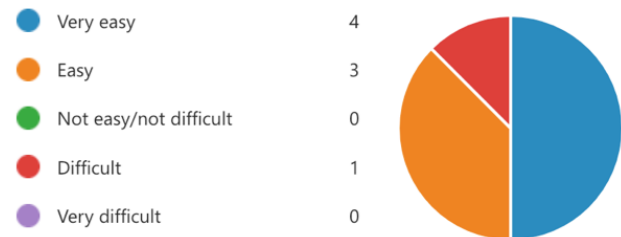


Figure 4. Ease of understanding and participating in the recruitment process

The majority (7) thought it was easy to provide all required documentation during the recruitment process (fig. 5). Four respondents thought Better Impact (the online volunteer system) was easy to access and use, while four believed it was neither easy nor difficult (fig.6).



Figure 5. Ease of providing required documentation

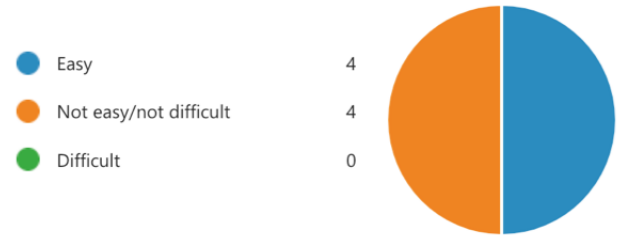


Figure 6. Ease of accessing and using Better Impact

**Further opportunities**

Five respondents (62.5%) were aware of other volunteering opportunities at PBR and Partner Railways and how to find out about them (fig.7 below).

Four respondents would be interested in doing further training for other volunteer roles at PBR and Partner Railways while three would consider it but would need more information (fig.8).

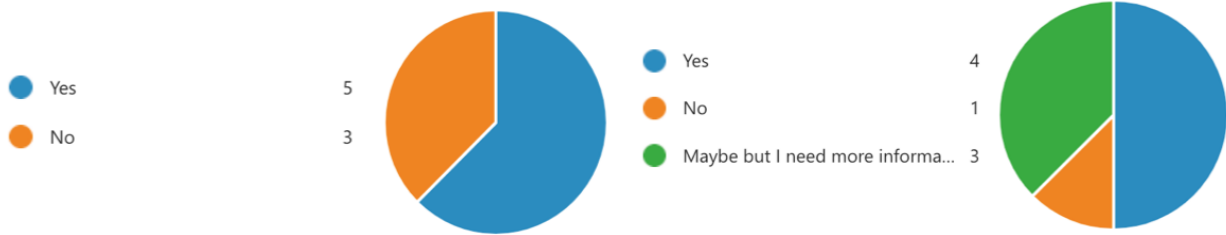


Figure 7. Awareness of other volunteering opportunities      Figure 8. Interest in further training for other volunteer roles

When asked if interested in staying connected with PBR and Partner Railways when they no longer volunteer to support new volunteers, four respondents said yes, two said no and two would need more information before making a decision (fig.9).

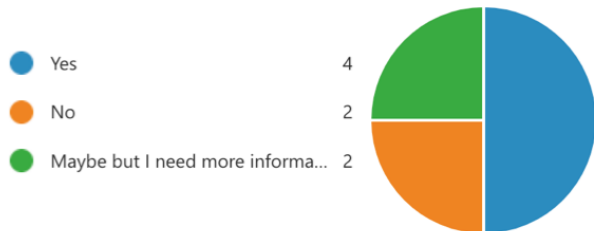


Figure 9. Interest in staying connected

**Wellbeing and ongoing recognition**

When asked how appreciated the respondents felt when they volunteer:

- 7 out of 8 felt valued
- 6 out of 8 felt respected
- 7 out of 8 felt thanked, note that one volunteer did not feel thanked
- 6 out of 8 felt supported
- 6 out of 8 felt that they were part of a team
- 7 out of 8 felt as it was easy to make friends

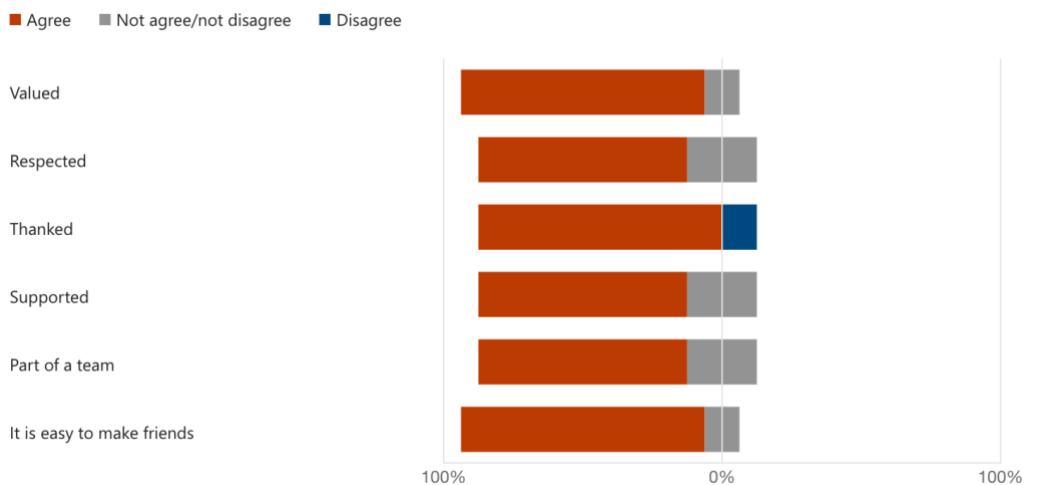


Figure 10. Sense of appreciation

One respondent did not feel comfortable to raise issues with their volunteer supervisor due to communication issues.

### Promoting Puffing Billy Railways

When asked if they would recommend PBR and Partner Railways to their friends and community as a place to volunteer, 100% of respondents said yes – demonstrating PBR as a positive volunteer experience for CALD volunteers.

Respondents indicated that the best way to promote volunteering opportunities at PBR and Partner Railways in their communities was via social media (8), local schools, TAFEs and universities (6) and community centres (fig.11). (Note that respondents could choose more than one option).

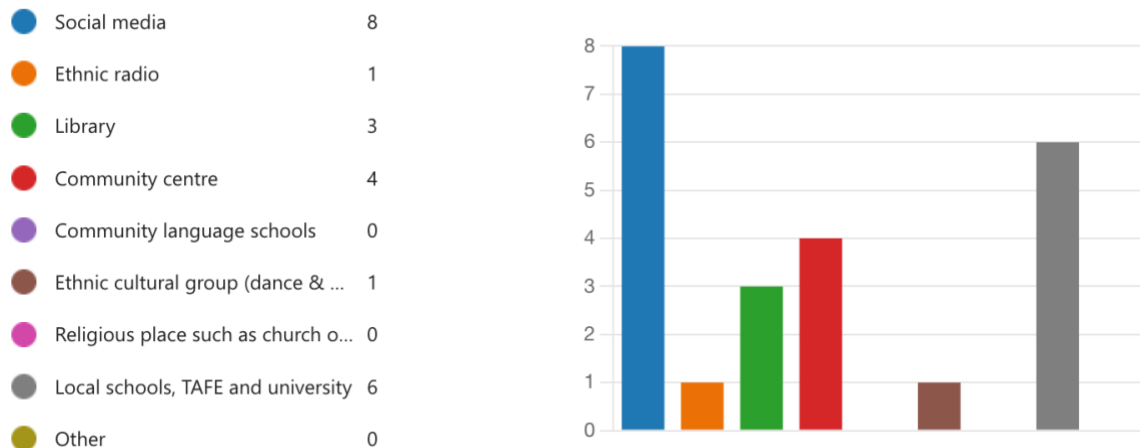


Figure 11. Suggested ways to promote volunteering opportunities

## Focus groups

### CALD volunteers

Following on from the survey a focus group was held with those volunteers who had expressed an interest. This provided an opportunity to further explore the topics and validate responses from the survey. Themes discussed included:

1. Motivation for volunteering
2. Concept of volunteering within their community
3. Recruitment processes
4. Promotion
5. Welcoming environment
6. Barriers to participation.

Refer Appendix 2 for the questions covered in the focus group.

Insights shared by the focus group attendees included:

- Some community members do not see volunteering as a viable option as it can be seen as 'working for free'. It is important to increase awareness and change the perception about volunteering in CALD communities.
- PBR may consider offering free rides for prospective volunteers to provide an insight into what is involved in different volunteer roles.
- PBR may want to invite community groups to 'show and tell' sessions led by CALD volunteers.
- PBR may want to connect with local schools, TAFEs, workplaces and Rotary to provide information sessions.
- It is important to provide incentives and rewards to volunteers – for example, offer lunch occasionally and reimbursements for travel expenses.

### Service providers

It was agreed by the project working group that a second focus group would be sufficient (rather than three focus groups as originally agreed) that was aimed to reach both community leaders and service providers. However, the seven participants attending were primarily from the railway network whose role had a volunteer management focus. Representatives from the City of Casey, South East Volunteers and Volunteers for Knox were also present.

The aim of this focus group was to provide an opportunity for representatives to share their experiences working with CALD volunteers and to learn from each other. Topics covered:

1. Volunteer roles
2. Demographic volunteer profile
3. Sources of volunteers
4. Barriers to CALD participation
5. Recruitment practices
6. Recognition
7. Volunteer training.

Refer Appendix 3 for the questions covered in this focus group.

Insights from the focus group attendees included:

- Only one participant indicated that their organisation had a high number of CALD volunteers. The majority had few or no CALD volunteers but agreed that it is important to have a diverse pool of volunteers.
- Some service providers are unaware of the demographic profile of the area they operate in.
- Need to improve how to leverage the diversity of volunteers and accept that people volunteer for different reasons and personal circumstances.
- Opportunity to create a pool of available volunteers that can be shared between smaller organisations when there is a short-term need.
- Important to celebrate and recognise the contributions volunteers make. It is important to say 'thank you'!
- Suggested strategies to offer a more inclusive environment included:
  - provide cultural awareness training for staff
  - have signage in multiple languages – both for security reasons and to create a welcoming space
  - have access to 'cheat sheets' about countries and cultures – top 10 insights staff need to know
  - deliver centralised preparatory sessions for volunteers about what is required and expected from them as volunteers in an Australian workplace through an organisation such as AMES Australia.

### Cultural awareness training sessions

The project working group determined it was important that the project strengthened sector capacity in order to encourage and support existing CALD volunteers; and to encourage community members from diverse backgrounds to start volunteering.

AMES developed a 2-hour training session that aimed to provide staff and volunteers of PBR and Partner Railways with:

- An understanding of culture diversity and the benefits of cultural awareness
- Increased awareness of cultural differences and how they may present in the workplace.

The session provided an introduction to culture awareness, to the diversity that exists within their local municipalities, and allowed time for reflection. The session covered the following:

1. 2021 Census data
2. What is culture?
3. Phases of adjustment
4. Cultural concepts
5. Why cultural awareness is so important
6. Biases - (unconscious, gender, cultural)
7. Cross cultural communication
8. Diversity and inclusion.

AMES delivered four sessions to a total of 71 staff and volunteers, including the PBR CEO. Having the CEO present was of particular significance - reinforcing the importance of diversity and inclusion and signalling to staff and volunteers the organisation's openness to change.

Sessions 1 (25 participants) and 2 (15 participants) were held in person at the PBR Visitors Centre. The in-person training allowed for a deeper engagement by facilitating group discussion.

Sessions 3 (14 participants) and 4 (17 participants) were held online. Adjustments to the number and range of activities were made for the online sessions and as such there were fewer opportunities for group discussions.

A short feedback survey was distributed to participants after each training session. Fifty-six participants completed the survey – a response rate of 79%. Of those:

- 89% (50) said that the training was relevant and useful for them in their roles
- 88% (49) said that the training met their training needs.

When asked what the main learnings from the session were, answers included:

*“To be more aware and open minded of different cultures and behaviours”*

*“Stay open minded and tread cautiously when dealing with unfamiliar cultures. We all have subconscious biases and norms that affect our interactions and which can inadvertently cause confusion or offense. Interacting with many different cultures can broaden our understanding”*

*“Listen and treat people respectfully. Lots to learn about different cultures”*

*“Cultural awareness is a lot bigger than I thought”*

*“Be patient when dealing with / speaking to people from other cultures”*

*“Be very cautious about using "humour”*

*“Whilst I knew that we live in culturally diverse community I didn't realize the breakdown of exactly where people from different cultures originated”*

*“I hadn't thought about being on time for instance would be of less importance to some folk than others”.*

## Key insights and recommendations

Informed by the survey, the two focus groups and the four training sessions, the following insights can be observed:

### Welcoming environment

- PBR is seen as an inclusive place to volunteer by existing CALD volunteers with the overall majority feeling valued when volunteering.
- While the Lakeside Visitor Centre is bright and colourful there is no messaging to welcome visitors who speak a language other than English.

**Recommendation 1:** Display large in-language “welcome” signs in the top 5-10 languages other than English spoken by visitors to PBR.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop a specific role description for a bicultural Passenger Guide who can greet visitors in community language/s.

### Recruitment process

- The concept of volunteering and its benefits are not well understood by CALD communities. This may hinder organisations like PBR to broaden their volunteer base and tap into local CALD communities.
- The recruitment process needs to be clear and simple so as not to be a barrier for CALD volunteers.

**Recommendation 3:** Develop relationships with local ethnic community organisations as outlined in the resource guide, promoting the benefits of volunteering (refer to ‘Lily the Volunteer’).

**Recommendation 4:** Simplify current role descriptions – use plain English an/or translate into key community languages.

### Induction and training of staff and volunteers

- Existing CALD volunteers believe PBR’s onboarding process and volunteering management system are easy to engage with.
- A selection of service providers feel that some of their CALD volunteers find it hard to understand both the Australian culture and the specific workplace culture – making it more difficult for them to achieve a sense of belonging and fulfilment as volunteers.
- Organisations tend to have limited understanding of the multicultural profile of their local communities and how to engage with them in a culturally appropriate way.
- PBR staff are interested in learning more about gender equality, equity and different cultural groups; and exploring positive actions PBR can do to better engage and support CALD volunteers.

**Recommendation 5:** Deliver preparatory training sessions for CALD volunteers about what is required and expected of them as volunteers in an Australian workplace through an organisation such as AMES Australia.

**Recommendation 6:** Incorporate CALD customer examples and realistic scenarios into regular customer service training.

**Recommendation 7:** Provide cultural awareness training as part of the induction of all staff and volunteers.

**Recommendation 8:** Develop easily accessible information about priority countries and cultures with key information, cultural etiquette and 'do's and don't's' for staff. Utilise existing resources such as the [SBS Cultural Atlas](#).

**Recommendation 9:** Consider developing a more diverse staff profile over time to reflect the cultural diversity of the community and visitors.

## Conclusion

In summary, this project achieved what it set out to do. The goodwill and active engagement of PBR staff facilitated a collaborative and practical response to inform and direct actions that the organisation and its Partner Railways can implement which will ultimately make a difference to their volunteer profile, volunteer numbers, and awareness of Australia's multicultural communities.

AMES Australia acknowledges and thanks PBR for reaching out and we look forward to furthering the relationship into the future.

## Appendix 1. CALD volunteer survey question set

Question	Response options	Rationale - will address the following topic
1. How did you hear about the volunteering opportunity at Puffing Billy and Partner Railways?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facebook</li> <li>• Railway website</li> <li>• Friend/family member</li> <li>• Other – prompt to type answer</li> </ul>	Communication / advertising / marketing strategies
2. What is your motivation for volunteering at Puffing Billy and Partner Railways?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give back to community</li> <li>• Develop connections with my community</li> <li>• Interest in steam trains</li> <li>• Develop employability skills</li> <li>• To make new friends and decrease social isolation</li> <li>• Other – type answer</li> </ul>	Personal aspirations
3. What would you like to gain from volunteering?	Tick all that apply: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved communication skills</li> <li>• Build professional networks</li> <li>• Gain work experience</li> <li>• Make friends/build social networks</li> <li>• Other – type answer</li> </ul>	Personal aspirations
4. Was the recruitment process easy to understand and participate in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very easy</li> <li>• Easy</li> <li>• Neither easy/nor difficult (not easy/not difficult)</li> <li>• Difficult</li> <li>• Very difficult (if difficult/very difficult – follow up question: what/why did you find it difficult?)</li> </ul>	Onboarding / recruitment process Inclusivity Accessibility
5. Was it easy to provide all required documentation during the recruitment process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy</li> </ul>	Onboarding / recruitment process Inclusivity Accessibility

Question	Response options	Rationale - will address the following topic
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neither easy/nor difficult (not easy/not difficult)</li> <li>• Difficult</li> </ul>	
6. Are you aware of other volunteering opportunities/roles at Puffing Billy and Partner Railways or how to find out about them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>	Volunteering opportunities
7. Would you be interested in doing any training for other volunteer roles at Puffing Billy and Partner Railways?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Maybe, but I need more information</li> </ul>	Volunteering opportunities
8. When volunteering, do you feel: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valued</li> <li>• Respected</li> <li>• Thanked</li> <li>• Supported</li> <li>• Part of a team</li> <li>• It is easy to make friends</li> </ul>	Each option will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree</li> <li>• Neither agree/nor disagree (not agree/not disagree)</li> <li>• Disagree</li> </ul>	Ongoing Recognition
9. Do you feel comfortable to raise issues with your volunteer supervisor?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No – follow up question: why do you not feel comfortable?</li> </ul>	Health and safety Wellbeing Inclusivity
10. How easy is Better Impact (the online volunteer system) to access and use?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy</li> <li>• Neither easy/nor difficult (not easy/not difficult)</li> <li>• Difficult</li> </ul>	Accessibility Continuous improvement
11. Would you recommend Puffing Billy and Partner Railways to your friends and community as a place to volunteer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No – if no, follow up question: Why? Open text box to type</li> <li>• Maybe</li> </ul>	To ascertain if they think PBR is an inclusive/diverse place to volunteer
12. What would be the best way to promote volunteering opportunities at Puffing Billy and Partner Railways in your community?	Tick all that apply: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Ethnic radio</li> </ul>	How to reach/promote volunteering to CALD communities

Question	Response options	Rationale - will address the following topic
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library</li> <li>• Community centre</li> <li>• Community language schools</li> <li>• Ethnic cultural group (dance &amp; performance)</li> <li>• Religious place such as church or temple</li> <li>• Local schools, TAFE and university</li> <li>• Other – text box</li> </ul>	
13. Would you be interested in staying connected with Puffing Billy and Partner Railways when you no longer volunteer with them to support new volunteers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Maybe, but I need more information</li> </ul>	PBR's interest in establishing a 'Guild' of former volunteers/staying connected
14. Would you be interested in participating in a focus group with other volunteers to discuss ways of support new volunteers from culturally diverse communities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>	To recruit focus group participants

## Appendix 2. Focus group questions – CALD volunteers

### 1. What motivates you to volunteer?

Prompt with:

- From the survey, majority of people said they want to give back to the community and an interest in steam trains. We do note that some people said they want to develop employment skills and make friends.
- How satisfied are you? Have you gained employment related skills and have you made friends?
- If you are satisfied, why do you think more people from your community do not volunteer?

### 2. Is volunteering common in your community?

- If no, why?
- If, yes, what type and or organisation?

### 3. What do you like the most about volunteering at PBR?

### 4. What do you like least about volunteering at PBR?

### 5. Recruitment process - From the survey, most of you said the recruitment process was relatively straightforward but a couple of people found it difficult. How can we make it simpler?

### 6. How would you recruit people from your community?

- From the survey, 100 % people said social media is a great way to promote volunteering opportunities, do you agree with that?
- If yes, which social media platforms are preferred with your community?
- If not, what platforms do you think is the best way to promote it?

### 7. Where should PBR promote their volunteer opportunity?

- The survey said PBR should promote it at local schools or TAFEs, would information session about volunteering be helpful?

### 8. How did you find the current volunteer opportunities? (To see if they know how to check it on the website)

### 9. How can PBR build supportive environment for volunteers?

### 10. Are there any other barriers or issues that may discourage people from a CALD backgrounds volunteering with PBR?

## **Appendix 3. Focus group questions – service providers**

- 1. What type of volunteer roles do you have within your organisation and what percentage of your volunteers are CALD?**
- 2. Do your volunteers represent your local community? i.e. what is the demographic profile of your community?**
- 3. Where do you source volunteers from?**
- 4. What barriers are you facing in engaging CALD volunteers? (prompt if necessary: language, reaching them)**
- 5. What recruitment practices do you use? e.g. application, interview**
- 6. What do you do to retain your volunteers? (Recognitions, cultural celebrations)**
- 7. What benefits do volunteers gain from being involved in your program? (Volunteer motivation, internal vacancies, community events)**
- 8. How do you receive feedback and provide feedback to your volunteers?**
- 9. Could you adapt some of your existing processes to make your volunteer program more inclusive?**
- 10. What training do you provide to volunteers and how is it delivered?**
- 11. What training do you need to be able to support volunteers from CALD backgrounds?**
- 12. What do you like most about working with volunteers?**
- 13. What challenges do you experience when working with volunteers?**

