

Volunteering and Pacific peoples

1. This paper summarises issues and suggested solutions identified by Pacific peoples, during consultation on the Volunteers and Volunteering Policy Project. The comments in this paper do not reflect government policy or the views of the Ministry of Social Development.
2. The issues and suggested solutions were taken into account by the Ministry of Social Development, when developing advice to the government on volunteering in late 2002. (The project had been due to report in June 2002 but this was delayed due to the 2002 general election.)

Consultation process with Pacific peoples

3. A series of ad-hoc consultations were undertaken in late 2001 with Pacific communities around New Zealand, to gather Pacific peoples' views about volunteering.
4. A Pacific sub-group was established in early 2002 to take up the lead in developing a Pacific perspective for the project. The sub-group was made up of three officials from the Department of Internal Affairs, the Department of Labour and the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. The sub-group summarised the comments from the consultation process to date, and provided ongoing advice to the Ministry of Social Development throughout the project.
5. Three Pacific Community Reference Groups, coordinated by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, provided feedback in April/May 2002 on the issues and ideas captured during earlier consultation.

Pacific Peoples definition(s) of 'volunteering'

6. 'Volunteering' is a foreign concept in the traditional cultures of Pacific peoples. There are activities that Pacific peoples engage in, however, that are conceptually similar to volunteering. Any definition of volunteering for Pacific peoples needs to take these activities into account.
7. These traditional cultural activities are closely associated with concepts of:
 - to serve
 - duty to care
 - a requirement in order to sustain the community
 - a cultural obligation or expectation
 - a form of love and reciprocity relating to kinship and protocol.
8. Pacific peoples do not, therefore, necessarily associate the unpaid work they undertake to contribute to the community, or to fulfil cultural obligations, as 'volunteering'.
9. Pacific peoples would be concerned if government used one generic definition of 'volunteering' in government policy, if it conceptually excluded the cultural equivalent of 'volunteering' undertaken by Pacific peoples. This would risk excluding Pacific peoples from government support for volunteering.

Formal and informal volunteering

10. In a mainstream volunteering context, formal volunteering is a term used to describe voluntary work for an organisation where there is some formal agreement about the terms of engagement between the volunteer and organisation. Informal volunteering is a term used to describe voluntary work between neighbours, friends, extended family, or as part of a more casually-organised group of people.

11. Pacific peoples provided the following examples of how they see their own 'formal' and 'informal' volunteering and unpaid work:

Formal activities are when Pacific peoples:

- are engaged, without remuneration, for a government-driven initiative, such as capacity building exercises between government agencies and Pacific communities
- serve on an unpaid basis on trust boards, or governance or constitutional boards for organisations
- carry out unpaid activities on behalf of a community group or community driven initiative.

Informal activities are when Pacific peoples:

- assist one another on an unpaid basis, arranging community and extended family gatherings
- provide unpaid care-taking roles for groups of youth or older people from the community, such as providing transport to attend meetings, or domestic related activities
- provide unpaid mentoring support and capacity work for Pacific groups.

Draft government vision and commitment statement

12. Pacific members of the Pacific Community Reference Groups (see *Consultation*) that were consulted in April/May 2002, were asked to comment on a draft government vision, recognition and commitment statement. (*This statement is now the Government Policy on Volunteering, launched in December 2002 and available from the Ministry of Social Development*).

13. Overall, Pacific peoples identified with the spirit of the draft vision, recognition and commitment statement. Pacific peoples felt, however, that they should be recognised separately, rather than alongside Māori and ethnic peoples. It was noted that the word 'citizenship' has negative connotations for some Pacific people as they may be in New Zealand on work permits or temporary visas, and while not 'citizens', they often do contribute to their communities through voluntary work.

Information relating to volunteers and volunteering

14. The three key information gaps identified were:

14.1 **information on how legislation impacts on volunteers and unpaid workers.** In particular:

- health and safety legislation
- accident insurance through the ACC scheme
- privacy legislation

- volunteer liability under the law
 - taxation law
 - social security (benefits) legislation.
- 14.2 **information on best practice in volunteer management, including the rights and responsibilities of volunteers/unpaid workers and organisations.** This includes information on insurance needs of volunteers.
- 14.3 **information on training and workforce development initiatives for volunteers, and funding available for that training.**
15. Pacific peoples said that the various government and non-government agencies responsible for providing information related to volunteering, need to consider the most effective way to provide information to Pacific peoples. Information needs to be:
- timely and accurate
 - available in key community languages, not just in English
 - conveyed through face-to-face contact, as well as written material, whenever possible
 - provided with practical examples that are easy for people to relate to
 - strategically targeted for Pacific community organisations, families and churches, and through Pacific media.

Volunteer training and workforce development

16. Pacific peoples said they require better access to volunteer training and workforce development. Two training gaps mentioned were reception duties and administrative compliance procedures.
17. Government needs to provide information about funding that is available for training volunteers. Government agencies may have good networks of training providers that Pacific peoples could refer to.
18. Any training or workforce development initiative provided to Pacific volunteers needs to account for the way in which Pacific people communicate through language, and should be delivered through a community coordinated process.

Regional forums

19. Pacific peoples suggested that regional Pacific forums would be useful avenues, for providing information, and for further discussion on volunteering. These forums could be established in partnership with Pacific organisations and communities, including churches.
20. Forums could set out to:
- identify the training needs of Pacific volunteers
 - provide information on volunteer training already available, and promote participation of Pacific volunteers in training opportunities
 - provide information on how legislation impacts on volunteers and unpaid workers
 - provide information on best practice in managing volunteers (rights and responsibilities of volunteers and organisations involving volunteers)

- raise awareness of voluntary work in Pacific communities.
 - promote best practice when government directly interfaces with volunteers.
21. The regional forums could develop a 'plan of action' made up of key actions that Pacific communities and volunteers have identified as priorities for moving forward, and meeting their needs and aspirations around volunteering and cultural obligations. These plans would include training and information gaps, but may include other areas of work as well.

Government funding for volunteering

22. Most Pacific peoples consulted for the project were not aware that funding had been available to support volunteering during the International Year of the Volunteer 2001.
23. A suggestion for how Pacific peoples would like to use such funding would be to develop a descriptive report on Pacific volunteer contributions in the past and present. This could assist in promoting and raising the profile of Pacific volunteering.

Honours and awards for volunteers

24. Many Pacific peoples are not aware of the official New Zealand honours system, and what honours are given to people who provide outstanding service to the community. Pacific peoples would welcome receiving information about the honours system, and the process for submitting Pacific candidates for consideration.

Research

25. There is very limited data or statistics on Pacific volunteering. Pacific peoples would like government to gather data on the volunteering and unpaid work of Pacific peoples and how this contributes to the economy. Over time, this would also provide information about trends in Pacific volunteering and unpaid work.
26. Information from this data could also be published annually in order to raise the profile of Pacific volunteering.

Pacific youth

27. Pacific peoples are concerned about a perceived trend that Pacific youth do not support voluntary or unpaid activities with the same enthusiasm as in the past. They suggest that this may be related to the economic climate, the lack of remuneration, pressures of time, and/or a view of young people that they do not receive anything valuable in return. This attitude could be exacerbated by the perception of some Pacific youth that voluntary work is not widely valued.

Pacific older peoples

28. Pacific older peoples' unpaid work in New Zealand has been significant in maintaining Pacific cultures for generation after generation. The foundations of many Pacific communities in New Zealand were built from the unpaid 'labour of love' and determination of older Pacific peoples.

Pacific older peoples have, for example, established community halls, churches, social services, and community advocacy movements through unpaid work.

29. Pacific people indicated that they would like government support to celebrate the contributions made by older people. Pacific peoples believe that these contributions have been heavily undervalued by modern society. They would like to hold regional gatherings that celebrate these contributions, demonstrating, particularly to young people, that older people are valued and recognised for their volunteering and unpaid work.

Pacific peoples employed by government

30. Many Pacific government employees provide information and advice relevant to their paid jobs, to their communities. This is usually outside working hours and on an unpaid basis. This is often because the information Pacific people are seeking is not accessible through government agencies' communication channels.
31. Pacific peoples often feel more comfortable asking a Pacific government employee for information relevant to them. Sometimes this is because the Pacific employee is able to speak the language of the enquirer.
32. Pacific peoples felt that Pacific staff of government agencies should be recognised and acknowledged for the additional unpaid work they do, as an extension of their paid work. This recognition and acknowledgement could be in performance reviews and/or through special leave arrangements.

Volunteer expenses

33. Pacific volunteers resource their various voluntary activities from their own pockets. Pacific organisations would like greater access to funding for reimbursing volunteers for expenses, such as transport and childcare costs. They would also like government to recognise the associated costs of volunteering, and the contribution of voluntary labour to the services they provide, in contracting and funding arrangements.

Pacific volunteering and Work and Income

34. Pacific peoples would like clearer advice from Work and Income (Ministry of Social Development) on benefit policy relating to Pacific beneficiaries' volunteering. For example, some beneficiaries are unclear whether a payment they receive that reimburses their volunteer expenses will be treated as income. *(MSD's advice is that beneficiaries are required to provide receipts for reimbursement of volunteer expenses from organisations to Work and Income. Provided the payment received is not above the actual expense to the beneficiary, this is not treated as income).*
35. Some Pacific people felt that job seeker agreements between people on benefits and government should allow for greater cultural sensitivity so as not to impinge on a Pacific person's volunteering or cultural obligations.

Overseas visitors volunteering in New Zealand

36. A number of Pacific people come to New Zealand on visitor permits or temporary visas. They may contribute to voluntary sector organisations and/or Pacific communities through volunteering or unpaid work. These people have particular information and support needs that should be taken into account by policy makers.

Voluntary assistance with Pacific disaster relief

37. During consultation it was requested that government look into whether support could be provided to Pacific peoples in New Zealand wishing to return to their home island nation in the event of a natural disaster to help out with voluntary relief work. Such support could include introducing policies to provide job protection for Pacific volunteers or subsidising travel.

Government consultation

38. Pacific peoples made the following suggestions to improve government consultation processes with Pacific volunteers:

- government agencies should organise joint consultation meetings, so that people can set aside a block of time for consultation, rather than attend many sporadic meetings
- consultation processes should be resourced so that Pacific peoples are able to coordinate activities with one another in a community setting
- government agencies should provide support to those Pacific peoples engaged for consultation processes, so that these people are able to gather views and feedback from their community, in a manner that they consider appropriate
- government agencies should establish good databases and networks with Pacific peoples, and use an appropriate approach to seeking Pacific expertise. They should ensure that it is not always the same people that are invited to take part in government processes.

Conclusion

39. The following key points were made by Pacific peoples during consultation for the Volunteers and Volunteering Policy Project:

- Volunteering is a term which many Pacific peoples are unfamiliar with, and as such is a foreign concept in their traditional cultures. That said, Pacific peoples do, none the less, undertake traditional activities that are conceptually similar to volunteering. This includes unpaid work to fulfil cultural obligations, or as a form of love and reciprocity relating to kinship and cultural protocol.
- Any definition of volunteering used by government needs to be inclusive of the cultural equivalent of 'volunteering' for Pacific peoples.
- There are key information needs for Pacific peoples on legislation, best practice, and training, as they relate to volunteering. Pacific peoples have suggested that regional forums may be useful avenues for providing information, and facilitating discussion on, a range of issues relating to volunteering.

- Pacific peoples have unmet training needs. Regional forums could be organised to identify these training needs and provide information on current training available.
- Regional forums could also be avenues for developing a 'plan of action' encompassing training and information provision, but also looking at other actions that Pacific communities and volunteers have identified as meeting their needs and aspirations.
- Pacific peoples would like government support to produce a descriptive report on Pacific volunteers' contributions, both in the past and in the present.
- Pacific peoples are not familiar with the national honours system or the process for nominating Pacific candidates, and need information on this.
- Pacific peoples would like better official data about their voluntary and unpaid work, to provide explicit recognition of how this contributes to the economy, and to provide information about trends in Pacific voluntary activity and unpaid work.
- There is a perceived trend of a decline in volunteering amongst young Pacific people, which is of concern to some Pacific people.
- Pacific peoples would like government support to celebrate the voluntary contributions of their older people.
- Government agencies should ensure that they recognise and support the community involvement of Pacific staff, for example through performance appraisals and/or special leave arrangements.
- The expenses associated with volunteering are usually met by Pacific volunteers themselves. Pacific organisations would like to access funding so that they can meet these costs for their volunteers.
- The costs associated with volunteering, and voluntary contribution of Pacific volunteers, should be recognised by government in funding and contractual arrangements.
- Some Pacific peoples receiving benefits are seeking clearer information on Work and Income policy on reimbursement of expenses.
- It was requested that government explore ways to support Pacific people in New Zealand to return home to help voluntarily for disaster relief.
- Pacific peoples are seeking improvements in the way government agencies consult with Pacific communities.