



ECCV SUBMISSION TO THE STRONGER COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS PROJECT JULY 2007

Introduction

1. Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcomes the *Stronger Community Organisations Project*. As a peak body representing around 170 multicultural community organisations ECCV has a strong interest in the objectives of this project.
2. ECCV believes it is important to recognise that there is great diversity among the community sector ranging from very small not-for-profits to large service providers who may have many corporate style characteristics. The experiences and needs of these types of organisations obviously differ greatly.
3. Victoria is a very culturally diverse community with Victorians coming from over 200 countries, speaking nearly two hundred languages and following over one hundred faiths. Around one quarter of Victorians were born overseas and nearly half of all Victorians were born overseas or have one or more parents born overseas. ECCV's membership reflects this diversity in our community.
4. Given the huge number of ethnic or multicultural community organisations in Victoria, ECCV would have liked to have seen a senior representative from this constituency on the steering committee of this project, whether from ECCV or another like organisation.
5. ECCV's membership consists largely of smaller ethnic community associations who have incorporated as not-for-profits under the Victorian *Incorporated Associations Act 1981*. ECCV also has some medium sized multicultural and/or ethno-specific service providers as members. ECCV will consider these two groups separately as they have different needs.

Smaller Ethnic Community Organisations

6. ECCV has reports of many smaller ethnic senior citizens clubs struggling or closing due to both the ageing of their members and increased regulatory requirements and costs, such as public liability insurance requirements.
7. Ethnic community organisations assist greatly in the settlement process of migrants. After settlement they assist greatly in providing social connectedness, which assists with the overall health and wellbeing of migrants. As such, it is important that the Government provides some assistance in keeping these organisations and clubs going wherever possible.
8. The social support structures these organisations provide are absolutely critical to people already disadvantaged by language and cultural barriers, who may otherwise be further isolated and marginalised if these organisations did not exist.



9. These smaller organisations are based almost entirely on voluntarism and the selfless and entrepreneurial efforts of community leaders. The people involved often receive little reward or mainstream recognition for their efforts with the exception of the Victorian Multicultural Commission Awards of Excellence.
10. Ethnic community organisations need particular support around governance and financial management training and income maintenance. Smaller ethnic community organisations often struggle to keep abreast of regulatory arrangements and complex issues like public liability insurance and compliance with various laws. They need basic support and training in governance arrangements. DVC could provide more support in this area through education, information and training, with a culturally appropriate approach using interpreting and translation services where necessary.
11. Two particular areas that smaller ethnic community organisations need assistance with are public liability insurance and auditing assistance. DVC should consider a (low or no-cost) public liability insurance scheme for smaller ethnic (and other) community organisations. DVC could also provide a comprehensive auditing and financial scheme for such organisations perhaps incorporating pro-bono assistance from the corporate sector. The Department of Human Services (DHS) has an existing public liability insurance scheme for their funded agencies which works very well.
12. Ethnic community organisations also suffer from very small incomes. Small grants from the Victorian Multicultural Commission do provide great assistance but opportunities for funding through other government programs need to be considered. For instance the hundreds of ethnic senior citizens clubs could be funded to run exercise programs under *Go for Your Life*, which would both help in community strengthening by maintaining these clubs, and also help the *Go for Your Life* message reach other communities and improve health outcomes for otherwise marginalised groups (ECCV has a pilot program with Office of Senior Victorians (DVC) in this area).
13. Government funding for these types of activities is often complex and shuts smaller community organisations out of the process. One significant government community funding program, the Community Support Fund, administered by the Department for Victorian Communities, gives a very small proportion of its significant monies to ethnic or multicultural organisations (small or large). Generally speaking, government funding opportunities need to be more accessible and non-discriminatory. Ethnic or multicultural community organisations should receive equitable access to these program funds in proportion to their community reach and representation.
14. Some smaller ethnic community organisations have complained about inadequate support from government with regards to subsidised or free access to meeting space. Such in-kind support can often be equally important to any small grants with regards to the ongoing sustainability and viability of small ethnic community organisations. One example we have is of a community based organisation that receives a small grant from a local government but is then charged a higher annual rental fee to use that local government's space. Uniform statewide policies around subsidised access to meeting spaces for smaller community organisations would be a good initiative.
15. ECCV recommends that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in regional Victoria are made a government priority area in terms of support and resources. Regional ethnic



communities' councils and small community organisations work hard to meet the needs of regional CALD communities, often operating within the context of extremely limited funding. Relying on the commitment and goodwill of volunteers is not sustainable and strong consideration needs to be given to creating secure and ongoing state government funding for projects and organisations that assist CALD communities in regional Victoria. Regional areas may have small numbers of the CALD population overall when compared to metropolitan areas but they still require support and opportunities to foster the participation in community life by regional CALD communities.

16. ECCV also recommends that particular attention be placed on the needs of smaller ethnic organisations representing new and emerging communities, such as our newer African and Middle-Eastern communities. Organisations representing new and emerging communities often have particular problems getting started. They may struggle to attract funding without an organisational history. Moves towards 'mainstreaming' as government policy disadvantages new communities that have not had the opportunity to develop core capacity, as did organisations for more established communities which were created when government funding of multicultural organisations was more prevalent. The needs of members of new and emerging communities are particularly acute as they have critical settlement challenges. Supporting the sustainability and effectiveness of their community organisations will assist greatly in this process.

Larger Ethno-Specific and Multicultural Service Providers

17. ECCV also has members from medium and larger ethno-specific service providers and multicultural agencies such as COASIT (Italian), AGWS (Greek), the Northern Migrant Resource Centre (Spectrum), APCS (Polish), Diversitat and Jewish Care. These larger organisations are highly professional with paid staff running a variety of services for their communities although their size and income varies often depending on the size of the community or communities they are serving.
18. These organisations need to be offered an opportunity to compete equally for outsourced government service programs to maintain their sustainability. In recent times various government policies have directed funding towards larger mainstream providers such as local government and the religious charity sector, with funding being directed away from the ethno-specific service sector. This is part of the 'mainstreaming' ethos that currently dominates many state government program policies and programs, which is not supported by any evidence that mainstream agencies deliver services better than multicultural or ethno-specific agencies. Governments should let ethno-specific agencies compete equally with other providers so that ultimately consumers can have more choice about who delivers their services.
19. Governments should also recognise the particular strengths and value that multicultural and ethno-specific agencies offer, including culturally effective services such as bilingual and bicultural staff.
20. DVC could work to develop models for greater partnerships between multicultural and ethno-specific providers and the mainstream service sector so as to develop the overall effectiveness of our community organisations.



21. Since the federal government moved to providing settlement assistance predominantly in the initial stages of settlement, ongoing settlement assistance has been forced on to the state government and community sector who often have insufficient funding to provide for these important services.
22. There is an expectation that larger ethnic and multicultural organisations perform significant advocacy and representative functions for government, including activities like participation in government committees and local area planning groups, but this work is mostly unfunded (with the exception of the work of the peak body, ECCV). The government could consider further support for organisations performing this role.
23. Many larger ethnic and multicultural organisations are providing unfunded support to smaller ethnic groups for things like meeting room space and financial and administrative assistance, in the absence of support from government. The smaller ethnic organisations often rely on this support for their very survival. This supporting role needs both more recognition and support from government in the interests of sustaining these vital smaller organisations.

Conclusion

24. ECCV calls on the *Stronger Community Service Organisations Project* to recognise the great diversity in the community sector, including the large number of ethnic and multicultural organisations, and ensure the outcomes of the project properly addresses their particular needs as outlined above.