



Multicultural Dialogue #1 Strategic Planning Day Snapshot Summary

30 October 2021, Ballarat Welcome Centre

Purpose

The Multicultural Dialogue: Strategic Planning Day was hosted by Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council. As the peak body for multiculturalism and settlement in the region, BRMC seeks to directly work with, involve and consult culturally, linguistically and religiously (CALD) diverse communities in the development of strategic priorities. The aim of the dialogue was to consult multicultural leaders in the development of priorities and actions for BRMC's upcoming 2023-30 Strategic Plan. 38 key stakeholders attended, including BRMC members as representatives of CALD communities (through 15 local cultural and faith associations and one multicultural business), BRMC board members and staff, and representatives from the City of Ballarat and Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria.

The dialogue employed a global café conversation style, where small group conversations were organised around Priority areas. Priority areas were identified through surveying BRMC members prior to the dialogue. This summary snapshot provides an overview of the priority areas, suggested actions, and outcomes of the dialogue.

Background: BRMC Strategic Roadmap 2021-23

The priority areas identified in the dialogue will inform BRMC's upcoming Strategic Plan 2023-30, which will continue on from the current BRMC Strategic Roadmap 2021-23. The Strategic Roadmap 2021-23 has the following four strategic directions:

1. **Intercultural Participation, Equity and Diversity:** Culturally diverse communities overcome disadvantage to participate and prosper in our region.
2. **Regional and State-Wide Collective Impact:** Discrimination is eradicated and diversity is valued and celebrated in regional Victoria.
3. **Enterprise and Services:** Multicultural innovation and capital are supported to overcome market bias and imperfections.
4. **Wellbeing and Governance Excellence:** Our team is accountable, supportive and building strong service and member capability.

Future Priority Areas

Five global café-style conversations were led by facilitators in small groups of 5-8 people. Each group identified priorities from the perspective of the needs of their cultural and faith communities.

Priority Area 1: Celebrations and Events

BRMC members seek to develop their capacity to host more events to showcase culture and traditions, that are inclusive and welcoming to the general public and all cultures and faiths. Suggestions to strengthen event capabilities follow:

- **Financial Sustainability.** CALD communities need support to make events sustainable, such as event partnership, sponsorship and funding, assistance with grant applications, event and public liability insurance, and technical and administrative support. A key need is for affordable venues with commercial kitchen access for cultural events, large festivals (of up to 400 people) and smaller activities. Ballarat Welcome Centre was suggested as a potential venue for events, including the use of the Hall, meeting rooms and stage and backdrop equipment. The Centre was seen as a place where everyone felt welcomed, and it was suggested that BRMC could offer in-kind support such as free/reduced-fee venue hire.
- **Online Calendar.** Creation of a shared online calendar of community programs and events that could be regularly updated would enable wide promotion of cultural celebrations and the expansion of participation from the general public and many cultural groups.
- **Collaborative Events.** Collaborating to support and promote events is important, especially across interests and causes that involve the whole community such as climate change, sport, arts, youth, and faith.
- **Key Annual Intercultural Event.** CALD communities want to build their own capacity to run and grow an annual cultural event that will promote Ballarat as the first Intercultural City in Australia, drawing on intercultural and cross-cultural exchange.

Priority Area 2: Partnerships and Networks

BRMC members seek to strengthen partnerships and networks both within their cultural communities and across the wider Ballarat community in order to promote diversity and share their cultures and faiths. Suggestions of avenues to strengthen networks follow:

- **Information on Services.** BRMC members would like access to up-to-date information on available services and programs to circulate within their communities (such as Diversity Homework Club, Good Governance, English Tutoring, Stepping Stones, and Settlement Engagement and Transition Support).
- **Mutual Cultural Exchange and Learning.** Opportunities for cultural exchange were suggested such as the promotion of cultural events and interfaith forums to the wider community, developing intercultural events celebrating many cultures and faiths, events where the wider community can learn about diverse communities and histories in Ballarat, promotion of existing anti-racism workshops, and the involvement of Aboriginal traditional owners as well as established cultural groups (such as Chinese and European early settlers) in facilitating settlement and integration of new and emerging communities.
- **Promotion of Existing Networks.** There are already strong existing partnerships and networks in Ballarat that require more promotion and awareness building, such as the Intercultural Advisory Committee, Intercultural Ambassadors, Ballarat Regional Settlement Advocacy Committee, Multicultural Pandemic Response and Emergency Preparedness Group, and Regional Advisory Group.

- **Regional and National Networks.** There is a need for building cultural networks and advocating at the regional level including the Grampians and the Wimmera. National level flagship events were also suggested to bring together and support cultural groups (e.g. InterKultura as a best practice model).
- **Online Information Hub and Multicultural Resource Index.** The BRMC website, newsletter and social media could be utilised as hubs to promote and disseminate information on events, about communities, services for new migrants, and multicultural businesses. The website could also host a Multicultural Resource Index with information for communities.

Priority Area 3: Employment and Business

Employment was identified as a top priority for most migrants, but there are major barriers due to factors such as visa issues, lack of opportunities, and discrimination. Key issues and suggestions follow:

- **Visas and Qualifications.** Barriers to employment are created by limits on visa conditions such as temporary and student visas. There is also a shortage of local immigration support and visa advice in Ballarat. Additionally, many migrants are highly educated and skilled, but cannot find appropriate level work due to lack of Australian recognition of qualifications, forcing them into unskilled work.
- **Support for Women and Parents.** Many women with young children struggle to focus on career or English language learning and can become isolated. It is difficult for parents of young children to participate in employment workshops and training due to child minding responsibilities and needs. In terms of career opportunities, girls and women would benefit from expanding ideas of what opportunities are available beyond gendered roles, into areas such as STEM and manufacturing.
- **Mentoring and Support.** There is a need for mentoring and support to assist migrants into job readiness, including language skills, understanding of the Australian workplace and employment law, and financial literacy and independence. There is currently a gap as the City of Ballarat's Intercultural Employment Program has ended.
- **Networking and Collaborating.** Working together and developing business networks through engagement with businesses, business owners looking for workers, and BRMC Member entrepreneurs was seen as vital to creating opportunities. Social media networks of cultural associations can also be utilised to promote employment and business opportunities.

Priority Area 4: Health, Wellbeing and Social Support

BRMC members emphasised the need for ongoing health, wellbeing and social support for CALD communities especially during the pandemic. Suggestions for support follow:

- **Joined-Up Services.** BRMC members want BRMC to guide and connect their communities with other health-related agencies and with other Australians. Some suggestions included a community hub to connect with the wider community, and programs and information on healthy living and diet.
- **Pandemic Information.** This is seen to have been handled well with the development of collaborative public awareness campaigns and information sessions between BRMC, BCH, Grampians Health and CALD leaders in the Multicultural Pandemic Emergency Response and Preparedness group.

- **Family Activities and Support.** Creating more social activities and events for families including outdoor activities, and support for young families. This could include opportunities for intergenerational connection and support. Families with young children need extra support such as help with homework and childcare. Women with children need support to allow them to access education and employment. Project ABCD (Australian based Culturally Diverse Parents) can assist parents and children in mixed cultural environments who may find it hard to manage demands and support children through their multiple cultural and intergenerational expectations.
- **Youth Programs and Guidance.** Establishing more programs for children and young people for physical and mental health such as sports programs, homework clubs, camps. There is also a desire from CALD communities for guidance and support to young people to learn how contribute to the community positively through learning about their cultures, values and etiquette, and the importance of volunteering and helping people in need such as older people and the wider community.
- **Support for New Arrivals.** Health information and connections are needed for new arrivals. BRMC and more established CALD communities can provide guidance.
- **Social Support Especially for Vulnerable Residents.** Some members of communities are isolated and need opportunities to be welcomed and included through activities. Many older generations live in Ballarat, and need social support including assistance with technology. Families who are sick during the pandemic need social support through home visits. Transport support may be needed to attend events. The Seniors Club could host more activities such as a walking group, sewing group, and gardening group. Other younger groups may need people to talk to with similar interests (work, hobbies etc).
- **Mental and Spiritual Wellbeing.** There is an opportunity to develop support for spiritual wellbeing through multicultural and interfaith initiatives. During the pandemic, many people are isolated and experiencing loneliness and mental health issues, especially younger people and older people. A helpline for support would assist as well as promotion of existing support channels and more face-to-face connection opportunities as the pandemic eases.
- **Physical Wellbeing.** Regular and affordable exercise sessions and outdoor activities such as walking groups and community gardens would promote fitness. This would be especially appreciated for parents and families. The City of Ballarat may be a partner on this with their new public wellbeing strategies.
- **Support for Men.** Men's mental wellbeing and community friendships are often overlooked and they would benefit from targeted activities to release stress from being at home such as outdoor activities, fishing and men's talk. Religious support may also be helpful for men to discuss their feelings.

Priority Area 5: Advocacy and Voice

BRMC members would like BRMC as the peak body to take a more active role in working with CALD communities to identify their priorities and needs, and advocating for communities especially to government. Suggestions for consultation and advocacy follow:

- **Strengthen Advocacy, Research and Policy Capacity.** Developing BRMC's website to be a one-stop reliable source for multicultural and settlement research, policy and COVID-related information. Strengthening strategic avenues for advocacy and influence at the national level such as the Welcoming Cities Network, Settlement

Council of Australia, and Refugee Council of Australia. At the local level, strengthening advocacy through engagement with Council and Councillors in a structured manner to ensure diversity in Council policies and plans.

- **Direct Advocacy and Capacity Building.** Enabling direct advocacy by BRMC members through their participation in government meetings and processes wherever possible. Advising and engaging BRMC members about existing peak organisations at State and Federal level and their potential to advocate, building the capacity of cultural and faith voices.
- **Regular Consultation.** Regular consultation with BRMC members to document CALD community concerns, needs and priorities.
- **Proactive Communications.** Ensuring that BRMC media and communications are purposeful, planned and proactive.
- **Anti-Racism Support and Training.** BRMC's Anti-Racism training is crucial and should continue to be rolled out, especially to support children who are racially targeted at schools, as well as additional support for parents. While most people are friendly, BRMC members still experience instances of racism. For example, many feel judged when praying, and would like more awareness and understanding across the community of why space to pray is necessary. Others shared experiences of discrimination in the banking and finance sector.

Takeaway Messages

In summary, the Priority Areas and associated actions identified by BRMC members are:

1. **Celebrations and Events**
 - Financial Sustainability
 - Online Calendar
 - Collaborative Events
 - Key Annual Intercultural Event
2. **Partnerships and Networks**
 - Information on Services
 - Mutual Cultural Exchange and Learning
 - Promotion of Existing Networks
 - Regional and National Networks
 - Online Information Hub and Multicultural Resource Index
3. **Employment and Business**
 - Visas and Qualifications
 - Support for Women and Parents
 - Mentoring and Support
 - Networking and Collaborating
4. **Health, Wellbeing and Social Support**
 - Joined-Up Services
 - Pandemic Information
 - Family Activities and Support
 - Youth Programs and Guidance
 - Support for New Arrivals

- Social Support Especially for Vulnerable Residents
- Mental and Spiritual Wellbeing
- Physical Wellbeing
- Support for Men

5. Advocacy and Voice

- Strengthen Advocacy, Research and Policy Capacity
- Direct Advocacy and Capacity Building
- Regular Consultation
- Proactive Communications
- Anti-Racism Support and Training

Outcome: Multicultural Dialogues Series

This dialogue was the first step in setting up a regular consultation channel with BRMC members to ensure that CALD community voices are driving BRMC's strategic priorities and actions as the peak body for multiculturalism and settlement in the region.

A direct outcome of the dialogue was the rollout of the Multicultural Dialogues Series. During 2022 and 2023, a further four planned global café conversations will drill down into each of the identified Priority Areas. Summaries of the discussion will be documented and shared, and will inform BRMC's strategic planning taking place in 2023.