



Beyond Barriers

Understanding Multicultural Participation in Volunteering

Prepared for Volunteering Queensland as part of the
Volunteer Management Activity

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Finally, we acknowledge that this report represents one step in an ongoing journey.

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Part One – Context and Approach

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Volunteering plays an important role in strengthening communities. It creates opportunities for people to contribute their skills, build relationships, develop confidence and foster a sense of belonging. Beyond the contribution made to organisations and communities, participation in volunteering is increasingly recognised as supporting individual wellbeing, social connectedness and community resilience.

Despite these recognised benefits, participation in formal volunteering is not experienced equally across all communities. Multicultural communities contribute extensively through informal helping, mutual support, faith communities, neighbourhood networks and cultural organisations, yet these contributions are often overlooked within traditional understandings of volunteering. As a result, participation is frequently viewed through a deficit lens that focuses on barriers and underrepresentation rather than recognising the significant contribution that already exists.

Much of the existing discussion surrounding multicultural volunteering has focused on identifying barriers such as language, transport, confidence or awareness. While these barriers are important, they do not fully explain why some people participate, why others do not, or how participation develops over time.

The THRIVING Ways Volunteering Readiness Project was established to explore these questions from a different perspective. Rather than asking why multicultural communities are not volunteering, the project asked how participation is experienced, what enables people to move into broader community participation, and what can be learnt from the experiences of multicultural women, young people and community leaders.

This shift in perspective proved significant. Throughout the consultations, participants consistently described extensive helping, caring and community contribution that was already occurring within families, neighbourhoods, faith communities and cultural organisations. The challenge was not creating participation, but understanding how existing contribution is recognised, supported and connected to broader volunteering opportunities.

1.2 Purpose of the Report

This report presents the findings of the THRIVING Ways Volunteering Readiness Project, undertaken in partnership with Volunteering Queensland through the Volunteering Management Activity (VMA) Innovation Fund.

The report has four purposes:

- to explore how multicultural women, young people and community leaders understand participation and volunteering;
- to identify the factors that influence participation within multicultural communities;
- to examine how participation develops across different stages of engagement; and
- to develop an evidence-informed understanding of multicultural participation in volunteering.

The report is intentionally evidence-focused. It documents the findings emerging from the consultations and presents the conceptual understanding of participation that developed throughout the project.

The findings presented here provide the evidence base for the companion publication, *Designing Participation: A Practical Framework for Inclusive and Multicultural Volunteering*, which translates these insights into practical guidance for volunteer-involving organisations.

1.3 Project Context

The THRIVING Ways Volunteering Readiness Project was undertaken in Logan, one of Australia's most culturally diverse and fastest growing local government areas. Home to people from more than 240 cultural backgrounds and over 100 language groups, Logan provides a rich context for understanding participation within multicultural communities.

The project was delivered through THRIVING Ways in partnership with Volunteering Queensland and sought to strengthen understanding of how volunteering can better reflect and support the diversity of contemporary Australian communities.

Recognising that participation is experienced differently across communities and life stages, consultations were undertaken with three interconnected groups:

- multicultural women;
- multicultural young people; and
- multicultural community leaders.

Each group provided a distinct perspective on participation. Women described their own participation journeys and experiences of volunteering. Young people explored participation through the lens of identity, belonging and future aspirations. Community leaders provided broader insights into community strengths, systemic influences and the factors shaping participation across multicultural communities. Together, these perspectives provide a richer understanding of participation than would be possible through any single cohort alone.

1.4 Project Objectives

The project sought to:

- understand how multicultural communities experience participation and volunteering;
- identify the factors that enable and constrain participation;
- explore how participation develops across different stages of engagement;
- understand the role of trust, relationships and community networks in supporting participation;
- identify common patterns across women, young people and community leaders; and
- develop an evidence-informed framework that explains participation within multicultural communities.

Rather than testing predetermined assumptions, the project adopted an exploratory approach, allowing themes and patterns to emerge directly from participants' experiences.

1.5 Why This Research Matters

Participation is increasingly recognised as contributing to stronger communities, improved wellbeing, greater social cohesion and increased civic engagement. For multicultural communities, participation can also support settlement, belonging, confidence, leadership development and pathways to employment.

Despite this, much of the existing literature continues to frame multicultural participation primarily through barriers or deficits. This perspective risks overlooking the significant contribution already occurring within communities and can unintentionally position multicultural communities as lacking participation rather than recognising the many ways participation is already expressed.

The findings presented in this report suggest a different perspective.

Across all three consultation groups, participants consistently demonstrated a strong desire to contribute. Many were already volunteering informally through helping

neighbours, supporting new arrivals, caring for family members, organising community activities, participating in faith communities and strengthening social networks.

Rather than asking why multicultural communities do not participate, this report asks a different question: *How does participation develop, and what influences whether people continue moving through that journey?*

This shift from understanding participation as a single decision to understanding it as a developmental process represents one of the key contributions of this report.

1.6 Structure of the Report

This report is organised into three parts.

Part One – Context and Approach introduces the project, outlines the methodology and explores why participation matters within multicultural communities.

Part Two – Insights into Multicultural Participation presents the findings from consultations with multicultural women, young people and community leaders. Each chapter explores the experiences of a different cohort before identifying the broader insights that emerge from their perspectives.

Part Three – Understanding Multicultural Participation brings these findings together to present an integrated understanding of participation across the three cohorts. It highlights the key insights emerging from the project and reflects on what they reveal about multicultural participation in volunteering.

This report is accompanied by a second publication, *Designing Participation: A Practical Framework for Inclusive and Multicultural Volunteering*, which builds on these findings by translating them into practical principles, tools and approaches for organisations seeking to strengthen inclusive participation.

Together, the two reports move from understanding multicultural participation to supporting organisations to apply these insights in practice.

Chapter 2. Methodology

2.1 Project Overview

The THRIVING Ways Volunteering Readiness Project was undertaken to develop a deeper understanding of participation within multicultural communities. Rather than measuring volunteering rates or evaluating existing programs, the project sought to understand how participation is experienced, what influences involvement, and how participation develops over time.

The project formed part of the Volunteering Management Activity (VMA) Innovation Fund and was undertaken through a partnership between THRIVING Ways and Volunteering Queensland.

From the outset, the project recognised that participation is influenced by social, cultural and community contexts. Consequently, the research adopted an exploratory qualitative approach that prioritised participants' experiences and allowed themes to emerge through consultation rather than testing predetermined assumptions.

Rather than beginning with the question *"Why don't people volunteer?"*, the project asked: *How do multicultural communities experience participation, and what enables or constrains movement into broader volunteering and community life?*

This shift in perspective shaped both the consultation process and the subsequent analysis.

2.2 Research Approach

The project adopted an iterative qualitative methodology combining community consultation, participatory inquiry, systems thinking and thematic analysis.

Rather than following a linear research process, analysis developed progressively throughout the project. Early consultations informed subsequent interviews and focus groups, allowing emerging ideas to be explored, refined and tested with participants. This iterative approach enabled increasingly sophisticated understandings of participation to emerge over time.

The methodology placed particular emphasis on understanding lived experience. Participants were regarded as experts in their own participation journeys, with the research seeking to understand not only what barriers existed but how participation was experienced, interpreted and navigated.

Throughout the project, visual mapping, reflective analysis and systems thinking techniques were used to synthesise findings and identify relationships between emerging themes.

2.3 Community Consultation

Consultations were undertaken with three interconnected participant groups:

- multicultural women;
- multicultural young people; and
- multicultural community leaders.

These groups were intentionally selected to provide complementary perspectives on participation.

Multicultural women shared detailed accounts of their own participation journeys, including volunteering, informal helping, community involvement and experiences of navigating opportunities.

Young people explored participation through the lens of identity, belonging, aspirations and future pathways.

Community leaders contributed broader insights into community dynamics, trust, leadership, social cohesion and the structural factors influencing participation across multicultural communities.

Together, these perspectives enabled participation to be examined from individual, family, community and systems perspectives.

2.4 Data Collection

A range of qualitative methods were used throughout the project, including:

- focus groups;
- semi-structured interviews;
- community conversations;
- participatory activities;
- reflective discussions with community leaders; and
- iterative review of emerging findings.

Consultations were designed to encourage open discussion rather than structured responses. Plain English resources, visual prompts and culturally responsive facilitation approaches were used to support participation across diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Rather than seeking statistical representation, the project sought to develop rich qualitative understanding through detailed exploration of participants' experiences.

2.5 Analytical Approach

Analysis occurred concurrently with data collection. Consultation notes, participant quotations and facilitator reflections were reviewed following each consultation. Emerging themes were compared across participant groups and progressively refined through ongoing discussion and reflection.

Rather than simply identifying recurring barriers, analysis focused on understanding relationships between ideas and examining how participation developed over time. This process revealed that many challenges occurred not as isolated barriers but at particular points where participants attempted to move from one stage of participation to another.

As analysis progressed, individual themes were progressively synthesised into broader conceptual understandings. This iterative process ultimately led to the development of the Participation Transition Framework presented later in this report.

Throughout the analysis, attention was given to identifying both shared experiences across participant groups and important differences between women, young people and community leaders.

2.6 Strengths and Limitations

The project provides rich qualitative insights into multicultural participation within one of Australia's most culturally diverse communities.

Its strengths include:

- direct engagement with multicultural women, young people and community leaders;
- iterative consultation allowing themes to be progressively explored and refined;
- multiple perspectives across different participant groups;
- emphasis on lived experience rather than predetermined assumptions; and
- integration of community, relational and systems perspectives.

As with all qualitative research, the findings are intended to provide depth of understanding rather than statistical generalisability. The project was undertaken within the Logan context, and experiences may differ across communities and regions. Nevertheless, many of the themes identified—including trust, belonging, informal helping, community leadership and participation pathways—are likely to have broader

relevance for organisations working alongside multicultural communities throughout Australia.

2.7 From Consultation to Understanding

The purpose of the methodology was not simply to collect community views but to develop a deeper understanding of how participation is experienced within multicultural communities.

As consultations progressed, an important shift occurred. Rather than describing participation solely through lists of barriers and enablers, participants increasingly revealed participation as a dynamic process shaped by relationships, trust, confidence, opportunity and recognition.

This insight became one of the defining contributions of the project. It provided the foundation for the conceptual framework presented in the following chapters and informed a richer understanding of multicultural participation than barrier-based approaches alone.

The findings presented in this report should therefore be understood not simply as a summary of consultation responses, but as an evidence-informed interpretation of how participation develops across multicultural communities.

Our Methodology: A Participatory, Iterative Design Process

Listening deeply. Understanding together. Designing better participation systems.



**TOGETHER, WE CREATE STRONGER PATHWAYS
TO PARTICIPATION AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES.**



Chapter 3. Why Volunteer Participation Matters for Migrant and Refugee Communities

3.1 Participation is central for multicultural communities

Participation is central to healthy, connected and resilient multicultural communities. While volunteering is an important expression of participation, it represents only one part of the many ways people contribute to community life.

Within culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, contribution frequently occurs through informal, relational and community-led activities embedded within everyday life. People support neighbours, welcome newly arrived families, interpret languages, organise cultural events, mentor young people, transport community members, prepare meals, care for children and older people, connect people to services and respond to community crises. Although these activities are rarely described by participants as "volunteering", they represent substantial contributions to community wellbeing, social cohesion and community resilience.

Throughout this project, women, young people and community leaders consistently described helping others as a natural extension of family, culture, faith and community responsibility. Rather than beginning with formal volunteer roles, participation was already occurring through trusted relationships, reciprocal support and existing community networks.

This finding suggests that volunteering should be understood within the broader context of participation. Formal volunteering provides one important pathway through which people contribute to their communities, but for many people from CALD backgrounds it is not the starting point. Participation often begins through informal helping, trusted relationships and shared community responsibility before expanding into formal volunteering, community leadership, civic engagement and other forms of public contribution.

Recognising this broader understanding of participation shifts attention away from simply increasing volunteer numbers towards recognising existing community strengths and designing pathways that enable participation to grow over time. This broader conception of participation provides the foundation for the discussion that follows throughout this report.

3.2 Participation builds thriving communities

Participation is fundamental to thriving multicultural communities. It is through participation that individuals build relationships, communities develop trust and collective capability, and people from diverse backgrounds contribute to shaping the places in which they live.

When people participate, they do far more than contribute their time. Participation creates opportunities to develop confidence, strengthen identity, build skills and establish meaningful connections with others. It enables individuals to move from being recipients of support to active contributors within their communities, strengthening both personal agency and collective capacity.

For culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, participation has particular significance. It provides opportunities to establish trusted relationships, navigate unfamiliar systems, strengthen community networks and contribute existing knowledge, skills and lived experience. Participation enables people to retain strong cultural identities while also building connections across the wider Australian community.

At a community level, participation strengthens trust, reciprocity and social capital. It creates opportunities for people from different cultural, linguistic and faith backgrounds to work alongside one another, building mutual understanding, shared responsibility and stronger relationships. These interactions contribute to more resilient, inclusive and cohesive multicultural communities.

Participation also strengthens civic life. By creating opportunities for people to influence decisions, contribute their perspectives and assume leadership roles, participation helps ensure that multicultural communities are active partners in shaping their own futures.

Importantly, participation is not simply an outcome of strong communities—it is one of the mechanisms through which strong communities are created. Communities thrive when people have meaningful opportunities to contribute, connect, belong and lead.

3.3 Participation supports healing and recovery

For many refugee communities, participation is more than a pathway into volunteering, employment or civic life. It is also a pathway through which individuals and communities recover, rebuild trust and strengthen the relationships that support long-term settlement and wellbeing.

Experiences of war, persecution, torture and forced displacement often extend beyond individual trauma. They disrupt the social fabric of communities by separating families, fracturing trusted relationships, weakening community leadership and limiting opportunities for collective participation. While resettlement may restore physical safety, rebuilding trust, belonging and community connection often takes much longer.

Recovery from refugee trauma is therefore not solely an individual psychological process. It is also a deeply relational process.

Where trauma has damaged relationships, healing often requires opportunities to safely reconnect with others, contribute to community life and experience positive relationships built on trust, reciprocity and belonging.

Volunteer participation provides one of the mechanisms through which this rebuilding can occur. Through helping others, joining community activities, volunteering and contributing alongside others, people develop trusted relationships, rebuild confidence and strengthen their sense of identity and belonging. Participation therefore contributes not only to individual wellbeing but also to the rebuilding of community resilience, collective efficacy and social cohesion.

This is particularly important within multicultural communities such as Logan, where established community organisations, neighbourhood centres, faith communities and volunteering opportunities provide places in which people can safely reconnect with others. These environments create opportunities to strengthen relationships within cultural communities while also developing new connections across the wider community.

Viewed through this lens, participation is not simply a means of contributing to community life. It is also a trauma-informed approach to community recovery. By creating opportunities for people to reconnect, contribute and belong, participation supports healing, strengthens social capital, develops leadership and creates the conditions through which thriving multicultural communities emerge.

3.4 Participation responds to complex societal challenges

Volunteer participation matters not only because it benefits individuals and communities, but also because it contributes to addressing some of the most significant social challenges facing Australia today.

Governments across Australia are increasingly focused on improving population wellbeing, strengthening productivity and workforce participation, and building social cohesion within an increasingly diverse society. At the same time, communities are experiencing rising social isolation, declining trust, increasing complexity in service systems and growing pressures associated with rapid social, economic and demographic change. These are among the defining public policy challenges of our time.

Many of these challenges exhibit the characteristics of what the *Cynefin Framework*¹ describes as complex problems. They emerge through the interaction of multiple social, economic and cultural factors, have no single cause and cannot be solved through linear programs or isolated interventions. Rather than responding to complexity with

¹ The Cynefin Framework: <https://thecynefin.co/about-us/about-cynefin-framework>

increasingly complicated systems, effective responses strengthen the capacity of people, communities and institutions to learn, adapt and respond together.

Volunteer participation represents one such response.

Governments cannot directly create wellbeing, productivity or social cohesion. They can, however, invest in the conditions that enable these outcomes to emerge.

Participation is one of those conditions.

Participation strengthens wellbeing by creating purpose, belonging, trusted relationships and opportunities for contribution. It supports productivity by developing confidence, transferable skills, leadership capability and pathways into education and employment. It strengthens social cohesion by building trust, reciprocity and relationships across culturally diverse communities while creating opportunities for people to participate in civic and community life.

For culturally and linguistically diverse communities, these outcomes have particular significance. Participation not only supports settlement and inclusion but also helps rebuild trust, strengthen social capital and create meaningful connections between individuals, communities and institutions. These relationships increase community resilience and strengthen the capacity of multicultural communities to respond collectively to future challenges.

Viewed through a complexity lens, participation should not be understood simply as an activity that communities undertake. It is a form of social infrastructure that strengthens the relationships, trust and community capability upon which resilient societies depend. Investment in participation is therefore an investment in stronger individuals, stronger multicultural communities and a stronger Australia.

3.5 Participation rebuilds social capital

One of the most significant insights emerging from this project is that participation is fundamentally a process of rebuilding social capital. Rather than viewing participation simply as an individual decision to volunteer, the findings suggest that participation develops through relationships that progressively rebuild trust, belonging and confidence over time.

Many participation and volunteering systems implicitly assume that people already possess the trust, confidence and social connections needed to engage. For many refugees and migrants, however, this cannot be assumed. Before participation can grow, the conditions that enable social capital must first be rebuilt.

This is particularly significant because trust has often been disrupted long before people consider participating in community life. For many refugees, experiences of war, persecution, torture and forced displacement involve profound interpersonal trauma, where harm is inflicted by other people or institutions. For many migrants and refugees

alike, experiences of racism, discrimination and exclusion can further erode trust following settlement, reinforcing social isolation and reducing confidence to participate in unfamiliar environments.

Recovery and inclusion are therefore not only individual processes but also deeply relational ones. Where trust has been damaged, opportunities to safely rebuild relationships become fundamental to both healing and participation.

The consultations suggest that participation progressively rebuilds three interconnected forms of social capital.

Bonding Social Capital – Rebuilding Safety

Participation often begins within trusted family relationships, faith communities, cultural organisations and established community networks. These environments provide psychological safety, familiarity and encouragement, allowing people to reconnect with others, rebuild confidence and strengthen their sense of identity and belonging.

For many participants, these trusted relationships provided the foundation from which broader participation became possible.

Importantly, *bonding social capital* cannot always be assumed. War and persecution frequently destroy the very relationships upon which communities depend. Families become separated, trusted leaders are targeted, communities become divided and fear may persist long after resettlement. Some refugees therefore arrive in Australia without established support networks or may remain reluctant to trust even members of their own community.

This disruption of bonding social capital can become a significant contributor to social isolation. In these circumstances, expecting people to move directly into mainstream volunteering or unfamiliar community organisations may be unrealistic.

Community infrastructure therefore becomes critically important. Neighbourhood centres, community organisations, settlement services, faith communities and other trusted local spaces can provide psychologically safe environments where new relationships develop and trust begins to grow. For many refugees, rebuilding bonding social capital is not simply the first step towards participation—it is the first step towards rebuilding trust in other people and, ultimately, restoring confidence in humanity itself.

Bridging Social Capital – Rebuilding Belonging

As confidence grows, participation creates opportunities to develop relationships beyond immediate cultural and family networks.

The consultations consistently identified this transition as one of the most challenging stages of the participation journey. Entering unfamiliar organisations, navigating different cultural expectations, overcoming language barriers and developing confidence to participate alongside people from different backgrounds often required intentional encouragement and support.

These experiences build *bridging social capital* by creating relationships across cultures, faiths, neighbourhoods and organisations. Through these relationships, trust expands beyond familiar networks, creating stronger social cohesion, greater understanding and a deeper sense of belonging within the broader Australian community.

Linking Social Capital – Rebuilding Confidence

Participation also creates opportunities to develop relationships with institutions, education providers, employers, local government and community organisations.

For many refugees, experiences of persecution or inaccessible systems may have undermined confidence in institutions long before settlement. Developing positive relationships with workers, organisations and service systems therefore represents much more than access to information or services. It contributes to rebuilding confidence that institutions can be trusted, navigated and influenced.

These relationships strengthen *linking social capital*, creating opportunities for education, employment, leadership, civic participation and community influence. For many participants, volunteering represented one of the first opportunities to develop these trusted institutional relationships.

The consultations suggest that participation is fundamentally a process of rebuilding trust through these three interconnected forms of social capital.

- Bonding social capital rebuilds safety.
- Bridging social capital rebuilds belonging.
- Linking social capital rebuilds confidence to participate and contribute.

Rather than viewing participation simply as increasing volunteer numbers, this project views participation as rebuilding the relationships upon which healthy multicultural communities depend. By strengthening bonding, bridging and linking social capital, participation creates the conditions for healing, settlement, productivity, social cohesion, leadership and civic participation. It is through these relationships that resilient, connected and thriving multicultural communities are created.

Rebuilding Trust. Rebuilding Community. Rebuilding Lives.

How volunteering helps refugees and migrants heal, belong and contribute.



Participation through volunteering is a pathway that rebuilds trust and creates stronger multicultural communities.

By strengthening bonding, bridging and linking social capital, volunteer participation supports:



Healing and wellbeing



Belonging and social connection



Opportunity and confidence to participate



Access to opportunities and resources



Stronger, cohesive and resilient communities

Participation is not just about volunteering. It is about rebuilding trust, strengthening relationships and creating a more inclusive Australia for all.

3.6 Participation strengthens communities

Participation is not simply an outcome of strong communities - it is one of the mechanisms through which strong communities are created.

Participation creates outcomes that extend well beyond the immediate volunteer role or community activity. As individuals rebuild trust, strengthen relationships and develop social capital, participation creates opportunities that influence multiple aspects of individual, community and civic life.

The consultations undertaken throughout this project consistently demonstrated that participation creates reinforcing pathways of growth. Rather than producing a single outcome, participation generates a range of interconnected benefits that strengthen both individuals and communities over time.

Wellbeing and Healing

For many refugees and migrants, participation provides opportunities to rebuild confidence, develop trusted relationships and regain a sense of purpose following the disruption of migration, displacement and resettlement. Participants frequently described volunteering and community involvement as reducing loneliness, improving mental wellbeing and creating hope for the future. Many also spoke of helping others as an important part of their own healing journey.

Belonging and Community Connection

Participation creates opportunities to establish trusted relationships both within cultural communities and across the broader Australian community. Feeling welcomed, valued and included strengthens belonging, reduces social isolation and encourages continued participation. These experiences help transform unfamiliar places into communities where people feel connected, accepted and at home.

Settlement, Inclusion and Navigation

Participation supports successful settlement by helping people better understand Australian systems, expand their social networks and develop confidence in navigating unfamiliar environments. It provides opportunities to practise English, develop new skills, access information and connect with services, while strengthening bonding, bridging and linking social capital that supports long-term inclusion.

Productivity and Economic Participation

Many participants viewed volunteering as an important pathway towards employment rather than an activity separate from their future aspirations. Participation develops confidence, transferable skills, local experience, professional networks and leadership capability. It also strengthens confidence to engage with employers, education providers and other institutions that support long-term economic participation.

Social Cohesion

Participation strengthens relationships within culturally diverse communities while also creating opportunities for meaningful connection across different cultural, linguistic and faith groups. These relationships build trust, mutual understanding and reciprocity, strengthening social cohesion while recognising cultural diversity as an asset that enriches community life.

Leadership and Civic Participation

Participation often becomes the starting point for broader leadership. As confidence and experience grow, individuals frequently progress into mentoring, advocacy, governance and community leadership roles. These pathways strengthen the capacity of culturally diverse communities to participate in decision-making, influence local priorities and contribute to civic life.

Collectively, these outcomes demonstrate that participation is far more than an act of volunteering. It creates a reinforcing cycle in which stronger relationships lead to greater confidence, confidence encourages broader participation, and participation strengthens individuals, organisations and communities alike. In doing so, participation contributes simultaneously to improved wellbeing, increased productivity and stronger social cohesion - the three interconnected outcomes that underpin thriving multicultural communities.

3.7 Participation is developmental

One of the most significant findings emerging from the project was that participation is best understood as a developmental process rather than a single decision.

Participants rarely described one moment at which they decided to volunteer. Instead, they described gradually building confidence, relationships, understanding and opportunities over time.

This suggests that participation develops progressively as people encounter different experiences, opportunities and relationships throughout their participation journey.

Recognising participation as developmental provides a richer understanding than approaches that focus solely on barriers or recruitment.

3.8 From barriers to understanding participation

The ideas explored throughout this chapter provide an important context for interpreting the consultation findings.

Rather than viewing participation simply as the presence or absence of volunteering, the consultations encourage a broader understanding of contribution, belonging, wellbeing, relationships and community life.

The following chapters build upon this foundation by exploring what multicultural women, young people and community leaders revealed about participation through their own experiences.

Together, these perspectives contribute to a deeper understanding of multicultural participation and the pathways through which participation develops over time.

Part Two – Insights into Multicultural Volunteer Participation

Chapter 4. Women's Insights: Understanding Participation

4.1 Introduction

The consultations with multicultural women provided the richest and most detailed insights into how participation develops over time.

Although discussions initially focused on volunteering, participants consistently spoke about much broader experiences of helping, belonging, family, community, confidence and opportunity. Volunteering was rarely viewed as an isolated activity. Instead, it was understood as part of everyday community life and closely connected to identity, relationships and aspirations for the future.

Women did not begin their stories by talking about barriers. They began by describing the many ways they already contributed to their families, neighbours, faith communities and cultural groups. Throughout the consultations, it became increasingly clear that participation was already occurring. The question was not whether women were participating, but how existing participation could grow into broader forms of community involvement.

This chapter presents the key themes emerging from the consultations with multicultural women. Together, these findings provide the foundation for understanding participation as a developmental process rather than a simple decision to volunteer.

4.2 Women's Voices: Participation in Everyday Life

One of the strongest impressions emerging from the consultations was the richness of women's everyday participation.

Women described lives characterised by multiple responsibilities and multiple identities. They were mothers, daughters, carers, neighbours, workers, students, faith participants and community members. Many were also navigating settlement, learning English, supporting family members overseas and balancing significant caring responsibilities.

Participation occurred within this broader context of everyday life.

Helping others was rarely described as something separate from daily responsibilities. Instead, it was understood as a natural expression of care, reciprocity and belonging.

Women spoke about:

- supporting neighbours during difficult times;

- helping newly arrived families settle into Australia;
- interpreting for friends and relatives;
- preparing food for community gatherings;
- organising cultural and faith events;
- caring for children and older community members;
- sharing information and connecting people with services; and
- encouraging other women to become involved in community life.

Many participants did not initially describe these activities as volunteering. Instead, they simply described them as helping.

As one participant explained: *"Volunteer means help."*

Another reflected: *"It is showing our love from deep in our hearts. Alone we are not as powerful as together."*

These conversations suggest that participation is already deeply embedded within community life. Formal volunteering represents only one expression of a much broader culture of contribution.

4.3 Emergent Themes

Theme 1: Volunteering is understood as "help" - and already happening

The consultations consistently demonstrated that volunteering is not primarily understood as a formal role within an organisation.

Instead, women viewed volunteering as an extension of caring, helping and contributing to their communities.

This broader understanding challenges traditional assumptions that volunteering begins when people enter formal volunteer roles.

Rather, participation frequently begins long beforehand through informal helping and mutual support.

The findings suggest that multicultural communities should not be understood as having limited participation. Instead, much of their participation simply occurs outside formal volunteering systems.

Theme 2: There is a participation spectrum - not a single journey

Women described very different participation experiences, suggesting that participation is not a single pathway but a spectrum.

Three broad participation profiles emerged.

Self-directed participants

These women demonstrated high levels of confidence and agency. They:

- sought opportunities independently;
- navigated unfamiliar systems confidently;
- selected opportunities aligned with their interests; and
- frequently encouraged others to participate.

As one participant explained: *"I call in myself, don't wait to be asked - I just do it when I feel like it."*

Supported participants

Many women were highly motivated but required trusted encouragement before participating.

These women benefited from:

- invitations;
- reassurance;
- trusted relationships;
- opportunities to observe before participating; and
- gradual exposure to unfamiliar environments.

One participant captured this beautifully: *"I might be quiet at first, but when I'm in it's VOOM!"*

Rather than lacking confidence, these women often required time, trust and supportive relationships before fully engaging.

Constrained participants

A third group expressed strong motivation to participate but experienced multiple interacting barriers.

These included language, transport, health, financial pressures, caring responsibilities, the impact of trauma and unfamiliarity with volunteering systems.

As one participant explained: *"I want to work and help others... but I need English and someone to show me."*

Importantly, these women were not disengaged because they lacked motivation.

They remained willing to contribute but experienced greater difficulty converting willingness into participation.

Together, these three participation profiles demonstrate that multicultural women are not a homogeneous group. Participation is shaped by differing levels of confidence, opportunity, social connection and previous experience.

Theme 3: Willingness does not automatically become participation

Across the consultations, women consistently expressed a desire to contribute.

However, willingness alone did not necessarily lead to participation.

Participants frequently described uncertainty about:

- where opportunities existed;
- how to become involved;
- what would be expected of them; and
- whether they would be welcomed.

As one participant explained: *"Not sure what is available... I need to be shown what to do."*

Even highly skilled women sometimes remained disconnected from relevant opportunities. One qualified teacher, for example, had never considered volunteering within a school until this possibility emerged during the interview.

These findings suggest that many volunteering pathways assume a level of independence and system knowledge that cannot be taken for granted.

Theme 4: Trust is central - but fragile

Trust emerged as one of the strongest themes throughout the consultations.

Women repeatedly described trusted organisations and trusted community leaders as creating the confidence necessary to participate.

Participants spoke about the importance of:

- feeling culturally welcomed;
- knowing someone involved;
- receiving honest information;
- being accompanied into unfamiliar environments; and
- feeling confident they would be respected.

At the same time, trust was described as fragile. Several women recounted experiences of broken promises, exploitation or culturally unsafe environments.

One participant reflected: *"They said they would pay... but it didn't happen. No trust from what happened to me."*

These experiences often influenced future willingness to participate.

Trust therefore operates in two directions. It enables participation. But when trust is broken, participation may diminish long after the original experience.

Theme 5: Participation creates pathways to the future

Women consistently described volunteering as much more than helping others.

Participation was viewed as creating opportunities to:

- develop confidence;
- improve English;
- build friendships;
- strengthen community connections;
- develop new skills;
- gain work experience; and
- move towards employment.

One participant expressed this relationship memorably: *"It's like milk gives birth to cheese... volunteering gives birth to a job."*

Another reflected: *"If I can do it, so can the other women - and I want to keep helping them."*

Participation therefore represents not only contribution, but also growth, opportunity and hope.

Theme 6: Participation is shaped by interconnected influences

Women rarely described a single barrier preventing participation. Instead, they described participation as being shaped by a combination of practical, relational, psychological and systemic influences.

Practical factors such as transport, caring responsibilities and financial pressures influenced participation. Relationships frequently determined whether opportunities felt accessible. Confidence was influenced by language, previous experience and reassurance from trusted people. Systems sometimes made participation unnecessarily difficult through unclear pathways or limited recognition of existing experience.

These influences rarely operated independently. Instead, they interacted in ways that either strengthened or constrained participation. Importantly, women consistently described becoming more confident once they had opportunities to participate in supportive environments.

This suggests that participation is dynamic rather than fixed. Confidence, capability and connection often grow through experience.

4.4 What Women Reveal About Participation

The consultations with multicultural women challenge several common assumptions about volunteering and participation.

First, women demonstrate that participation already exists through extensive informal helping within families, faith communities and neighbourhoods.

Second, participation is fundamentally relational. Women rarely described becoming involved independently. Instead, participation developed through trusted relationships, invitations and encouragement.

Third, participation is closely connected to confidence, belonging and future aspirations. Volunteering was rarely viewed as an isolated activity but as part of broader journeys towards employment, leadership, wellbeing and community connection.

Finally, women revealed that participation is influenced by multiple interacting factors rather than isolated barriers. Practical constraints, trust, confidence, relationships and system accessibility work together to shape participation experiences.

Taken together, these findings suggest that multicultural women's participation is both richer and more complex than traditional barrier-based explanations imply.

They provide the conceptual foundation upon which the broader findings from young people and community leaders are explored in the following chapters.

4.5 Summary

The consultations with multicultural women reveal participation as a process that begins long before formal volunteering.

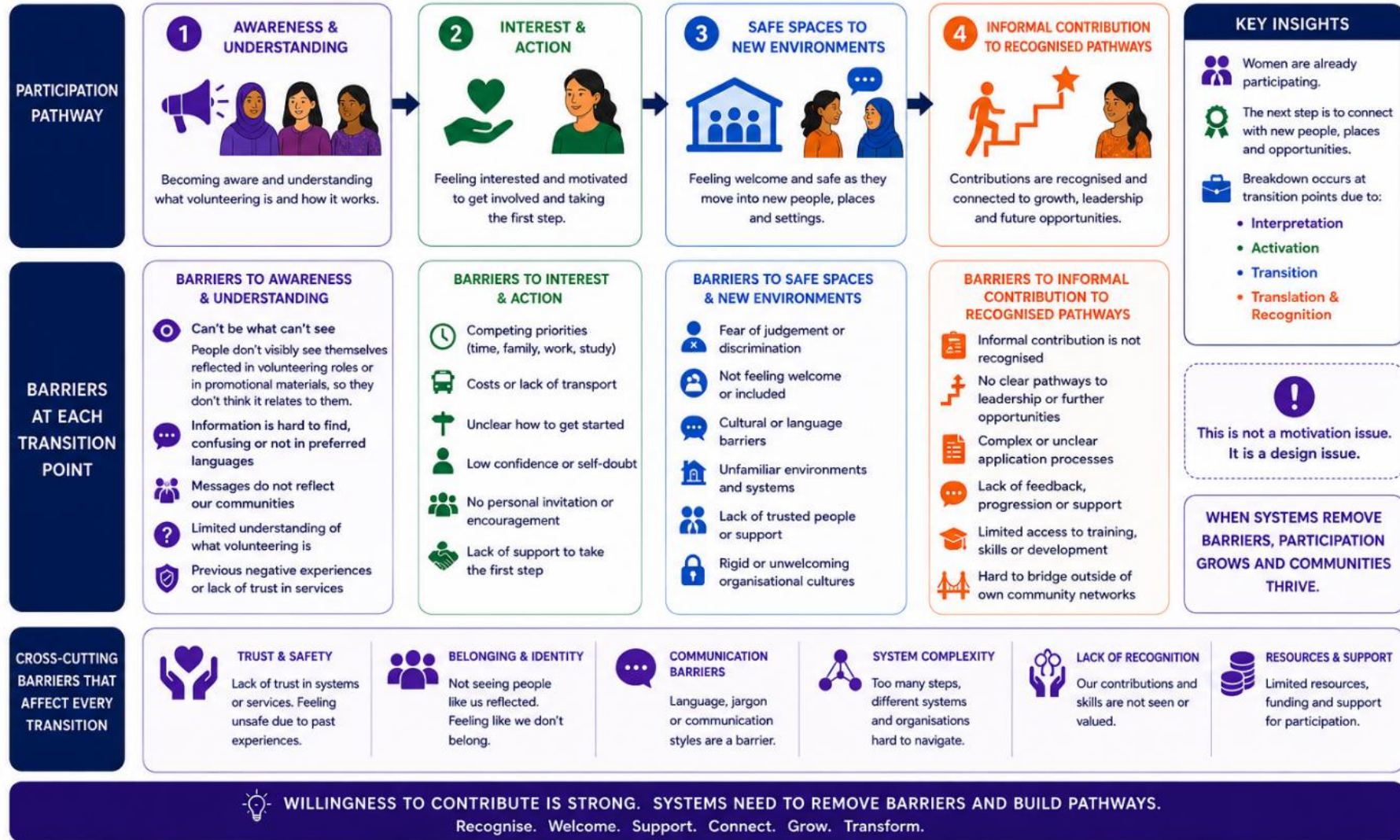
Women's stories demonstrate extensive existing contribution, strong motivation to help others and a desire to build stronger connections within their communities. At the same time, they highlight the importance of trust, relationships, belonging and opportunity in shaping how participation develops.

Rather than presenting participation as a simple decision to volunteer, the consultations portray it as an evolving journey that grows through everyday acts of contribution, supportive relationships and expanding confidence.

These insights form the foundation for the broader understanding of multicultural participation developed throughout this report.

BARRIER MAP – WHAT CALD WOMEN TOLD US

Barriers that impact participation at each transition point



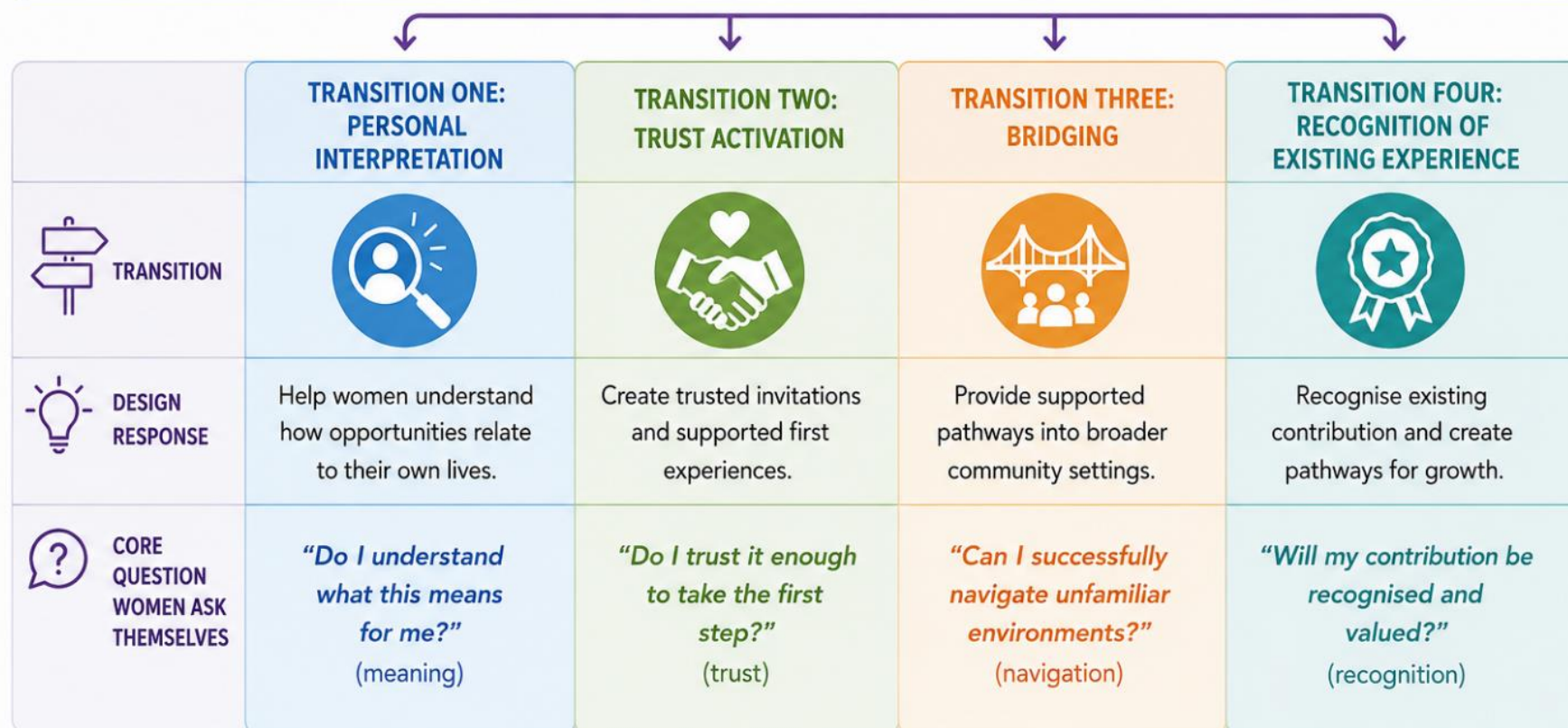
The Women's Participation Transition Framework

From everyday contribution to expanded participation



**CROSS-CUTTING FOUNDATION:
SAFETY, TRUST AND BELONGING**

Create psychologically, culturally and relationally safe environments that support participation across every transition.



Chapter 5. Young People's Insights: Understanding Participation

5.1 Introduction

The consultations with multicultural young people revealed a perspective on participation that was both optimistic and aspirational.

Unlike many adults, young people rarely spoke about volunteering as an obligation or civic responsibility. Instead, they described participation as an opportunity to grow, discover their strengths and build the future they hoped to create.

For many participants, volunteering was closely connected with identity, confidence, friendships, education, employment and leadership. Participation was viewed not simply as helping others, but as part of becoming the person they wanted to be.

At the same time, young people described uncertainty about where to begin. Many expressed strong motivation to contribute but were unsure how to access opportunities, whether they would feel welcome or whether volunteering would genuinely lead to the outcomes they hoped for.

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that young people's participation is shaped not only by opportunity, but also by belonging, relationships and future aspirations.

5.2 Emergent Themes

Theme 1: Participation begins long before formal volunteering

Like the women who participated in this project, young people consistently described contributing to their families and communities long before entering formal volunteering.

Participants spoke about:

- translating for parents and relatives;
- caring for younger siblings;
- supporting community members;
- helping organise cultural events;
- mentoring younger children;
- assisting within faith communities;
- helping friends at school;
- participating in fundraising activities; and
- supporting family businesses and community organisations.

Many regarded these contributions simply as everyday responsibilities rather than recognising them as valuable forms of participation.

One participant reflected: *"I already help my family and community. I just never thought that counted."*

These findings reinforce one of the strongest themes emerging throughout this project: participation frequently begins through informal helping long before people enter formal volunteering.

Theme 2: Participation is strongly connected to identity and future aspirations

Young people consistently described volunteering as more than an opportunity to help others.

Participation was linked to:

- developing confidence;
- discovering personal strengths;
- gaining work experience;
- building leadership skills;
- making friends;
- exploring future careers; and
- creating positive change within their communities.

Rather than viewing volunteering as separate from education or employment, many participants understood participation as part of a broader developmental journey.

One participant explained: *"I want to do something that helps people, but I also want it to help me build my future."*

Participation therefore represents both contribution and personal development.

Theme 3: Belonging comes before participation

A strong and consistent theme throughout the consultations was the importance of belonging.

Before considering what they could contribute, young people first considered whether they would feel accepted.

Participants frequently described asking themselves:

- *Will I fit in?*
- *Will people understand me?*
- *Will I feel comfortable there?*

Feeling welcomed, respected and culturally understood was often described as the foundation upon which participation developed.

As one participant explained: *"If I don't feel like I belong, I probably won't come back."*

These findings closely mirror those emerging from the consultations with women, where safety and trust also influenced participation.

Theme 4: Relationships create confidence

The first participation experience emerged as one of the greatest challenges for many young people.

Participants described feeling significantly more confident when:

- someone invited them personally;
- they could attend with a friend;
- expectations were clearly explained;
- they knew someone already involved; and
- supportive relationships developed early.

One participant summarised this simply: *"Having someone to go with makes everything easier."*

These findings suggest that relationships influence not only whether young people begin participating, but also whether they continue participating over time.

Theme 5: Participation grows through opportunity

Young people described participation as something that develops progressively.

Early experiences often led to:

- greater confidence;
- stronger friendships;
- increasing responsibility;
- leadership opportunities;
- expanded community connections; and
- clearer future aspirations.

Rather than representing isolated volunteering experiences, participation became part of an ongoing journey of personal growth.

As confidence increased, participants described becoming more willing to contribute, take initiative and encourage others to become involved.

5.3 What Young People Reveal About Participation

Although young people often described different activities from the women participating in this project, the underlying patterns were remarkably similar.

Young people were already contributing through their families, schools, faith communities and neighbourhoods.

Like the women, they demonstrated strong motivation to contribute, but often experienced uncertainty about where to begin. Trust, belonging and relationships consistently influenced participation.

However, young people also highlighted an additional dimension. Participation was closely connected to identity and future aspirations. Rather than asking simply, *"How can I help?"* many young people were also asking, *"Who am I becoming?"*

This developmental perspective distinguishes youth participation while also reinforcing the broader findings emerging throughout the project.

5.4 Comparison with Women's Findings

The consultations revealed substantial consistency between women and young people.

Across both groups:

- participation frequently began through informal helping;
- trust influenced willingness to participate;
- belonging encouraged continued involvement;
- relationships supported confidence; and
- participation developed progressively rather than occurring through a single decision.

The principal difference lay in emphasis. Women's participation was more commonly discussed in relation to family, community contribution and social connection. Young people more frequently linked participation with identity formation, confidence, education, employment and future opportunity. These differences appear complementary rather than contradictory. Together they suggest that participation supports both individual development and community wellbeing across different stages of life.

5.5 Summary

The consultations with multicultural young people reinforce many of the broader findings emerging throughout this project. Participation begins through existing contribution rather than formal volunteering. Relationships, trust and belonging remain central throughout the participation journey. At the same time, young people highlight participation as a developmental process closely connected to identity, confidence and future aspirations.

Rather than viewing volunteering as an isolated activity, young people consistently described participation as part of becoming who they hope to be. These findings strengthen and extend the broader understanding of participation emerging from the women's consultations and provide an important foundation for the perspectives of community leaders presented in the following chapter.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION PATHWAY

What Young People Are Saying

Young people respond to **PEOPLE** before they respond to programs. **BELONGING** before responsibility. **CONNECTION** before contribution.



BARRIERS AT EVERY TRANSITION POINT



THE FOUNDATIONS THAT MAKE PARTICIPATION POSSIBLE



WHAT THIS MODEL SHOWS

- ✓ Participation is a journey, not a single event.
- ✓ Barriers exist at every transition point.
- ✓ Connection comes before contribution.
- ✓ Youth are motivated – but need the right conditions to participate.
- ✓ Systems must build trust, safety & belonging.
- ✓ Paths must connect volunteering to skills, identity & future.
- ✓ When youth are supported, they lead, contribute & thrive.

YOUNG PEOPLE ALREADY WANT TO CONTRIBUTE.
THE QUESTION IS WHETHER SYSTEMS CREATE CONDITIONS WHERE THEY CAN.

WHAT YOUTH SAY MATTERS MOST

- PEOPLE BEFORE PROGRAMS**
Trusted relationships open the door.
- BELONGING BEFORE RESPONSIBILITY**
I need to feel I belong before I contribute.
- SAFETY & TRUST FIRST**
If I don't feel safe, I won't stay.
- FIRST STEP IS THE HARDEST**
Support, encouragement and someone to go with me makes it possible.
- FUTURE & PURPOSE**
I want volunteering that helps my future.
- I AM ALREADY CONTRIBUTING**
I already help my family, peers and community.

"Sometimes young people are overwhelmed, not unwilling."

What Young People Want

BEYOND VOLUNTEERING, YOUNG PEOPLE DESCRIBED PARTICIPATION AS A PATHWAY TO CONFIDENCE, BELONGING AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITY.

Throughout the consultations, young people consistently spoke about what they hoped participation would help them achieve. Their aspirations extended well beyond simply "doing volunteer work". Participation was seen as a way of building identity, developing skills, expanding opportunities and becoming active members of their communities.



Rather than asking, "Where can I volunteer?", many young people were asking: *"Where can I grow?"*

YOUNG PEOPLE WANT...



✓ To Belong

- To feel welcomed.
- To feel culturally safe.
- To know they will be accepted for who they are.
- To feel that they genuinely belong before they are expected to contribute.



✓ To Build Confidence

- To overcome uncertainty.
- To step into unfamiliar environments with support.
- To discover that they are capable of more than they thought possible.



✓ To Develop Skills

- To gain practical experience.
- To strengthen communication and leadership.
- To develop confidence for future education and employment.
- To continue learning.



✓ To Build Friendships

- To meet people from different backgrounds.
- To expand their networks.
- To develop meaningful relationships.
- To feel connected to their community.



✓ To Discover Their Strengths

- To understand what they enjoy.
- To recognise what they are good at.
- To explore new interests.
- To build a positive sense of identity.



✓ To Create Pathways

- To gain Australian experience.
- To strengthen their CV.
- To explore career options.
- To access education and employment opportunities.
- To build a future.



✓ To Make a Difference

- To contribute to something meaningful.
- To support other people.
- To improve their communities.
- To leave a positive impact.



✓ To Become Leaders

- To take responsibility.
- To mentor others.
- To represent their communities.
- To inspire younger people.
- To shape the future.



KEY INSIGHT

Young people consistently described participation as much more than volunteering.

For them, participation represents a pathway towards identity, confidence, belonging, leadership and future opportunity.

When organisations recognise these aspirations and intentionally create environments where young people feel welcomed, supported and valued, volunteering becomes a powerful platform for individual growth and community development.



DESIGN IMPLICATION

Participation opportunities for young people should be designed not simply as volunteer roles, but as developmental pathways.

Organisations can strengthen youth participation by creating opportunities that:

- ✓ foster belonging before responsibility
- ✓ provide mentoring and supported entry
- ✓ develop practical skills and leadership
- ✓ connect participation to education and employment pathways
- ✓ recognise and celebrate contribution
- ✓ enable young people to progressively take on greater responsibility over time



“Young people are not looking for something to do. They are looking for opportunities to *become* who they want to be.”



BELONGING



GROWTH



OPPORTUNITY



IMPACT



LEADERSHIP



FUTURE

WHEN WE INVEST IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION, WE INVEST IN OUR COMMUNITIES' FUTURE.

Chapter 6. Community Leaders' Insights: Understanding Participation

6.1 Introduction

Community leaders brought a distinctive perspective to the consultations.

Unlike women and young people, who primarily described their own experiences of participation, community leaders viewed participation from both community and organisational perspectives. They understood the lived experiences of multicultural communities while also navigating mainstream organisations, volunteering systems and government programs.

Many described themselves as constantly translating—not simply language, but expectations, cultures, relationships and systems. They helped community members understand opportunities while also helping organisations better understand the communities they hoped to engage.

This dual perspective provided important insights into why participation succeeds in some circumstances but breaks down in others.

As one leader reflected: *"People don't usually join because they saw a flyer. They join because someone they trust invited them."*

Rather than presenting a separate understanding of participation, community leaders reinforced many of the themes emerging from the consultations with women and young people while offering a broader community perspective.

6.2 Emergent Themes

Theme 1: Participation is fundamentally relational

The strongest message emerging from the consultations with community leaders was that participation develops through relationships. Leaders consistently explained that information alone rarely creates participation. Instead, participation grows through trusted human connections.

Many described a familiar sequence:

- someone notices potential;
- someone extends an invitation;
- someone provides reassurance;
- someone accompanies the person;
- someone offers encouragement; and
- someone remains connected after participation begins.

These small relational actions frequently determined whether participation continued or came to an end. One participant observed: *"People respond to people before they respond to programs."*

These findings reinforce the central role of relationships throughout the participation journey.

Theme 2: Trust is the gateway to participation

Trust emerged as one of the most consistent themes across the consultations.

Community leaders described trust operating across multiple dimensions, including trust in organisations, individual staff, community leaders, cultural safety and the participation experience itself.

Many explained that communities who have experienced displacement, discrimination or institutional mistrust often require repeated positive experiences before engaging confidently with unfamiliar organisations.

One leader reflected: *"Trust takes time to build but only one bad experience to lose."*

Like the consultations with women, these findings suggest that trust is not an outcome of participation but one of the conditions that makes participation possible.

Theme 3: Belonging comes before contribution

Community leaders consistently challenged the assumption that participation begins by matching people to volunteer roles. Instead, they described belonging as the foundation upon which participation develops.

Participants remain involved because they feel welcomed. Confidence grows because people feel accepted. Leadership develops because relationships strengthen over time.

As one leader explained: *"If people don't feel they belong, they won't stay, no matter how good the opportunity is."*

These findings closely mirror those emerging from both women and young people.

Theme 4: Existing contribution is often overlooked

Community leaders consistently described extensive participation already occurring throughout multicultural communities.

Examples included:

- faith communities;
- women's groups;
- youth mentoring;
- neighbourhood support;

- settlement assistance;
- cultural celebrations;
- crisis response; and
- community advocacy.

These activities required significant leadership, organisation, commitment and responsibility. However, they were rarely recognised within mainstream understandings of volunteering. As one participant explained: *"People think our communities aren't volunteering. They just aren't looking where the volunteering is already happening."*

This finding strongly reinforces one of the central themes emerging throughout the project - that participation frequently exists long before formal volunteering begins.

Theme 5: Community leaders create pathways between communities and opportunities

Perhaps the most distinctive contribution made by community leaders was their description of the role they play within participation.

Leaders consistently described facilitating movement between communities and mainstream organisations.

They:

- explain opportunities;
- interpret expectations;
- build confidence;
- encourage participation;
- introduce people to new environments; and
- help organisations better understand multicultural communities.

Many described themselves as helping both communities and organisations navigate unfamiliar territory. One participant summarised this role simply: *"Sometimes my biggest job is helping both sides understand each other."*

Rather than representing participation themselves, community leaders often enable participation for others.

6.3 What Community Leaders Reveal About Participation

The consultations with community leaders reinforce many of the broader findings emerging throughout this project. Participation develops through relationships rather than information alone. Trust influences whether people are willing to engage with unfamiliar opportunities. Belonging encourages people to remain involved.

Existing contribution provides the foundation upon which broader participation develops. Importantly, community leaders also highlight participation as a shared

process rather than an individual journey. Participation develops through communities, relationships and trusted networks.

This broader community perspective complements the experiences described by women and young people while strengthening understanding of how participation develops across multicultural communities.

6.4 Comparison Across the Three Cohorts

Although women, young people and community leaders approached participation from different perspectives, remarkable consistency emerged across the consultations.

All three groups described:

- extensive existing contribution within multicultural communities;
- trust as a prerequisite for participation;
- belonging as central to ongoing involvement;
- relationships as the foundation for confidence; and
- participation as a gradual developmental process rather than a single decision.

Community leaders contributed an additional insight. Where women described lived experience and young people described aspirations for the future, community leaders explained the community relationships and informal networks that enable participation to develop.

Together, these perspectives provide a richer understanding of multicultural participation than any single group could offer alone.

6.5 Summary

The consultations with community leaders provide an important community perspective on multicultural participation.

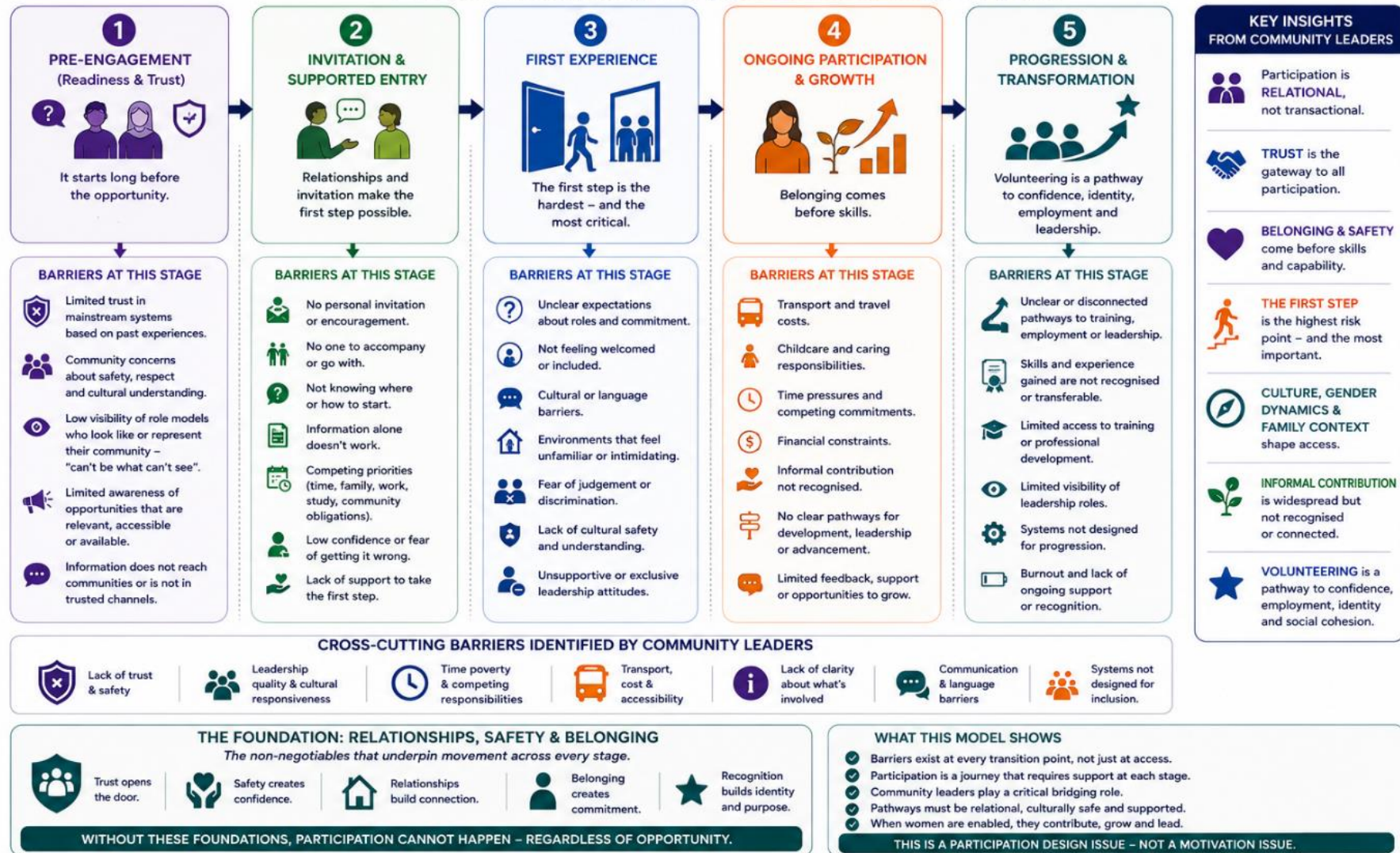
Their experiences reinforce the central role of trust, belonging, relationships and existing contribution while highlighting the importance of community networks in supporting participation.

Rather than describing participation as an individual choice, community leaders consistently portrayed participation as something that develops through trusted relationships and shared community experience.

These findings strengthen the broader understanding of participation emerging throughout this report and prepare the way for the final synthesis chapter, which brings together the insights from women, young people and community leaders into an integrated understanding of multicultural participation.

BARRIER MAP – WHAT COMMUNITY LEADERS TOLD US

Barriers that impact participation at each transition point





What Community Leaders See



A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE ON PARTICIPATION

Community leaders understand both their communities and mainstream systems. They see the connections, the gaps and the opportunities to build pathways where everyone can belong, contribute and lead.



Relationships before recruitment

People respond to relationships, not flyers. Participation begins through personal connections, invitations and trusted relationships.

People respond to people before they respond to programs.



Belonging before responsibility

People need to feel welcomed, accepted and culturally safe before they take on any role. Belonging is the foundation that makes participation possible and sustainable.

If people don't feel they belong, they won't stay.



Trust before participation

Trust is the gateway to participation. It is built over time through consistency, respect, cultural safety and positive experiences.

Trust takes time to build but only one bad experience to lose.



Support before independence

The first step is the hardest. People need guidance, encouragement and someone to walk alongside them before they feel confident to participate independently.

Once someone comes the first time, everything changes.



Recognition before progression

Informal contribution is often invisible. Recognition of existing skills, experience and leadership builds confidence and creates pathways to further opportunities.

We need to recognise what people already do.



Community strengths before community needs

Communities are full of capability, leadership and solutions. Start with strengths, not deficits—then build pathways that expand opportunities for everyone.

Don't just look at what communities need—look at what they already have.



LISTEN

Understand the community experience.



CONNECT

Build relationships and create introductions.



TRANSLATE

Explain systems, expectations and opportunities.



ACCOMPANY

Walk alongside people through new experiences.



ADVOCATE

Strengthen both communities and organisations.



AMPLIFY

Celebrate contributions and open doors to new opportunities.



“When community leaders are empowered, connected and valued, participation grows, communities thrive and systems improve.”

Strong communities are not built by programs alone. They are built by trusted leaders who build bridges.

Part Three – Understanding Multicultural Participation

Chapter 7. What We Learnt About Multicultural Participation

7.1 Bringing the Three Perspectives Together

This project sought to understand participation through the perspectives of multicultural women, young people and community leaders. Each group contributed a different lens through which participation could be understood.

Women described their lived experiences of helping, volunteering and navigating opportunities within unfamiliar systems. Young people described participation as part of building confidence, identity, belonging and future aspirations. Community leaders provided a broader perspective on the relationships, trust and community networks that enable participation to develop.

Although each cohort described participation from a different perspective, remarkable consistency emerged across the consultations. Rather than presenting separate stories, the findings revealed a shared understanding of how participation develops within multicultural communities.

Taken together, these findings move beyond traditional discussions of barriers. They suggest that participation is better understood as a developmental, relational and community-centred process.

The analysis resulted in seven key discoveries that together provide a new understanding of multicultural participation.

7.2 Seven Key Discoveries About Multicultural Participation

The seven discoveries presented below represent the strongest and most consistent findings emerging across all three consultation groups.

While each discovery is presented separately, they are closely interconnected and collectively explain how participation develops, where it stalls and why it succeeds.

Seven Key Discoveries

ABOUT MULTICULTURAL PARTICIPATION

What we learned from women, young people and community leaders about how participation develops, what enables it and why it matters.

1



PARTICIPATION ALREADY EXISTS.

Across families, faith communities and neighbourhoods, people are already helping, supporting and contributing in countless ways. Much of this participation is invisible to mainstream systems.

"I already help in my community. I just never thought of it as volunteering."

– COMMUNITY VOICE

2



PARTICIPATION IS DEVELOPMENTAL.

Participation develops over time, not through a single decision. It grows through experiences, relationships, confidence and opportunity.

"Every step made the next one easier."

– COMMUNITY VOICE

3



TRANSITION POINTS MATTER.

Participation most often slows or stops at key transition points—understanding opportunities, taking the first step, moving beyond comfort zones and progressing further.

"The first step is always the biggest step."

– COMMUNITY VOICE

4



RELATIONSHIPS CREATE PARTICIPATION.

Trusted relationships, invitations and encouragement are the mechanisms through which participation begins and continues.

"People respond to people before they respond to programs."

– COMMUNITY VOICE

5



TRUST, SAFETY AND BELONGING UNDERPIN PARTICIPATION.

Trust, cultural safety, psychological safety and belonging are the essential conditions that enable people to take the first step and keep participating.

"If I don't feel like I belong, I probably won't come back."

– COMMUNITY VOICE

6



COMMUNITY LEADERS BUILD BRIDGES.

Community leaders connect people and organisations, translate systems, build trust and open doors to opportunities in both directions.

"Sometimes my biggest job is helping both sides understand each other."

– COMMUNITY VOICE

7



PARTICIPATION REQUIRES RECOGNITION.

Recognising existing contribution builds confidence, validates capability and creates pathways to further opportunities, leadership and employment.

"I didn't need convincing. I needed someone to help me start."

– COMMUNITY VOICE

“

THIS PROJECT DID NOT SIMPLY IDENTIFY BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION.

”

Discovery One: Participation Already Exists

The most significant finding from the project is that participation is already occurring throughout multicultural communities.

Across all three cohorts, participants described extensive contribution through families, neighbourhoods, faith communities, cultural organisations and informal community networks.

Women spoke about caring, mentoring, supporting new arrivals and organising community activities.

Young people described translating for family members, mentoring younger children, supporting schools and participating in cultural events.

Community leaders highlighted the substantial volunteer effort occurring through faith communities, advocacy, settlement support, crisis response and community leadership.

Importantly, participants rarely described these activities as volunteering. Instead, they spoke simply about helping others.

This finding challenges the assumption that multicultural communities are under-participating. Rather, it suggests that participation is already widespread but often remains invisible because it occurs outside formal volunteering structures.

Discovery Two: Participation Is Developmental

The consultations consistently demonstrated that participation is not a single decision.

Instead, participation develops progressively through experiences, relationships, confidence and opportunity.

Women described gradually expanding their participation as they developed trust and confidence.

Young people viewed participation as part of becoming the person they hoped to be.

Community leaders observed that participation grows through repeated positive experiences and trusted relationships.

Across every consultation, participation emerged as a journey rather than an event.

Understanding participation as developmental provides a richer explanation than approaches that focus solely on recruitment or isolated barriers.

Discovery Three: Transition Points Matter

One of the most important insights emerging from the project is that participation rarely breaks down because of one overwhelming barrier.

Instead, people tend to pause at predictable transition points.

These include:

- making sense of opportunities;
- deciding whether participation feels safe;
- moving beyond familiar environments; and
- having existing contribution recognised.

Importantly, these transition points are not experienced equally. Some people move through them relatively quickly, while others pause for extended periods. Progress depends upon previous experience, confidence, trust, relationships and practical circumstances.

Recognising participation as a series of transitions helps explain why people with similar motivation often experience very different participation journeys.

This shift - from thinking about barriers to understanding transitions - represents one of the central conceptual contributions of the project.

Discovery Four: Relationships Create Participation

Across every consultation group, participants described relationships as the mechanism through which participation develops.

Information created awareness. Relationships created confidence. Trusted people explained opportunities, extended invitations, offered encouragement and supported first experiences.

Women described the importance of personal invitations. Young people emphasised mentors, friends and supportive peers. Community leaders consistently observed that people respond to trusted individuals before they respond to organisations.

Participation therefore develops through relationships rather than information alone.

Discovery Five: Trust, Safety and Belonging Underpin Participation

Trust emerged as one of the few themes consistently emphasised by every participant group.

Women described needing reassurance before taking the first step. Young people wanted to know they would feel accepted and welcomed. Community leaders explained that trust frequently determined whether participation began at all.

Participants also described the importance of psychological, cultural and relational safety. Together, trust, safety and belonging create the conditions that allow participation to develop.

Rather than representing another stage of the participation journey, these qualities underpin movement through every transition.

Discovery Six: Trusted Relationships Build Bridges

The consultations demonstrated that participation rarely develops in isolation.

Instead, trusted people and organisations frequently acted as bridges between multicultural communities and broader opportunities.

These bridges included community leaders, community organisations, faith communities, mentors, friends, volunteers, bicultural workers and respected community members.

They helped people:

- understand unfamiliar systems;
- interpret expectations;
- build confidence;
- reduce uncertainty;
- make connections; and
- navigate new environments.

Importantly, these trusted intermediaries also helped organisations better understand multicultural communities.

Rather than simply sharing information, they created the relationships through which participation could develop.

The findings suggest that trusted intermediaries form an important part of the social infrastructure that enables participation.

Discovery Seven: Participation Requires Recognition

The consultations consistently demonstrated that multicultural communities possess significant knowledge, skills and experience.

Much of this contribution, however, remains informal and therefore frequently goes unrecognised. Participants described caring, mentoring, organising, advocating, translating, leading and supporting others. These activities represent substantial community participation.

Recognition is therefore not simply about acknowledging contribution. It is about making existing capability visible.

When informal participation is recognised, it provides stronger foundations for volunteering, leadership, education and employment pathways.

The challenge identified throughout this project is not creating participation where none exists, but recognising and building upon participation that is already occurring.

7.3 The Participation Transition Framework

The seven discoveries collectively led to the development of the Participation Transition Framework. The consultations revealed that participation rarely breaks down because of a single barrier. Instead, participants described a series of transition points that required different forms of support before they could move confidently to the next stage of participation.

This represents an important shift in how participation is understood. Rather than asking *"What barriers prevent people from volunteering?"*, the findings suggest a more useful question is *"What support do people need at each transition in the participation pathway?"*

Across the consultations, four consistent transition points emerged. Each represents a different challenge requiring a different system response. Together, these transitions describe how people move from first becoming aware of opportunities through to having their existing contribution recognised and valued.

Transition One: Personal Interpretation – Making Sense of Opportunities

Many women had heard about volunteering opportunities through community organisations, social networks or local services. However, awareness alone rarely resulted in participation.

Participants commonly described uncertainty about:

- what volunteering actually involved
- whether opportunities related ‘to people like themselves’
- what would be expected of them
- whether they had sufficient English
- whether they would be welcomed.

Typical comments included:

- "I didn't know about this... but I would like to try."
- "Not sure what is available... I need to be shown what to do."

Rather than rejecting opportunities, women often described uncertainty about how opportunities related to them personally. Women are not asking, *"What is volunteering?"* They are asking, *"Is volunteering something for someone like me?"*

The findings suggest that awareness is not the primary challenge. Women were often aware that volunteering existed, but opportunities remained abstract rather than personally meaningful. This represents the first major transition point within the pathway.

Therefore, the first barrier is one of **interpretation**. The issue is not lack of information but lack of interpretation about whether the opportunity is relevant to them.

Women require support to interpret:

- what opportunities involve
- why they may be relevant to them personally
- whether they are capable
- how participation fits into their own lives.

Without this interpretive support, awareness rarely develops into genuine motivation or readiness to participate.

In summary, the interpretation barrier is fundamentally a meaning-making transition. At this stage, women are not deciding whether they want to participate; they are deciding whether participation is relevant, possible and intended for someone like them.

Opportunities become meaningful when they are explained in ways that connect with women's experiences, capabilities and aspirations.

Transition Two: Trust Activation – Deciding It Is Safe Enough to Act

Interest in helping others was almost universal. Women repeatedly described wanting to contribute:

- "I like to help."
- "I want to do more."
- "I am happy to do anything."

Despite this willingness, participation frequently stalled before action occurred.

Women consistently described needing:

- someone to invite them
- someone to explain the process
- reassurance
- encouragement.

One participant summarised this simply: "If she was invited... she would go."

These findings suggest that willingness is already present. The challenge lies in converting interest into action.

Therefore, the second barrier is one of **trust activation**.

Women do not generally require greater motivation. They require:

- invitation
- guidance
- reassurance
- supported first experiences that build trust and a sense of safety.

Participation therefore depends less on individual willingness (which already exists) than on whether systems actively create opportunities to welcome and nurture women into involvement.

In summary, the activation barrier is fundamentally a trust transition. At this stage, trusted invitations, culturally safe relationships and supported first experiences provide the bridge between wanting to participate and actually participating.

Transition Three: Bridging - From Safe Spaces to New Environments

Women described high levels of participation within trusted environments including:

- Women's Power of Inspiration (WPI)
- Church/Mosque/Temple
- cultural organisations
- community groups.

Within these settings they often demonstrated confidence, leadership and regular contribution. However, movement beyond these familiar environments was much less common. As one participant explained: *"I haven't gone many places yet... mainly WPI, church and community."*

Participation itself is already occurring. The challenge is extending participation beyond familiar environments. This reflects the movement from bonding to bridging social capital.

Therefore, the third barrier is one of **transition**.

Women require support to move from:

- familiar people
- familiar places
- familiar cultures

towards broader community participation. Without intentional bridging mechanisms, participation remains concentrated within trusted environments.

In summary, the transition barrier is fundamentally a bridging transition. Women are not moving from non-participation to participation; they are moving from participation within trusted environments to participation across the wider community. At this stage,

bridging relationships, supported introductions and culturally safe experiences provide the pathway from familiar networks into broader community life.

Transition Four: Recognition and Progression – From Informal Helping to Recognised Participation

Perhaps the strongest finding was that women were already making significant contributions within their families, communities and neighbourhoods.

Examples included:

- caring for neighbours
- cooking
- providing transport
- mentoring
- offering emotional support
- helping new arrivals
- organising community activities.

Many women viewed these activities simply as helping rather than volunteering.

One participant explained: *"Helping people helps me... I get more skills."*

Another observed: *"Volunteer means help."*

These findings suggest that participation is already occurring. The challenge is not creating participation but recognising the contribution that already exists and connecting it to broader opportunities.

Therefore, the fourth barrier is one of **recognition**.

Current volunteering (and vocational employment and training) systems rarely acknowledge informal helping as legitimate participation.

Women require systems that:

- recognise existing contribution
- value informal helping as a form of participation
- translate existing experience into recognised volunteering opportunities
- create pathways into leadership, training and employment.

Without recognition, valuable knowledge, skills and community leadership remain largely invisible. Existing contribution is overlooked rather than built upon, and opportunities for progression are frequently lost.

In summary, the recognition barrier is fundamentally a translation and recognition transition. Women are not moving from inactivity to contribution; they are moving from informal, often invisible participation to recognised participation that is valued by

mainstream systems. At this stage, recognition, validation and meaningful progression pathways transform existing community contribution into opportunities for leadership, volunteering and employment.

The framework does not prescribe how participation should be designed. Rather, it provides a conceptual explanation of how participation develops within multicultural communities. It brings together the major findings of the consultations into a single model that explains the transitions people navigate as they move from existing contribution towards broader participation.

One of the most significant insights emerging from the project is that participation rarely breaks down because of a single barrier.

Instead, participants consistently described a series of transition points that required different forms of support before they could confidently move to the next stage of participation.

This represents an important shift in how participation is understood.

The project began by asking: *"What barriers prevent people from volunteering?"*

It finished by asking: *"What support do people need to move through each transition in the participation pathway?"*

Across the consultations, four consistent transition points emerged.

Each represents a different challenge requiring different forms of support before people can confidently continue their participation journey.

These transitions are:

- **Personal Interpretation** – making opportunities personally meaningful.
- **Trust Activation** – developing sufficient trust to take the first step.
- **Bridging** – moving beyond familiar environments into broader participation.
- **Recognition and Progression** – connecting existing contribution with broader opportunities.

7.4 Cross-cutting Foundation: Safety, Trust and Belonging

While the four transitions describe the stages through which people move towards broader participation, the consultations consistently identified one factor that influenced every stage of the pathway: a feeling of safety, trust and belonging.

Safety was not experienced as a single concept. Rather, participants described three interconnected forms of safety that shaped whether they felt able to continue participating:

- **Psychological safety** – *Will I be judged or fail?*
- **Cultural safety** – *Can I be myself here?*
- **Relational safety** – *Will someone support me?*

Together, these forms of safety created the conditions that enabled people to interpret opportunities, develop trust, move into unfamiliar environments and have their contributions recognised.

Participants were consistently more likely to progress when they:

- trusted the organisation and the people involved;
- understood what to expect;
- knew someone already participating;
- felt culturally welcomed and respected; and
- believed support would be available if needed.

Conversely, when these conditions were absent, participation frequently stalled regardless of motivation, confidence or capability.

Safety therefore should not be understood as another transition within the framework.

It is the foundation that supports every transition.

7.5 Summary

Bringing together the perspectives of women, young people and community leaders reveals a remarkably consistent understanding of multicultural participation.

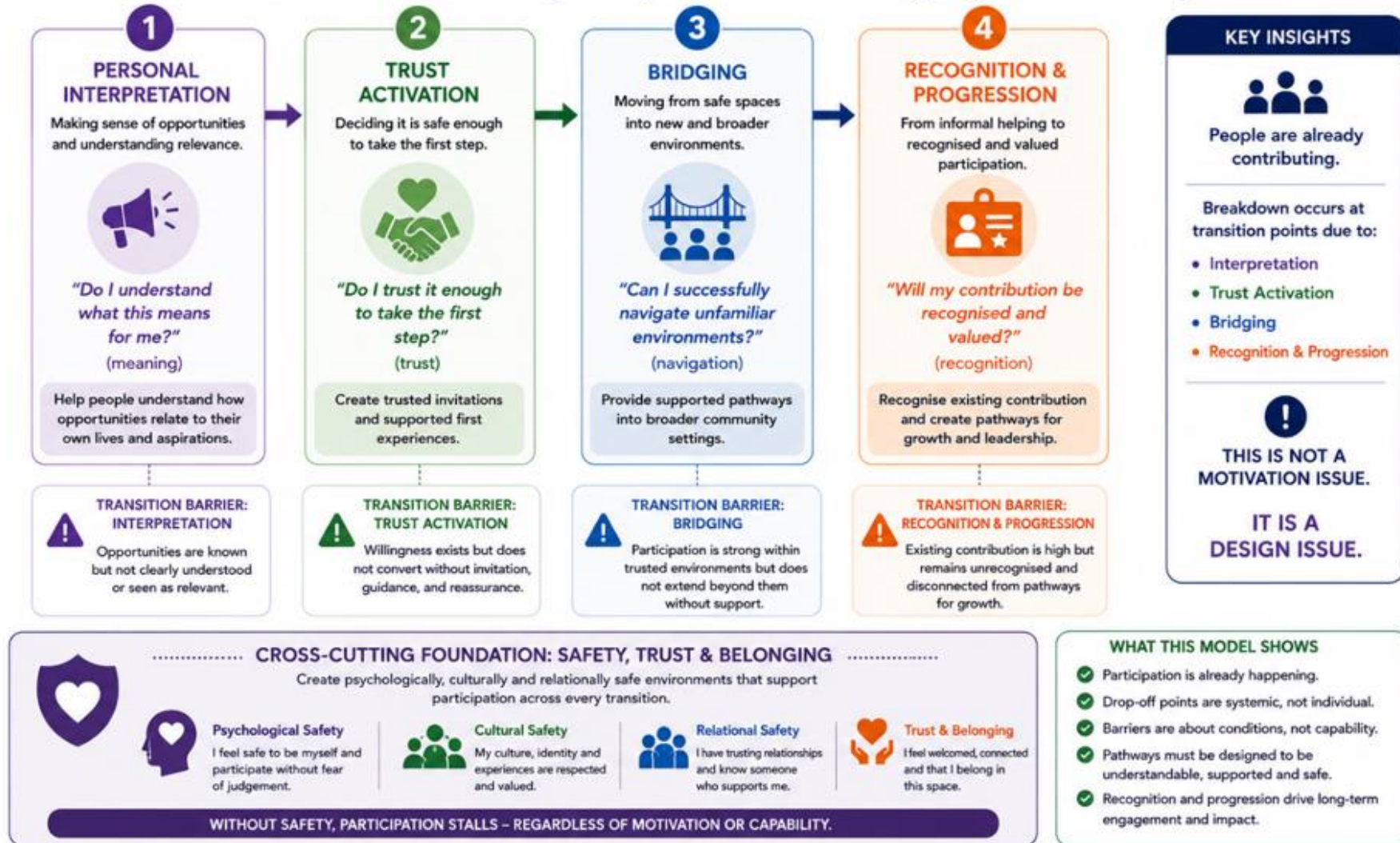
Participation already exists. It develops progressively. It grows through relationships. It depends upon trust, safety and belonging. It builds upon existing contribution. And it expands when communities are supported to move through key transition points.

Collectively, these findings challenge traditional deficit-based understandings of multicultural participation. Rather than asking why multicultural communities do not participate, this project demonstrates that the more important question is how existing participation can be recognised, understood and supported to continue growing.

The Participation Transition Framework presented in this chapter represents one interpretation of that developmental journey. It provides the conceptual foundation for understanding multicultural participation developed throughout this report.

From Contribution to Participation

A Framework for Understanding Participation Barriers and Designing Inclusive Pathways.



Chapter 8 - Safety as the Foundation for Participation

8.1 Safety Was Present Throughout the Participation Journey

Although participants described different experiences at each transition within the Participation Transition Framework, one theme consistently connected every stage of the participation journey.

Participants spoke about feeling safe.

Safety was rarely described explicitly using technical language. Instead, it emerged through comments about feeling welcomed, respected, understood and supported.

Participants wanted confidence that they would:

- be accepted rather than judged;
- feel comfortable asking questions;
- be able to contribute without embarrassment;
- maintain their cultural identity;
- receive support if they were uncertain;
- know someone they could trust; and
- feel that they genuinely belonged.

Across all consultation groups, these experiences influenced whether people continued moving through the participation journey.

Safety therefore emerged not as an additional transition but as the foundation that enabled every transition.

8.2 Safety Is More Than Feeling Safe

Participants described safety in ways that extended well beyond physical safety.

Safety reflected confidence that participation would be a positive experience.

It included confidence that people would be respected, understood and supported as they entered unfamiliar environments.

Three interconnected forms of safety consistently emerged.

Psychological Safety

Participants wanted confidence that they could ask questions, make mistakes and learn without fear of judgement or embarrassment.

Many people described uncertainty about whether they would know enough, understand expectations or "fit in".

Feeling psychologically safe reduced this uncertainty and increased confidence to take the first step.

Cultural Safety

Participants also described the importance of feeling culturally respected.

They wanted confidence that their language, identity, values and cultural experiences would be welcomed rather than viewed as barriers.

For many refugee and migrant communities, participation was strengthened when organisations demonstrated genuine curiosity, respect and openness towards cultural diversity.

Cultural safety enabled people to participate without feeling they needed to leave important aspects of themselves behind.

Relational Safety

Relationships consistently emerged as one of the strongest enablers of participation.

Participants frequently described joining organisations because someone they trusted invited them, accompanied them or reassured them.

Knowing that support would be available significantly reduced the uncertainty associated with entering unfamiliar organisations.

People trusted people before they trusted organisations.

Relational safety therefore transformed willingness into action.

Equity Safety

Participants also wanted confidence that the strengths they already brought would be recognised fairly.

Across the consultations, people described contributing extensive knowledge, skills, lived experience and leadership within their families and communities. They wanted opportunities where these strengths would be recognised, valued and able to grow.

For some participants, this included confidence that previous experience, whether gained overseas or within their own communities in Australia, would be respected rather than overlooked.

Equity safety therefore reflects confidence that participation will provide fair opportunities for people to contribute, develop and progress based on the strengths they already bring.

Bringing the Four Forms of Safety Together

Although each form of safety was experienced differently, participants consistently described them as interconnected.

Psychological Safety enabled people to consider participation.

Relational Safety enabled them to begin.

Cultural Safety enabled them to participate across difference while remaining true to themselves.

Equity Safety enabled them to believe that their contribution would be recognised and that opportunities for growth would be fair.

Together, these forms of safety created the conditions that enabled people to continue moving through the participation journey.

8.3 Safety Enables Every Transition

The consultations suggested that each transition within the Participation Transition Framework depended upon different expressions of safety.

- During **Personal Interpretation**, people needed confidence that participation was relevant and appropriate for someone like them.
- During **Trust Activation**, they sought trusted relationships that reduced uncertainty and gave them confidence to begin.
- During **Bridging**, they wanted reassurance that they would be welcomed into unfamiliar organisations while maintaining their identity and cultural connections.
- During **Recognition and Progression**, they wanted confidence that the contribution they already made would be recognised, valued and supported.

Although these experiences differed, together they reinforced a common finding.

Participation develops when people experience sufficient safety to continue moving forward.

8.4 Designing Safe Participation

The consultations suggest that creating safe participation is not simply the responsibility of individuals.

Volunteer-involving organisations actively influence whether people experience participation as safe.

Participants consistently described feeling more confident when organisations:

- communicated clearly;
- welcomed questions;
- worked alongside trusted community leaders;
- recognised existing contribution;
- valued cultural diversity;

- created supportive first experiences; and
- demonstrated genuine respect for people's lived experiences.

These findings suggest that organisations do not simply manage volunteers.

They also create the conditions within which participation becomes possible.

8.5 Summary

Across all consultation groups, safety emerged as one of the strongest influences on participation.

Psychological safety, cultural safety and relational safety consistently shaped whether people interpreted opportunities positively, trusted organisations, entered unfamiliar environments and continued participating over time.

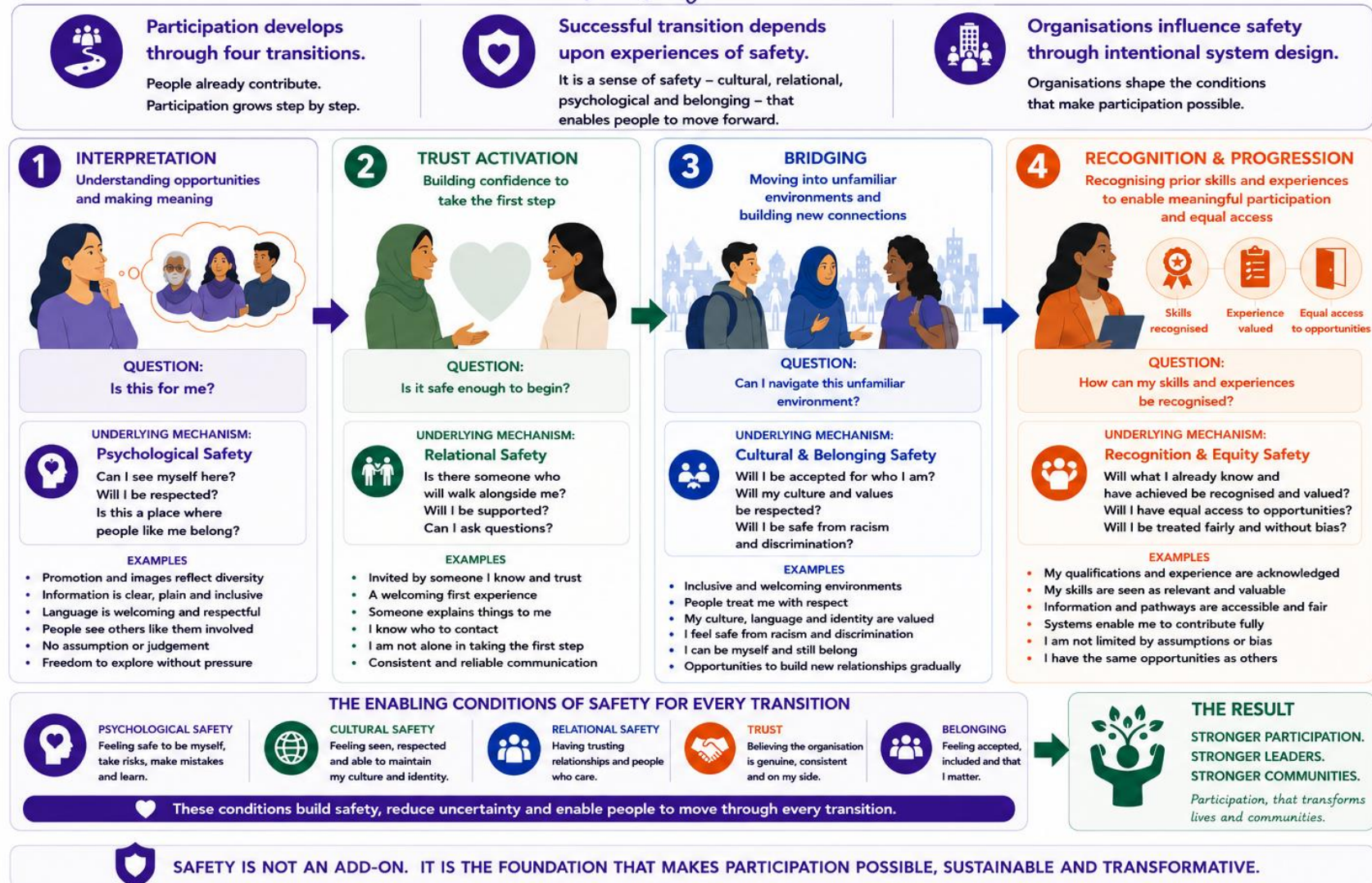
The findings therefore suggest that safety should not be viewed as another transition within the Participation Transition Framework.

Rather, it is the enabling condition that supports every transition.

Creating environments where people feel safe to contribute, learn, belong and participate may therefore be one of the most important ways volunteer-involving organisations can strengthen inclusive participation.

SAFETY AS THE FOUNDATION OF PARTICIPATION

A sense of safety enables transition.



Chapter 9 - Conclusion

9.1 Looking Beyond Barriers

This project began with a simple question:

How can multicultural participation in volunteering be strengthened?

Like much of the existing literature, it could easily have focused on identifying barriers to participation. Instead, the consultations deliberately began by listening to the experiences of multicultural women, young people and community leaders and asking how they understood participation in their own lives.

The answers challenged many of the assumptions that commonly underpin discussions about volunteering.

Participants did not describe communities lacking motivation or willingness to contribute.

Instead, they described communities that were already participating—through caring for neighbours, supporting new arrivals, mentoring young people, organising cultural events, strengthening faith communities and helping others in countless ways that often remained invisible to formal volunteering systems.

The challenge was not creating participation.

The challenge was recognising it, understanding how it develops and identifying what enables it to grow.

9.2 A Different Understanding of Participation

Across all three consultation groups, participation emerged as something far richer than formal volunteering alone.

It was described as:

- helping;
- belonging;
- contributing;
- building confidence;
- strengthening identity;
- developing relationships;
- creating opportunities; and
- supporting stronger communities.

Rather than occurring through a single decision, participation developed progressively through relationships, trust, experience and recognition.

This understanding represents an important shift away from deficit-based approaches that focus primarily on barriers.

Instead, participation is better understood as a developmental and relational process that builds upon strengths already present within multicultural communities.

9.3 The Contribution of This Project

One of the most significant outcomes of the project has been the development of a new way of understanding multicultural participation.

The seven key discoveries presented in this report demonstrate that:

- participation already exists;
- participation develops over time;
- transition points matter;
- relationships create participation;
- trust, safety and belonging underpin participation;
- community leaders build bridges; and
- recognising existing contribution creates opportunities for further participation.

Together, these discoveries provide an evidence-informed understanding of participation that moves beyond traditional barrier-based explanations.

The Participation Transition Framework further demonstrates that participation develops through a series of interconnected transitions rather than a single point of decision.

While developed through consultations within Logan, these insights have broader relevance for organisations, communities and policy makers seeking to better understand participation within multicultural communities.

9.4 A Foundation for Future Practice

This report has intentionally focused on understanding participation rather than prescribing solutions.

Its purpose has been to listen, interpret and bring together the voices of multicultural women, young people and community leaders into a coherent understanding of participation.

The findings suggest that strengthening multicultural participation begins with recognising the significant contribution that already exists within communities and understanding how participation develops over time.

This evidence provides the foundation for the companion publication, *Designing Participation: A Practical Framework for Inclusive and Multicultural Volunteering*, which

translates these discoveries into practical approaches for organisations seeking to strengthen inclusive participation.

Together, the two reports represent complementary stages of the same journey.

The first asks: *What do multicultural communities teach us about participation?*

The second asks: *How can this understanding be translated into practice?*

9.5 Final Reflection

Perhaps the most important lesson emerging from this project is that participation is not something organisations create.

Participation already exists within communities. It exists in families helping one another. It exists in neighbours supporting neighbours. It exists in faith communities, cultural organisations and informal networks of care.

What communities often need is not greater motivation to participate, but greater recognition of the participation that is already taking place and opportunities for that contribution to continue growing.

Ultimately, this project did not simply identify barriers to participation. It has enhanced how participation itself is understood.

Appendices - Glossary

The following glossary provides definitions of key concepts used throughout this report. Some terms draw upon established community development and volunteering literature, while others have been developed through the THRIVING Ways Volunteering Readiness Project to describe emerging concepts within the Participation Design Framework.

Belonging

A sense of being welcomed, accepted, respected and valued within a community, organisation or group. Belonging is a foundational condition for meaningful participation and often precedes confidence, contribution and ongoing engagement.

Bonding Social Capital

The relationships, trust and mutual support that exist within families, friendship groups and communities of shared identity or experience. Bonding social capital strengthens connection, resilience and mutual support within communities.

Bridging Social Capital

Relationships and networks that connect people across different communities, cultures, organisations or social groups. Bridging social capital creates opportunities for learning, collaboration, volunteering, education, employment and broader community participation.

Collective Impact

A structured approach to collaboration in which organisations from different sectors work towards a shared vision using coordinated strategies, shared measurement, continuous communication and mutually reinforcing activities.

Community Connector

A trusted individual who helps build relationships, shares information, introduces opportunities and supports people to navigate community systems. Community connectors often play a critical role in enabling participation by building trust and creating pathways into organisations and community life.

Community Participation

The ways in which people contribute to, connect with and influence the communities in which they live. Community participation includes formal volunteering, informal helping, leadership, civic participation, cultural activities, advocacy and community decision-making.

Community Wellbeing

The collective social, cultural, economic and environmental conditions that enable individuals and communities to flourish. Community wellbeing is strengthened through belonging, participation, inclusion, trust and connectedness.

Co-design

A collaborative process that actively involves community members, stakeholders and organisations in designing, testing and improving programs, services or systems. Co-design values lived experience as essential expertise.

Cultural Safety

An environment in which people feel respected, welcomed and able to participate without fear of discrimination, judgement or exclusion. Cultural safety recognises and values cultural identity, lived experience and diversity.

Informal Contribution

The everyday ways people support others outside formal volunteering structures. This may include caring for neighbours, mentoring, translating, organising community events, supporting faith communities, providing transport, advocacy or helping newly arrived families.

Intermediary

An organisation or entity that works between communities, organisations and systems to strengthen relationships, facilitate collaboration, build partnerships and support collective action. Intermediaries help translate community knowledge into system change while connecting people, organisations and opportunities.

Linking Social Capital

Relationships that connect individuals and communities with institutions, decision-makers, services, resources and opportunities. Linking social capital strengthens access to influence, support and broader systems.

Participation

The active involvement of people in community life through contribution, connection, leadership, volunteering, learning, decision-making or civic engagement. Participation is broader than volunteering and recognises both formal and informal forms of contribution.

Participation Design

The intentional design of systems, environments, relationships and pathways that enable people to connect, contribute and thrive. Participation Design shifts the focus from changing people to creating the conditions that support inclusive participation.

Participation Design Framework

The conceptual framework developed through the THRIVING Ways Volunteering Readiness Project that explains how participation develops and how organisations can intentionally design participation systems that build trust, belonging, relationships, supported transitions, recognition and opportunities for growth. The framework provides practical guidance for designing more inclusive volunteering, community development and participation systems.

Participation Ecosystem

The interconnected network of individuals, families, communities, organisations, institutions and systems that collectively influence participation. Participation is strengthened when these elements work together to create supportive environments and pathways.

Participation Pathway

The developmental journey through which people move from awareness and interest towards participation, leadership and ongoing contribution. Participation pathways recognise that people often require different forms of support at different stages of their journey.

Participation-Ready Organisation

An organisation that intentionally designs welcoming, inclusive and culturally responsive participation systems. Participation-ready organisations invest in relationships, belonging, supported entry, recognition, progression and continuous learning.

Place-based Practice

An approach that works with the unique strengths, aspirations, relationships and characteristics of a specific community or locality. Place-based practice recognises that solutions are most effective when developed with communities in the places where people live.

Recognition

The process of acknowledging and valuing people's skills, lived experience, leadership and contribution. Recognition builds confidence, strengthens belonging and creates pathways for future participation and leadership.

Social Capital

The networks, relationships, trust and reciprocity that enable people and communities to work together. Social capital strengthens participation, resilience, wellbeing and collective action and is commonly understood through bonding, bridging and linking relationships.

Strengths-Based Community Development

An approach to community development that begins with the strengths, assets, relationships and capabilities already present within communities rather than focusing primarily on needs or deficits. It recognises communities as active partners in creating change.

Systems Thinking

An approach that recognises communities as interconnected systems in which individuals, organisations, relationships, policies and environments continually influence one another. Systems thinking seeks to understand these interactions in order to create more effective and sustainable change.

Thriving Community

A community in which people experience belonging, connection, participation, opportunity and wellbeing, and where individuals, organisations and institutions work together to strengthen social cohesion, resilience and collective flourishing.

Transition Point

A stage within a participation pathway where people move from one level of participation to another, such as from awareness to action or from informal helping to formal volunteering. Transition points often require intentional support, encouragement and culturally responsive design.

Volunteer Participation

The contribution of time, skills and experience to benefit others or the wider community without financial reward. Within this report, volunteer participation recognises both formal volunteering through organisations and the important relationship between formal volunteering and the existing informal contribution that already occurs throughout culturally diverse communities.