



## 5. Management for visitors and community

### 5.4 Community engagement and volunteerism

#### Indicators

- Level of volunteer participation
- Effectiveness of volunteer and partnership programs
- Number and diversity and participation in community engagement programs

#### Context

Parks are significant community assets and community engagement is an important process to enable awareness involvement and belonging. Parks Victoria has a diverse array of interested stakeholders, individuals and the broader community through recreational user groups, local and regional conservation groups, local governments, Catchment Management Authorities, fire and emergency services, and neighbours. Engagement with Traditional Owners is expanding through new informal and informal partnerships.

Volunteers contribute to park management through their involvement in hands on activities ranging from tree planting to wildlife monitoring, conservation of heritage sites, maintenance of tracks and camp host programs. In return park volunteers can gain great social, physical and mental benefits and new skills.

Some sections of the community are under-represented in park visitation, often because of language, cultural and access barriers. Parks Victoria works with local government and community agencies to deliver programs that aim to reduce or remove these barriers and encourage culturally diverse or disadvantaged communities to experience parks.

## Volunteer participation

In 2013 there were nearly 200 volunteer groups involved in parks, contributing nearly 219,000 volunteer hours which was equivalent to 123 full time staff. Seventy-seven percent of volunteer hours involved Friends, community and recreational user groups.

Figure 5.4.1 Participation of volunteers in parks 2008-2013

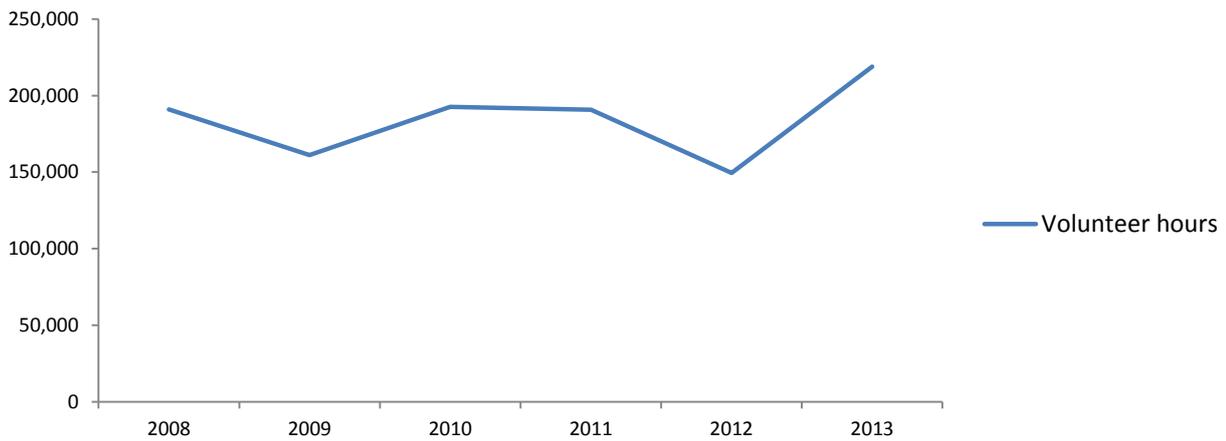
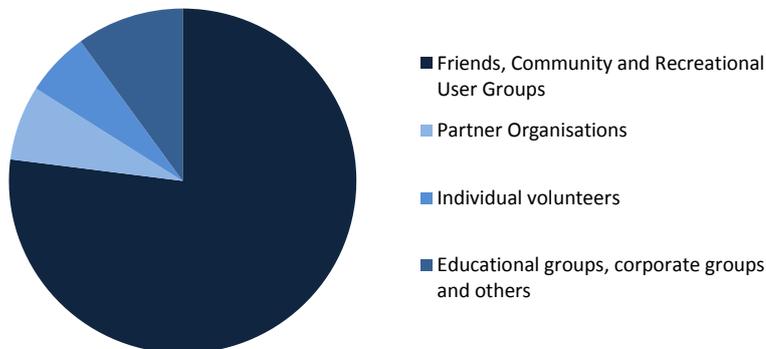


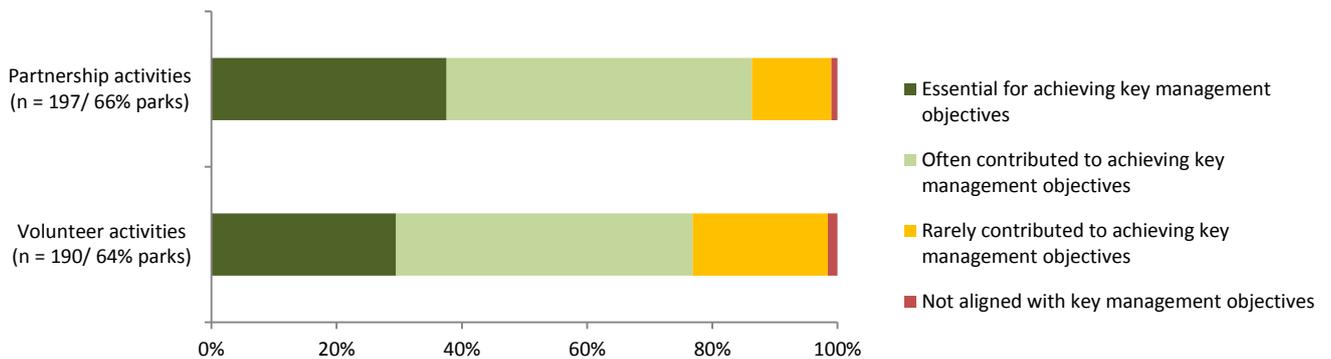
Figure 5.4.2 Percentage of volunteers in parks



## Effectiveness of volunteer and partnership programs

Park managers reported that the majority of volunteer and partnership programs contributed to park management objectives. There is some area for improvement in aligning volunteer programs to park priorities

**Figure 5.4.3 Contribution of volunteers and partnerships to achieving management objectives**



## Community programs

As part of its Healthy parks Healthy People initiative, Parks Victoria engages with diverse communities around Victoria to enable them to enjoy better access to Victoria’s parks. Diverse communities include those from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background, persons with a disability, carers, young people and older people.

These communities can experience barriers to visiting our parks which can be of physical, social or psychological nature. It may be a lack of funding or transport; fear of the outdoors or native animals; or discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or ability. In order to address these barriers, the park managers work with a range of partners to develop and sustain programs that offer opportunities for these communities to engage with parks. Partners come from the not-for-profit and government sectors, as well as internally, and provide a gateway to working with people from many different backgrounds.

**Figure 5.4.4 Programs to engage under-represented community groups in parks**

Program	Description
Access for All	A suite of initiatives designed to make Parks Victoria’s parks easier to access for adults and children with disabilities, including modified equipment and accommodation, information about park accessibility, and promotional media. Inclusive volunteer programs in parks, such as Walk in the Park (in partnership with Blind Sports Victoria) and Green Pathways (in partnership with Leisure Networks) are also part of this program.
Arts and Cultural Diversity Initiatives	Including the Heartlands Refugee Art Prize, Diwali Festival and Gurtji Narruk Youth Camp
Bilingual Guides	Training and support for culturally diverse participants to run park tours for community members in their own language
Discover Parks	A small funding round of grants of up to \$2,000 awarded to community organisations to introduce new groups to parks
Green Walks	Regularly led walks through various parks delivered in association with the Heart Foundation
Place-based programs	Targeted community engagement in disadvantaged areas such as Shepparton, Greater Geelong, and the Greater Dandenong regions
Programs for the Ageing	As above but with a focus on older people. Projects include Re-Activate in Parks (a partnership with Council of the Ageing Victoria) and Walk in the Park (a partnership with Blind Sports Victoria).
Staff Training	An online and face-to-face training package for Parks Victoria staff regarding working with people who have a disability or who are from a culturally diverse background
Swimsafe	A partnership with Lifesaving Victoria to deliver water safety education to CALD groups across regional Victoria
Urban Camping	A program that provides a camping experience to diverse participants who may not otherwise have the opportunity
Youth	Multiple short and longer-term projects designed to increase youth engagement with, and participation in, parks