



Multicultural Strategy: Context & Opportunities

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Introduction

The City of Port Phillip is developing a Multicultural Strategy to better support its diverse communities by ensuring inclusive and equitable services and engagement. This strategy aligns with the newly adopted *Plan for Port Phillip 2025–35*, particularly Strategic Direction 4.

Definitions of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism in Australia is a commitment to an inclusive society that values cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity, grounded in shared democratic principles. The Victorian Government and the Multicultural Framework Review (2024) reinforce this by promoting equal opportunity, civic participation, and a dynamic, responsive model of multiculturalism that addresses systemic inequities and strengthens social cohesion.

The term *multiculturalism* is used in place of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background to reflect a broader, more inclusive understanding of diversity that encompasses lived experiences, spirituality, and historical context. While CALD is a technical classification, multiculturalism is seen as a foundational and evolving aspect of Australian identity.

First Nations and Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism in Australia is also grounded in the enduring presence and cultures of First Nations peoples, whose sovereignty and histories span over 65,000 years.

Multiculturalism Must Confront Racism

The term “multicultural” has often been criticised for implying social harmony, despite the ongoing reality of racism experienced by many Australians, particularly those from migrant, refugee, and First Nations backgrounds.

As part of the development of the multicultural strategy, the use and meaning of multicultural terminology will be critically examined, with an explicit acknowledgement of the complexities, tensions, and lived realities that shape Australia’s diverse communities

Roles of Different Levels of Government in Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a shared responsibility across federal, state, and local governments. Local councils play a frontline role in fostering inclusion through:

- **Social policy** (e.g. multicultural action plans, anti-discrimination)
- **Community engagement** (e.g. festivals, advisory committees)
- **Inclusive service delivery** (e.g. translation, culturally responsive services)
- **Anti-racism initiatives** (e.g. campaigns, human rights promotion)
- **Collaboration** (e.g. partnerships with other governments and community organisations)
- **Celebrating diversity** (e.g. intercultural events).

The below table outlines the responsibilities of different levels of government in supporting multiculturalism and responding to social cohesion challenges.

Category	Federal	State	Local
Multicultural Policy & Planning	National multicultural frameworks and policies (e.g. Multicultural Access and Equity Policy, Multicultural Framework Review)	Implementation of federal policies adapted to state contexts (e.g. Multicultural Victoria Act, Victoria's Multicultural Review)	Local multicultural strategies, and community engagement initiatives
Immigration & Citizenship	Immigration control, visa policy, citizenship eligibility and processing	Settlement support, citizenship education, coordination with federal programs	Hosting citizenship ceremonies, distributing multilingual welcome materials, community education.
Funding & Investment	Settlement services, cultural diversity initiatives, community grants	Community programs, multicultural commissions, infrastructure	Local grants, program delivery, infrastructure supporting inclusion
Service Delivery	National Settlement Framework, immigration services	Education, health, social support services	Libraries, community centres, outreach programs, support for multicultural seniors and public housing tenants
Community Engagement & Harmony	Advice via Australian Multicultural Council, national research	State multicultural councils, intercultural programs	Cultural celebrations, anti-racism campaigns, advisory committees, and partnerships with local organisations
Social Cohesion & Anti-Racism	National Anti-Racism Framework	Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy, Anti-Vilification and Social Cohesion Bill	Local anti-racism strategies, community-led initiatives, support for reporting and education

City of Port Phillip background

Historical background

The City of Port Phillip is one of Victoria's most culturally rich and diverse municipalities, shaped by a long history of migration beginning with First Nations peoples. Station Pier in Port Melbourne, opened in 1854 and rebuilt in 1930, was a major gateway for post-WWII migrants. Greek communities settled in Port Melbourne, while Jewish refugees found a home in St Kilda both contributing significantly to the city's cultural fabric. Today, the city's identity reflects both long-established migrant communities and newer arrivals.

Over the past three decades, Council has actively supported multicultural and multifaith communities through policy leadership, advocacy, and partnerships. Key milestones include:

- **1995–2006:** Formation of the Multicultural Advisory Committee, declaration as a Refugee Welcome Zone, and adoption of a Statement of Commitment to Multiculturalism.

- **2007–2014:** Establishment of the Port Phillip Multifaith Network, endorsement of strategic frameworks, and participation in national anti-racism.
- **2018–2024:** Reaffirmation of refugee support, joining national inclusion networks, creation of outreach roles during COVID-19, and solidarity actions with faith communities.

Council’s multicultural work has been embedded within integrated strategic documents such as the Council Plan and the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, reflecting a holistic approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Current Council initiatives that support multiculturalism

The City of Port Phillip delivers a wide range of initiatives that support multicultural communities, promote inclusion, and foster intercultural understanding. These efforts span partnerships, cultural events, language access, grants, and targeted support for older resident.

The following table outlines key categories and initiatives, highlighting Council’s commitment to equity, belonging, and meaningful engagement with its multicultural residents.

Area	Initiatives
Partnerships & Networks	Multifaith Network (50+ leaders), Inner South Multicultural Network (90 members), Advisory Committee (under review)
Support for Seniors	Grants for wellbeing, free/subsidised venues for multicultural senior groups
Cultural Events	Cultural Diversity Week, Refugee Week
Welcome & Inclusion	Multilingual welcome postcards, new resident directory
Language Access	Translation and interpreting services across Council
Anti-Racism	Reporting tools and resources, membership of ‘Racism – It Stops with Me’ and All One Together anti-racism campaigns.
Community Grants	6 funding streams; 33% of 2024/25 grants supported multicultural communities
Library Services	LOTE collection, Storytime in 8 languages, English as an additional language support, cultural programming
Facilities	Used by 35 multicultural groups; key sites: South Melbourne, Sol Green, Betty Day
Civic Engagement	Local citizenship ceremonies in partnership with Federal Government

City of Port Phillip Community Profile

The following statistics, drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census, highlight the City of Port Phillip’s rich cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity.

Category	Key Insights
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Population Diversity	33.1% born overseas (up from 26.9% in 2006); 164 birthplaces; 126 languages spoken; 51% female; avg age 40
Disability Support	4.4% of overseas-born residents need assistance due to disability
Suburban Diversity Hotspots	South Melbourne - 34% born overseas (Park Towers), Montague- 38% born overseas (Southbank), Lakeside- 36% born overseas (St Kilda Rd)
Languages Spoken at Home	21% speak a language other than English; Top: Greek, Mandarin, Spanish, Italian, Russian
Emerging Languages	Spanish, Mandarin, Hindi, Portuguese, French among recent arrivals
Top Non-English-Speaking Countries of Birth	India (2.1%), China, Vietnam, Colombia (largest increase), Malaysia, South Korea
Age Distribution	3% under 12, 6% aged 12–24; 18% aged 60+ (44% of them born overseas); older migrants in Balacava, Port Melbourne, Elwood
Languages Spoken by Older Residents	Greek, Russian, Italian, Polish
Religious Affiliations	Catholic (27.3%), Buddhism (3.3%), Hinduism (2.1%), Judaism (3.3%) (large Jewish community in St Kilda)
Future Growth Areas	Fisherman's Bend, St Kilda Road, expected increase in cultural diversity

Migration data and trends for the City of Port Phillip

Between January 2015 and September 2023, 10,250 new migrants settled in the City of Port Phillip. Most arrived under the Skilled migration stream (73.33%), followed by Family (25.81%) and Humanitarian (0.86%) visas. The average age of new arrivals was 33.6 years, indicating a predominantly young, working-age population.

The top countries of birth (excluding English-speaking nations) were India, China, Colombia, Brazil, and Iran. Common languages spoken among these migrants include Mandarin, Spanish, Hindi, Portuguese, and Italian, reflecting the city's growing linguistic diversity. Islam and Buddhism are among the growing faiths represented in the local migrant population, contributing to the city's evolving cultural and spiritual landscape.

Multicultural Inclusion: Legislative and Policy Foundations for Local Government

The City of Port Phillip's multicultural work is guided by a multi-level framework of international, national, state, and local policies and legislation. These frameworks affirm human rights, promote

cultural diversity, and support equitable access to services. While not all are mandatory for local governments, aligning with them reflects best practice and a commitment to inclusive governance.

Key legislation such as the Racial Discrimination Act, Victorian Charter of Human Rights, and Equal Opportunity Act requires councils to deliver fair, inclusive services and uphold human rights. Complementary policies like Australia’s Multicultural Policy, Victoria’s Multicultural Review, and the Plan for Port Phillip (2025–35) provide strategic direction for fostering a respectful, culturally responsive community.

Frameworks of practice for Local Government and opportunities

The following frameworks offer practical guidance for local governments in Australia and internationally to strengthen social cohesion, embrace diversity, and build inclusive communities.

Framework Name	Origin	Purpose	Key Focus Areas / Dimensions
Welcoming Cities	Australia	Supports local governments in fostering inclusive, welcoming communities.	Leadership, Social & Cultural Inclusion, Economic Development, Civic Participation, Places & Spaces, Planning & Evaluation
Intercultural Cities	Council of Europe	Helps cities adopt intercultural strategies to manage diversity positively.	Commitment, Education, Neighbourhoods, Public Services, Business & Employment, Cultural & Social Life, Public Spaces, Mediation & Conflict Resolution, Language, Media & Communication, International Outlook, Participation, Anti-discrimination, Evaluation
Belong Network – Communities of Practice	United Kingdom	Focuses on social cohesion through shared learning among practitioners, policymakers, and researchers.	Connection & Belonging, Trust in Institutions, Inclusive Narratives, Civic Participation, Reducing Polarisation, Cultural Programming, Measurement & Evaluation

Strategic Opportunities

In developing the multicultural strategy, recent policy developments at both Federal and State levels, particularly around best practice in multiculturalism and anti-racism, present valuable opportunities for Council to build upon and explore further.

- **Multicultural Framework Review (Australian Government, 2024):** A national reform agenda to modernise multicultural policy, emphasising shared responsibility, inclusive identity, and culturally responsive services.

- Councils are encouraged to co-design services with diverse communities, embed intersectional approaches, invest in cultural programs, and promote national celebrations like Harmony Week and the UN Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.
- **Victorian Multicultural Review (2024–2025):** A statewide review resulting in 41 recommendations and new commitments, including a statutory body (Multicultural Victoria), a whole-of-government strategy, and targeted funding for multicultural organisations and museums.
→ Councils are encouraged to embed multiculturalism across departments, co-design policies with communities, promote anti-racism and inclusive safety, invest in grassroots organisations, and improve access to high-quality language services.
 - **National Anti-Racism Framework (AHRC):** Provides 63 recommendations for eliminating racism, with emphasis on place-based, community-led approaches and inclusive service delivery.
→ Councils can use the framework to audit local policies, co-design services with diverse communities, and collect data on racism to inform targeted responses.
 - **Victoria’s Anti-Racism Strategy 2024–2029:** A 5-year plan supporting councils through grants, education, and partnerships with multicultural and First Nations communities.
→ Councils are encouraged to apply for funding, promote anti-racism education, and collaborate with the Anti-Racism Taskforce to embed equity in local programs.

Conclusion

The City of Port Phillip stands at a pivotal moment in shaping a Multicultural Strategy that reflects its rich diversity, honours First Nations sovereignty, and responds to contemporary challenges. This paper has outlined the historical context, current practices, policy frameworks, and strategic opportunities that will guide the development of a strategy rooted in inclusion, equity, and social cohesion. By embracing intersectionality, strengthening community partnerships, and aligning with national and global best practices, Council can ensure that multiculturalism is not only celebrated but addresses inequality and racism.