



# **Polish Community Council of Australia**

## **Report into Community Consultations**

**May 2024**

## Introduction

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The Polish Community Council of Australia (Rada Naczelna Polonii Australijskiej) has become aware of a change occurring through which community members are engaging less with the traditional offerings of Polish community culture in Australia such as Clubs, functions, events, etc.

This change is captured through the following statistics:

- Nearly 250k Australians have a Polish background. (See: [8 Australian things that are actually Polish - ExpatsPoland](#))
- In the 2021 Census, there were 45,884 people in Australia who were born in Poland. Of these 42.5% were male and 57.5% were female. (See: [2021 People in Australia who were born in Poland, Census Country of birth QuickStats | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#))

Despite these statistics, it is estimated that only 11,000 people are directly engaged in Polish community organisations and their activities across Australia.

The Council commissioned Gigi Lacey, from Instinct Organisational Development, to consult with the community across Australia to

- Explore some possible reasons behind this disconnection, and
- Some strategies that may be used to address the situation

The results of the consultation will be used by the Council as well as its member organisations to consider:

- What might the Polish community in Australia look like by 2035?
- Will it be a historical curiosity for archivists to reference or will it be a thriving community, larger than that in 2024?

## Project governance

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The Executive of the Polish Community Council of Australia operated as an advisory committee for the project. Executive members are:

**President:** Henryk Kurylewski (QLD)

**Vice President:** Małgorzata Kwiatkowska (NSW)

**Secretary:** Małgorzata Wray (WA)

**Treasurer:** Dr. Robert Czernkowski (NSW)

**Committee Members:** Ania Cietrzewska (VIC), Edward Dudziński (SA), Adam Grabek (TAS), Grzegorz Machnacki (VIC), Ania Niedźwiadek (WA), Ita Szymańska (QLD), Ania Waldon-Rozoś (ACT),

The role of the advisory committee included

- Providing the consultant with contextual information about the community such as the history of immigration patterns and community dynamics

- Promotion of the consultation sessions
- Ensuring that the consultations were respectful of and acknowledged Polish culture and approaches.

## The consultation workshops

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Two consultation workshops facilitated by Gigi Lacey were held online via Zoom on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024. Approximately 60 people attended across the two sessions.

These 2-hour workshops worked through four key questions:

1. *What does it mean to you to be Polish?*
2. *What (if anything) currently makes being involved in the Polish community difficult?*
3. *What motivates you or could motivate you to be involved or more involved in the Polish community?*
4. *What do you think needs to happen to 'future-proof' connection within the Polish community?*

The workshops were open to people who identify as being a member of the Polish community and were attended by members of the PCCA Executive. Some Executive members contributed to the discussions while others were observers.

Participants were encouraged to contribute either through verbal discussion or by putting their thoughts into the Chat feature. Entries in Chat were drawn into the verbal conversation by the facilitator.

Participants were invited to send through any additional thoughts following the workshops.

## Response themes

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### 1. What does it mean to you to be Polish?

Themes in the responses to this question centred around:

- Being born and raised in Poland or having family in Poland
- Language, food, and music
- Connection with family, culture, history, ancestors, etc.
- Being part of a community
- *God, Honour, and Fatherland* (unofficial Polish motto)
- Being active online
- Helping other Poles form or re-form connection to language and culture
- Business connections
- Helping new migrants
- A feeling of belonging; having people who understand you

### 2. What (if anything) currently makes being involved in the Polish community difficult?

Themes in the answers to this question were:

- Difficulties being accepted into established Polish community groups
- What is being offered by the community groups (predominantly historical and cultural celebrations) is not meeting the needs of younger community members
- Older community members are not welcoming to new and / or younger people who wish to contribute

- Older people not being prepared to ‘move sideways’ to support succession planning
- Lack of trust and respect for younger people in their professional capacity – they have much to offer that is not being acknowledged
- Younger or newer community members not being patient with the processes
- Current structures require time that younger community members do not have
- Attempting to be more present in the broader Australian community and be inclusive is fraught with difficulties that frustrate and thwart attempts
- Lack of knowledge about the community organisations and events that exist
- Community is spread out across cities so not always near physical clubs, etc.
- Newcomers do not always understand that there are “legal” aspects (such as good governance) that impact on decisions made by organisation leaders, to protect the best interests of their membership and association
- Many activities are only in the Polish language; there is a need to engage with bilingual problems
- Many clubs / associations do not offer membership to non-Polish partners
- Legal requirements for volunteering such as Blue Cards
- The drama that Poles create / “inherited trauma”
- Burnout amongst current volunteers. Potential volunteers see this and hold back in getting involved
- Shift to individualism taking precedence over community values
- Younger people are more inclined to purchase services and experiences that they want rather than work with others to provide them as a volunteer i.e. ‘Customer’ mindset vs community service / ownership mindset
- Competition from other interests for volunteer contribution e.g. schools, work, etc.
- Lack of online opportunities

### **3. What motivates you or could motivate you to be involved or more involved in the Polish community?**

- Embracing newcomers and the energy, enthusiasm, and fresh ideas that they can bring
- Better communication
- Wanting to pass on culture and language to the next generations (children, grandchildren) can be a motivator for some to be involved in community.
- I am motivated by things like this forum and the genuine desire to make improvements
- Defined roles and tasks give direction and provides some motivation
- Dynamic, interactive technological information sharing
- Engagement and socialisation opportunities
- Succession planning – need to hand on to newcomers
- Desire for cross/inter-generational friendship
- Desire to connect with other like-minded people who are motivated to give something back beyond “what’s in it for me”
- Making connections between people
- Activities which could help me keep my children connected and interested in Polish culture.
- Business networking opportunities
- Being proud of our heritage and show it off to others

#### 4. What do you think needs to happen to 'future-proof' connection within the Polish community?

- Develop and implement strategies to bring younger and older generations together to achieve community aims
- PCCA to play a role of engaging and representing stakeholder organisations, advocating for them, and accessing funds to do things like this project which has relevance to all organisations and communities across Australia, then enabling and empowering state organisations to enact their own local strategies and plans
- It must be a combination of engagement online and face-to-face
- Working with wider Australian community as well as with other multicultural groups
- State and Federal funding for promoting Polish community events e.g. first aid training
- Start uniting to develop and run events across Australia
- Mentoring others; by way of knowledge transfer and empowering others
- Seek more support from Polish Consulate and Embassy
- Business networking opportunities
- Decentralising through smaller informal "pop-up" groups of ad hoc organised events
- perhaps it should be made easier for smaller organizations to get funds from Poland
- You can't fix human nature unfortunately. Communities are made up of all sorts of personalities. I think comments around intergenerational trauma are also fair - we've all grown up in it without realising, so maybe community workshops / resources would be useful
- Provision of governance and management training for leaders
- Reviewing what the objectives of the various Polish institutions are these days
- Closure of Clubs who no longer have a purpose

### Summary of themes

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An analysis of the themes that emerged through the discussions in response to the four questions suggest that there were five main themes:

1. Tensions between younger and older generations which includes tensions between the reasons for their migration to Australia
2. Tensions between Polish and non-Polish speakers
3. The differences between younger and older community members with respect to online versus 'bricks and mortar' clubs and connections. A sub-set of this is that 21<sup>st</sup> century Polish immigrants do not have as strong a need for a physical Polish community here in Australia as they can connect easily and cheaply to their family, friends and community anywhere in the world
4. Clubs and organisations not offering what people are looking for and then wondering why they won't be involved. This includes non-Polish spouses not being eligible for membership of some clubs
5. Broader Australian societal issues such as
  - a. Generational changes in approaches to volunteering
  - b. Less of a sense of ownership of organisations and a greater expectation of being a 'customer' purchasing a service
  - c. A greater sense of 'what's in it for me?'

## Recommendations

To meet the challenges occurring now and which can be foreseen into the future, the Polish community needs to consider responses at a national, state, local, and informal level.

There are roles to play for PCCA at the national level as well as by the State organisations; local formal Polish community associations, organisations, and clubs; and the informal individuals and groups who promote language, culture, and heritage and support Polish community members in Australia and beyond.

PCCA is ideally placed as the national body to coordinate this activity and provide support to the State associations who would, in turn, support the organisations within their state.

This process should be incorporated into PCCA and the State association's strategic planning, and regular review and evaluation of outcomes conducted.

Possible specific strategies that can be utilised to address these issues could include:

### 1. Tensions between younger and older generations

PCCA	State associations	Local associations, clubs, and groups
Offer training, guidance, and mentoring in understanding and working with various age groups.		-
Review organisational processes and structures to identify and remove barriers to contribution by people of all ages		

### 2. Tensions between Polish and non-Polish speakers

PCCA	State associations	Local associations, clubs, and groups
Review organisational processes and structures to identify and remove barriers to contribution by people who speak Polish or English.		
Provide information (websites, social media posts, etc.) in both languages.		
Ensure a culture of not promoting either language as 'better' than the other.		

### 3. The differences between younger and older community members with respect to online versus 'bricks and mortar' clubs and connections.

PCCA	State associations	Local associations, clubs, and groups
-	Develop and implement a hybrid program of events and activities that includes online as well as face-to-face opportunities for connection and engagement.	

PCCA	State associations	Local associations, clubs, and groups
-	-	Offer training and support to individuals who are not yet comfortable in an online environment.

**4. Clubs and organisations not offering what people are looking for.**

PCCA	State associations	Local associations, clubs, and groups
Undertake regular and varied formal and informal consultation with individuals and groups to identify what they want and then look for ways to provide this i.e. don't dismiss any suggestion out of hand.		
Look at what other cultural associations and groups offer their community members and consider what could be incorporated into your offerings.		

**5. Broader Australian societal issues such as**

- a. **Generational changes in approaches to volunteering**
- b. **Less of a sense of ownership of organisations and a greater expectation of being a 'customer' purchasing a service**
- c. **A greater sense of 'what's in it for me?'**

PCCA	State associations	Local associations, clubs, and groups
Acceptance of this change and a willingness to modify practices and approaches.		
Engage with state, national, and international volunteering associations to access current research and best practice approaches		Engage with local facilitators to review and adjust current processes to respond to changes.