Australian Volunteers

Volunteer Management Support Product: live testing

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Testing the Volunteer Management Support product with partners in Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Fiji and Cambodia

Complete
Aug 2023 - Feb 2024

Cover image: Australian Volunteers Program staff Samy and Karla connect via a Zoom call.
Photo: Harjono Djoyobisono.

Summary

Throughout this project the focus has been on learning about community volunteering in our partner countries, which led to co-designing a Volunteer Management Support product with our country teams. The final step was to test it in the real world!

To better understand whether our prototype had the potential to meet partner expectations, 20 participants from 15 partner organisations in Tanzania, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Fiji and Cambodia participated in live testing of the new support product, incorporating the volunteer management Resource Kit and workshops.

Our objectives

- To better understand what good user experience is in accessing and implementing volunteer management resources.

- To find ways to design volunteer management resources that can be flexible to diverse needs.

- To learn whether workshops can enhance user experience when upskilling in volunteer management.

- To better understand the feasibility of this product from a country team perspective.

- To identify if there are opportunities to engage country-based partners to deliver the support product in country.

Our approach

As we continued to explore user experience, we wanted to understand how participants accessed and engaged with the volunteer management support product, what were helpful supports, and finally, did everyone have the same experience?

This project focused on testing two elements of the same learning journey: the Resource Kit – a complete volunteer management guide – and workshops – accompanying sessions, designed to support the implementation of the Resource Kit and provide a peer platform for mutual sharing.

Participants were invited to choose between two streams of the project: the Guided stream that incorporated exploring the Resource Kit and attending the workshops; and the DIY stream that included only engaging with the Resource Kit. All participants were able to contact the facilitator for additional needs-based support around volunteer management.

Fifteen partners chose Guided and five opted for the DIY stream. All project participants were asked to complete regular surveys and join reflection sessions that sought to gain insight into their learning experience.

Partner organisation: "Thank you for developing this resource, before we had different documents, now – one."
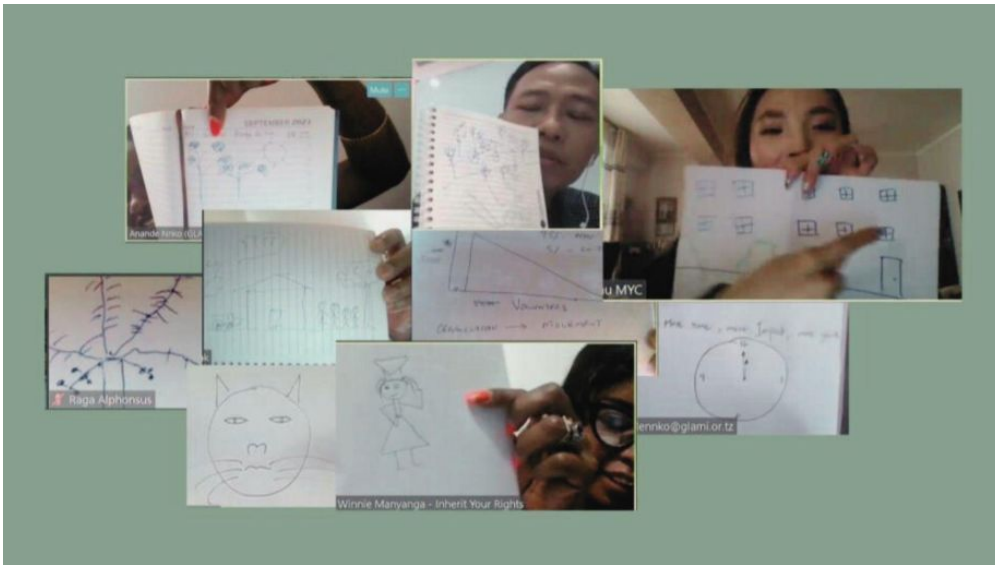
Project participants showcase their drawings as part of an activity, conducted at the start of each workshop to inspire conversations, creative thinking and sharing

What we learnt

- An effective way to address partners' lack of capacity and overwhelming amounts of information online is to promote resources by trusted organisations, e.g., program's country teams, and on known and regularly used online platforms, e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn and the Australian Volunteers Program website.

- The product has promise, for its flexible, adaptive and participatory approach supported organisations of various sizes, across sectors and industries.

- Organisations accessed the Resource Kit content in a non-linear way, based on their needs for learning. Additionally, participants easily adapted downloadable Word template resources to their organisational processes.

- Workshops have noticeably improved partners' learning experience. Interactive, consistent and tailored activities motivated participants to engage with their peers and better understand the Resource Kit content. As a result, most organisations implemented knowledge gained from the resources to improve or set up volunteer management systems. The workshops were successfully

delivered online, however, we learnt that to tailor the learning experience to organisations with lower English proficiency and poorer internet connectivity, sessions could be run in-person and in language.

- Further product improvements are needed. For example, to reflect increased online volunteering, the Resource Kit could include information about how to engage remote volunteers. It may also be helpful to design a shorter version of the guide for easier access.

- Facilitating a peer platform enabled real time learning and a sense of connection and accountability – participants called each other when late or unable to join.

- Often partners lack capacity and motivation to implement improvements in their organisations. To overcome these barriers the product may need to: set clear expectations at the start and motivate organisations; use interactive and flexible design and; provide hands on support, for example, an Australian Volunteers Program assignment.

- Some of the unexpected learnings were: some partners found the workshops style engaging and inspiring, which led to identifying enhancements to their own facilitation and presentation approaches; certain topics raised additional partner training needs, for example, adaptive and empathetic management and; one partner adapted the product to enhance their own member volunteer management training course.

- Country teams were instrumental in the initial facilitation of partner relationships. They expressed interest and availability to support online or hybrid training sessions in the future. However, the teams require support as they may not have capacity to implement and evaluate such activity independently.

Appendix 1 - Reflecting on the innovation project: where creativity brings people together

Innovation isn't solely about forging ahead; it entails pausing to reflect and gain learnings that help us better understand problems, test assumptions, and adapt.

This update shares insights about our most recent hybrid reflection sessions, where partners had the opportunity to meet in person after three months of collaborating solely online as they tested the effectiveness and desirability of the Volunteer Management Support product – Resource Kit and complementary workshops.

Project participants from partner organisations in Cambodia

The excitement of global connections was apparent as participants from Cambodia and Fiji convening for the first time in a virtual reflection session, while simultaneously gathering with their country teams in person. Later, a parallel session took place with partners from Tanzania, Sri Lanka, and Mongolia.

These workshops weren't mere data collection exercises; they were about fostering networks, nurturing creative thinking, sharing experiences, and, above all, expressing gratitude to our partners for their invaluable time and expertise.

"Partners were excited to engage with other organisations, to see others. This was a highlight. It was also important for them to come in one space and share the reflections. We all had a really good time."
-Country team

Project participants from partner organisations in Tanzania

During these sessions, participants were invited to envision volunteering, reflect on their learning journey, identify their most trusted and utilised data sources, and create poster mock-ups designed to inspire other organisations to explore our product. These insights provided invaluable understanding of the user experience with the product – directly from those who'd tested and may continue using it in the future.

Prototype of the Volunteering support product poster in Mongolia.

Prototype of the Volunteering support product poster in Sri Lanka.

The reflection sessions marked the conclusion of our Volunteer Management Support product live testing.

"Thank you for bringing us all together, I don't think it was easy to have so many different countries. And it was so well facilitated, very engaging. We learnt from this session too" - participant