Australian
Volunteers
FOR INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

Australian Volunteers Program
Annual Report
July 2018 — June 2019

(This page) **Papua New Guinea** *Australian volunteer Project Management Mentor Deb Chapman with Susan Kavengu, one of the rural midwives attending a training on maternal and child health run by Touching the Untouchables.*

(Cover image) **Tonga***: Australian volunteer Disaster Management Officer Maureen Bolawaqatabu (middle) with colleagues Mafi Penisoni (left), Disaster Management Officer and Mele Finau, Environment Officer, at the Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communication in Vava'u.*

Contents

1 | Executive summary

The Australian Volunteers Program is an Australian Government initiative. The program matches skilled Australians with organisations in developing countries to help those organisations to deliver on their own objectives.

The Australian Volunteers Program builds on the Australian Government's investment in international volunteering over the past 60 years. The program officially commenced on 1 January 2018 and represents the latest chapter in the Australian Government's support of skilled volunteering for development.

The program is an important part of the Australian Government's people-to-people portfolio, connecting Australians to Australia's aid program and the region.

The strategic components of the Australian Volunteers Program are set out in the Global Program Strategy. This strategy is framed by and contributes to Australia's aid policy, the Government's *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper* and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At a country level, the program is guided by three-year country program plans developed in collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

The Australian Volunteers Program is a five-year program with a total budget of up to AUD$190 million. The program is managed by AVI, in a consortium with Cardno Emerging Markets Pty Ltd and Whitelum Group.

1.1 Progress towards outcomes

2018/19 has been a period of strong program delivery including developing assignments and supporting volunteer placements and partnerships with local organisations across 26 countries. A range of activities and targeted partnerships have enhanced the program's reach, impact and visibility, which are important ambitions of this new chapter of the program. Simultaneously, 2018/19 has been a period of finalising the program's strategic scaffolding and embedding new systems and processes, providing the program with strong foundations for the next five to 10 years.

Critical to the progress achieved in 2018/19 has been the time spent building respectful and open relationships with program stakeholders, including partner organisations, Australian organisations, and between DFAT and the program (both in Australia and around the world).

Fiji *Elenoa Kaisau (left), Coordinator of Soqosoqo Vakamarama iTaukei in Cakaudrove Province, Fiji, with Australian volunteer Organisational Development and Sustainability Officer Tara Dias.*

Some of the major achievements of this period included:

- Supporting **1,017 volunteer assignments**, filled by 943 Australian volunteers. This included 611 new volunteer assignments commenced during the reporting period. The program also supported 151 additional Australians to participate as approved accompanying dependents.

- Working with **633 partner organisations** across 26 countries, facilitating many partnership workshops (for new and existing partners), and commencing the roll-out of partnership plans which are designed to maximise outcomes by supporting a more strategic approach to capacity building.

- Engaging with **over 70 Australian organisations** to support a range of assignments, and providing high-level support to a select number of strategic partnerships, such as the partnership between DFAT and the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) to develop and deliver a project supporting Australian farmers to volunteer overseas.

1.2 Challenges and lessons learnt

Valuing learning is a guiding principle for the program, and the second series of reflection events held in August 2019 provided the opportunity for program and DFAT staff to consider program strengths and challenges.

In 2018/19, key challenges and lessons learnt spanned a diverse range of areas, including recruitment and mobilisation, partnership planning, coordination and collaboration, systems development, and relationship management. Section 7 of this report provides a detailed review of lessons learnt.

The program team is very proud of the achievements over the last 12 months. As the program moves into 2019/20, it will focus on full scale and effective program implementation, while continuing to ensure that the health, safety and security of volunteers remains of paramount importance.

July 2018 to June 2019 at a glance
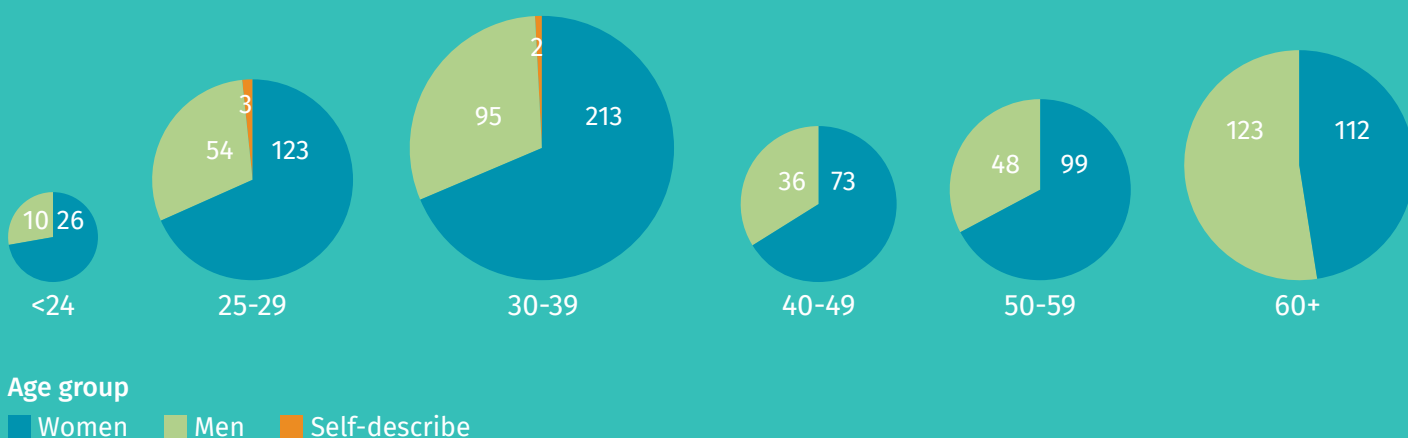
1017 assignments

943* volunteers

611 assignments started this year

406 assignments continued from previous years

63.5% women **36%** men **0.5%** self-describe

Age range by gender and number of assignments

Age group
■ Women ■ Men ■ Self-describe

Pie chart data:
- **<24**: Women 26, Men 10
- **25-29**: Women 123, Men 54, Self-describe 3
- **30-39**: Women 213, Men 95, Self-describe 2
- **40-49**: Women 73, Men 36
- **50-59**: Women 99, Men 48
- **60+**: Women 112, Men 123

Australian volunteers were accompanied by
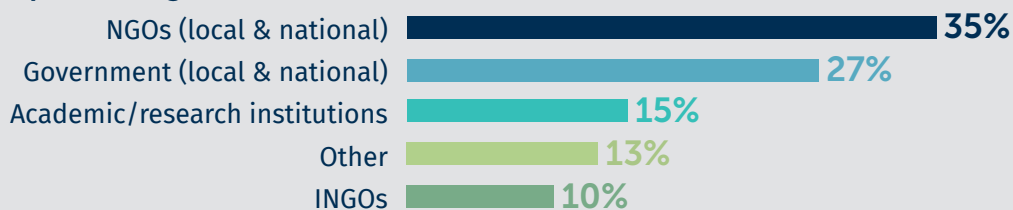
151 approved accompanying dependents
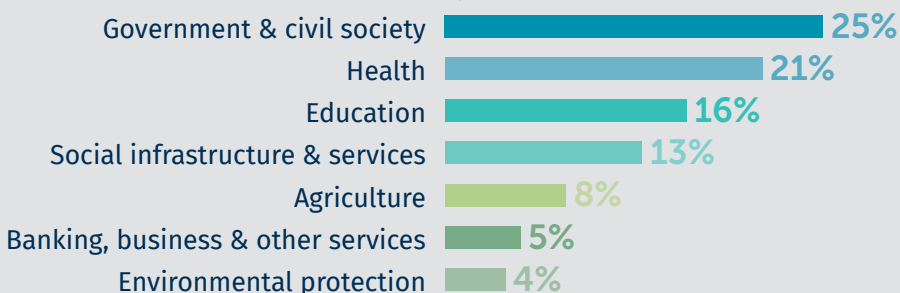
1.7% volunteers identify as having a disability

3.5% volunteers identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

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Our partner organisations

Organisation	%
NGOs (local & national)	35%
Government (local & national)	27%
Academic/research institutions	15%
Other	13%
INGOs	10%

Number of partner organisations supported

633

Most common sectors partner organisations work in

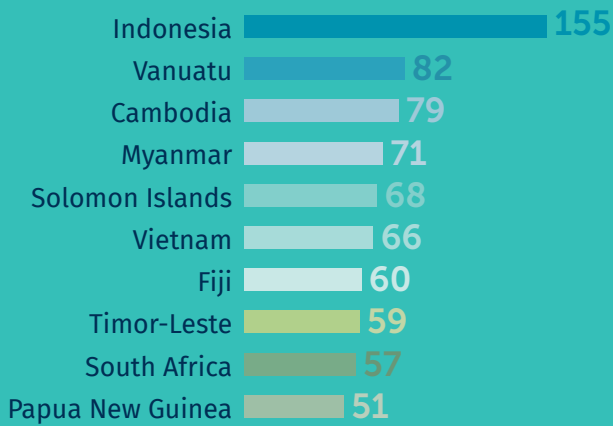| Sector	%
Government & civil society	25%
Health	21%
Education	16%
Social infrastructure & services	13%
Agriculture	8%
Banking, business & other services	5%
Environmental protection	4%

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* The difference between the number of volunteers and the number of assignments is due to some volunteers carrying out multiple assignments during the reporting period.
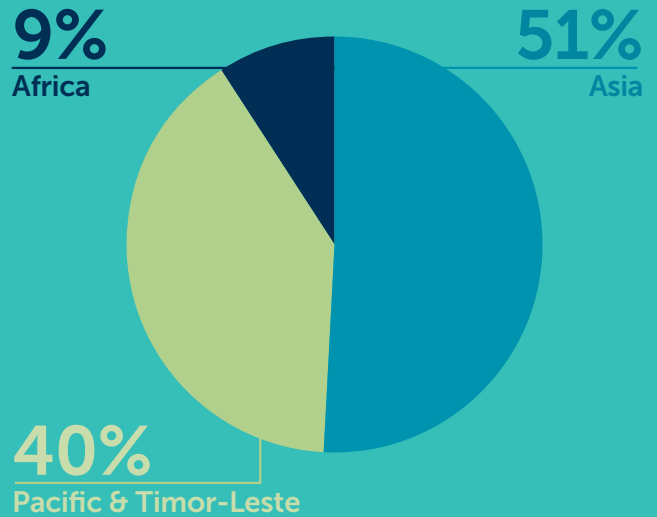
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Total budget

$37.3M

Top ten countries by assignment (out of 26 countries)

Country	
Indonesia	155
Vanuatu	82
Cambodia	79
Myanmar	71
Solomon Islands	68
Vietnam	66
Fiji	60
Timor-Leste	59
South Africa	57
Papua New Guinea	51

Where volunteers went

9%
Africa

51%
Asia

40%
Pacific & Timor-Leste
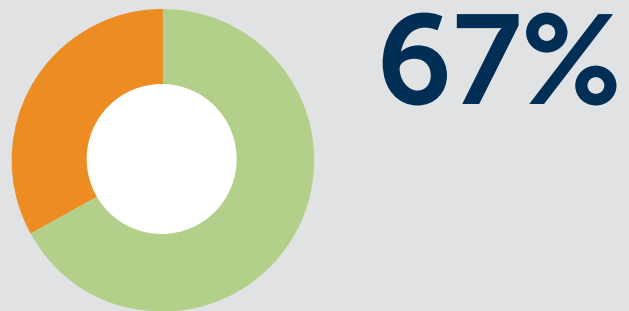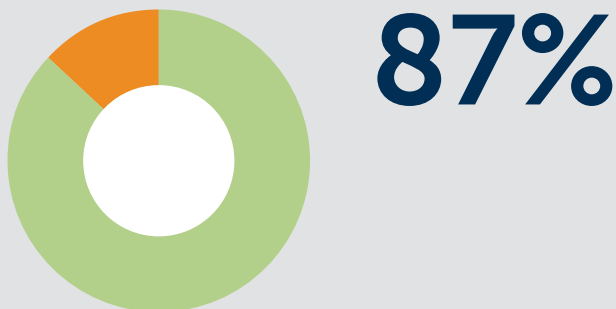
76% of partner organisations reported good or excellent progress against assignment objectives
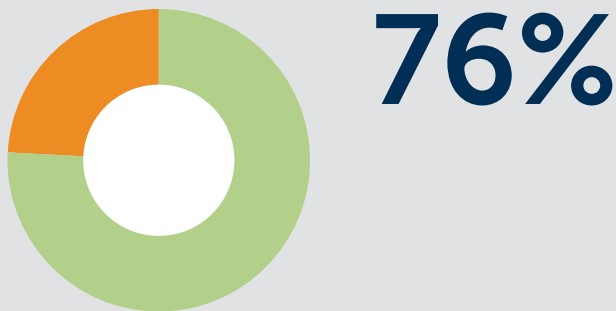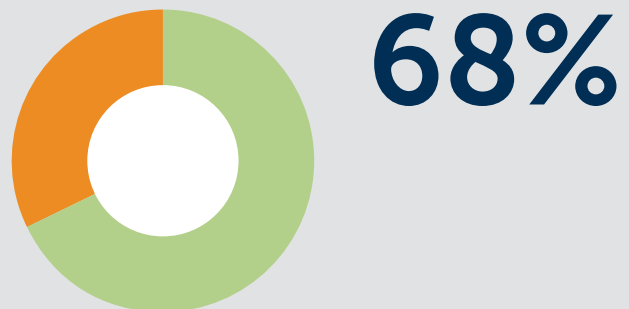
76%

67% of volunteers thought they made good or excellent progress achieving their assignment objectives.

67%

87% of partner organisations were satisfied or very satisfied with the program

87%

68% of volunteers were satisfied or very satisfied with the program

68%

2 | About the program

The Australian Volunteers Program is an Australian Government initiative, building on the Australian Government's investment in international volunteering over the past 60 years.

Tanzania *Maasai women Anna (left) and Nongera (right) with Australian volunteer Dani Yannoulis at Sidai Designs.*

Vanuatu *Australian volunteer Paramedic Clinical Instructor Kallai Sugden with ProMedical colleague Yvonne Ngwele.*

The program matches skilled Australians with organisations in developing countries to help those organisations to deliver on their own development objectives.

The program uses international volunteering as a people centred approach to capacity development. The program is part of the Australian Government's people-to-people program portfolio, connecting Australians to Australia's aid program and the region.

Over five years, the Australian Volunteers Program aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Partner organisations are supported by Australia to achieve their own development objectives
- Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally
- The public in Australia better appreciate the value of international volunteering

By successfully achieving these outcomes, the Australian Volunteers Program will also contribute to the following broader development and diplomacy goals:

- The Australian Government achieving its development objectives
- Australians becoming more globally literate and connected
- Australian aid perceived positively in Australia and internationally

The program replaced the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program, which closed on 31 December 2017. This new chapter retains the core elements of AVID with the aim of enhancing program reach, visibility, impact and value for money.

The Australian Volunteers Program is managed by AVI, in consortium with Cardno Emerging Markets Pty Ltd (Cardno) and Whitelum Group. It is a five-year program with an estimated total budget of up to AUD$190 million.

3 | About this report

This is the second annual report submitted by the program to DFAT, and marks the end of the second year of the five year (plus a potential additional five years) timeframe of the program. This report covers the period from July 2018 to June 2019, the first annual planning cycle of the program.

Papua New Guinea *Australian volunteer Rob Eden (right) with his colleague Laikos Ricky at the Port Moresby Nature Park.*

Vietnam *Returned Australian volunteer Leanne Wicker with Nguyen Ngoc Duyen Huong at Save Vietnam's Wildlife.*

The first six months of the program, July – December 2017, was a transition phase, focused on scaling up program operations from 11 countries to 26 countries and preparing for the novation of volunteers and partners. The second six months, January – June 2018, were focused on ensuring a smooth and safe transition for all volunteers and partners, mobilising and supporting the first cohort of volunteers under the program and starting to lay the strategic foundations for the next 10 years.

During the current reporting period, the program has strengthened these strategic and operational foundations, while supporting over 1,000 volunteer assignments to support more than 600 partner organisations.

This report is based on a number of key documents, including:

- The Global Program Strategy
- The 2018/2019 Annual Plan
- The program's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, and the program logic

This report includes a summary of program highlights (Section 4) and an update on the operating context (Section 5). The program logic provides the structure of the report, with progress towards the program outcomes being detailed in Section 6. Progress against outputs and the program's foundations is summarised in Section 6.4. A number of significant cross-cutting themes are also highlighted throughout the report. Section 7 identifies lessons learnt, and key management actions are provided in Section 8.

4 | Program highlights

The program team is very proud of progress and achievements over the last 12 months. All milestones and contract deliverables for 2018/19 were delivered on time and to a high-quality. This included a strong Partner Performance Assessment by DFAT of the AVI-led consortium.

Valuing learning and continuous improvement are important commitments in how the program, and DFAT, approaches implementation. The program learns through reflection, self-assessment, information and performance assessment provided from stakeholders, and a range of other evidence from monitoring and evaluation activities. Much of the data the program collects is presented in this report and has informed its narrative.

Some key highlights over the last year, which speak to progress and impact, are summarised below. Further information can be found in Section 6 of the report.

In 2018/19, the program:

- Supported **1,017 volunteer assignments**, filled by 943 Australian volunteers. This included 611 new volunteer assignments which commenced during the reporting period, and 151 additional Australians as approved accompanying dependents.

- Supported locally-led development in **633 partner organisations** across 26 countries involved in hosting volunteers. In-country teams facilitated a large number of partnerships workshops (for new and existing partners), and commenced the roll-out of **partnership plans**, which are designed to assist partners and the program to maximise outcomes by supporting a more strategic approach to capacity building.

- Engaged with over **70 Australian organisations** to support a range of assignments, and provided high-level support to select **strategic partnerships**, including the partnership between DFAT and ACIAR to develop and deliver a project supporting Australian farmers to volunteer overseas.

- Continued a strong record of high-quality support, advice and services in relation to the **health, safety and security** of volunteers.

- Launched a **new website** and a **self-service volunteer recruitment process**, to increase the program's visibility and to deliver a more efficient and streamlined recruitment and mobilisation journey for volunteers.

- **Strengthened the program's approach to diversity and inclusion** through a range of activities including Access and Inclusion Plans which provide additional support to people with a disability while on assignment; undertaking the first gender equality analysis of the program; and recruiting an Indigenous Programs Coordinator to support the sixth year of the Classic Wallabies Indigenous Exchange and to prepare for a design to enhance Indigenous inclusion across the program.

- Worked with DFAT to develop the **Global Program Strategy**, which was launched by DFAT's Secretary in February 2019. This document frames a suite of other strategies that guide program implementation.

Mongolia *Australian volunteer Public Health Officer Elaine Ung (right), with her colleague Dr Z. Setsen at the National Centre for Communicable Diseases.*

- Developed a full set of **monitoring tools**, established **a baseline** against which to measure program performance, delivered **high quality research and strategic evaluations** relating to public diplomacy, program impact areas, and volunteer diversity and inclusion, and held the **first program-wide reflection events** in August 2018.
- **Established the Innovation Fund**, including prototyping a new volunteering model which combines time spent in-country with time spent in Australia volunteering remotely.
- Delivered more than **80 events and outreach activities** across the program. Developed and launched **new social media channels** and a **program newsletter.**
- **Supported returned volunteers** to engage and stay connected, including through hosting or supporting over 40 events across Australia, piloting a mentoring program, and holding the second successful *Go Back<>Give Back* competition.
- Commenced a comprehensive **review of volunteer allowances**. Findings of the review will be implemented in 2019/20, as approved by DFAT.

In addition, when surveyed:

- A majority of DFAT Posts (85%) felt the program **aligned well** with Aid Investment Plans and other Australian aid initiatives.
- **Volunteers reported strengthening partner capacity**, most often at the organisational level (with 90% of assignments contributing at this level) and individual level (86%), with 62% strengthening capacity at the network and linkages level.
- **Partners rated 76% of assignment objectives as being positively achieved**. A further 17% of objectives were rated as somewhat achieved. A large majority of partner organisations (82%) report that the assignment had supported them to strengthen or establish new partnerships with other organisations.
- **Eighty-seven per cent of partners said they were very satisfied with the program** overall. Ninety-two per cent of partners said they would like to have another Australian volunteer in the future, with a quarter of those already having an assignment in the pipeline.

Where we operate

29 23

16 11
Nepal   Bhutan

25 20

71 47
Myanmar   Laos

40 24
Vietnam

66 51
Cambodia

13 12
Philippines

79 49

Sri Lanka

14 12

155 90
Indonesia

59 41
Timor-Leste

Tanzania   28 20

Lesotho   6 4

eSwatini   7 5

South Africa

57 25

Republic of the Marshall Islands
2 2

Federated States of Micronesia
14 10

Kiribati
14 7

Palau
1 1

Papua New Guinea
51 24

Solomon Islands
68 25

Tuvalu
5 4

Vanuatu
82 43

Fiji
60 34

Samoa
30 17

Tonga
25 13

Australia

N Number of assignments supported July 2018 – June 2019

N Number of partner oganisations

11

5 | Operating context

This report should be read in relation to the program's external operating context. Over this reporting period, the program's external operating environment included changing host government policies and priorities, and uncertain safety and security contexts.

Some of the external factors which have impacted the program include:

Host government policies: Varying visa processes and requirements for certain countries means that the visa application process can take many months and require more resources in-country and in Australia to monitor and manage. Several countries have strict policies regarding the types of organisations (e.g. government or non-government) that can host volunteers, as well as the types and total number of assignments that will be accepted by that country. A focus on highly technical roles in some countries resulted in assignments which were difficult to fill, despite repeated re-advertising and outreach to relevant Australian networks. Delays to finalisation of the subsidiary agreements, such as in the Philippines, led to a suspension of mobilisation of volunteers because the program was not able to secure legitimate volunteer visas.

Australian Government priorities: The intentional focus on Australia's closest neighbours continued, resulting in 40% of volunteer assignments placed in the Pacific region and Timor-Leste. The focus on the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH) by both the Australian Government and the non-government sector led to the development and implementation of AVI's PSEAH policy, and the strengthening of both staff and volunteer codes of conduct. The Australian Government election in May, and the preceding caretaker period, had some impact on program momentum.

Natural disasters, elections, civil unrest and health risks: Program teams have supported volunteers through natural disasters, including relocating volunteers in some circumstances. Other teams have managed restricted movements or heightened security of volunteers during elections and large-scale civil unrest. The Easter bombings in Sri Lanka resulted in a pause in recruitment and mobilisation of volunteers. The emergence of mosquito-borne diseases across some Pacific Island countries required the program to increase its vigilance to proactively protect program participants.

6 | Progress towards outcomes

This section of the report presents progress made during the year towards the program's three end of program outcomes, and the related intermediate outcomes.

Three of the sub-sections look at the indicators set out in the program logic to explore to what extent the program is achieving what it intends to achieve, based on evidence gathered over the course of the year. The program logic is based around three inter-related end of program outcomes:

- Partner organisations are supported by Australia to progress their developmental objectives
- The public in Australia better appreciates the value of international volunteering;
- Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally.

An additional fourth sub-section looks at the program's foundations: the output level activities needed to ensure the successful implementation of the Australian Volunteers Program.

The evidence presented in this report is collected in line with the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework. The key sources of evidence include:
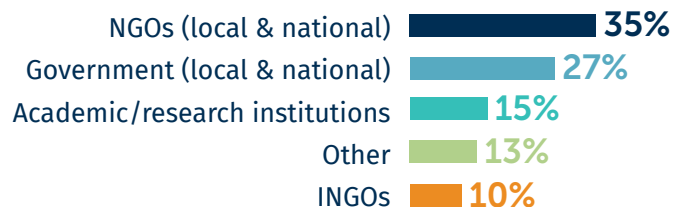
- The program's Management Information System (MIS)
- End of assignment reports completed by volunteers
- End of assignment reports completed by partner organisations
- Media monitoring tools
- Additional research and evaluation activities commissioned by the program

6.1. Supporting the development outcomes of our partner organisations

The Australian Volunteers Program supports locally-led capacity development to enable its partners to deliver on their own development objectives.

In the last year, the program has worked with 633 partner organisations across 26 countries. This compares to 496 partners supported in the previous six-month reporting period.

The program partners with a diverse range of organisations. Of the 633 organisations:

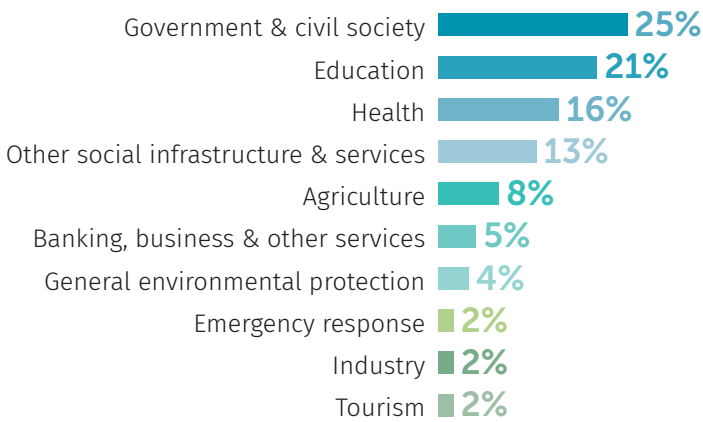|	
NGOs (local & national)	**35%**
Government (local & national)	**27%**
Academic/research institutions	**15%**
Other	**13%**
INGOs	**10%**

These different types of organisations work across a range of development sectors.

Samoa *Australian volunteer Civil Engineer Kamal Jayasinghe (left) with colleague Faletao Polutea, Civil Engineer at the Ministry of Works, Transport and Infrastructure.*

Most common sectors

Sector	%
Government & civil society	25%
Education	21%
Health	16%
Other social infrastructure & services	13%
Agriculture	8%
Banking, business & other services	5%
General environmental protection	4%
Emergency response	2%
Industry	2%
Tourism	2%

End of program outcome 1: Partner organisations are supported by Australia to progress their development outcomes

Partner organisations, and therefore volunteer assignments, work across a wide range of development sectors that ultimately align to all 17 of the SDGs.

While it is too early in the program to report on end of program outcomes, a number of necessary pre-conditions for progress in this area can be seen, including: the roll-out of partnership plans; the strategic alignment of the program with Australian aid priorities; and the achievement of intermediate outcomes.

Partnership plans are a way of developing more strategic relationships with our partners to better support them to achieve their developmental outcomes over the long-term. They also provide the means of measuring changes in partner capacity. In 2018/19, the systems for implementing partnership plans across the program have been developed, integrated with the existing MIS, and guidance has been provided to staff and partners.

Twenty-nine partnership workshops have been held in 22 countries (more than one in some countries) to continue developing new relationships with a diverse range of partners, and to introduce the concept of partnership plans. More than 90 partnership plans were developed during the year. Continuing the roll-out of partnership plans is a priority for the year ahead.

Top eight SDGs that assignments have aligned with over the year [2]
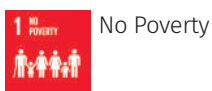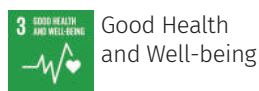
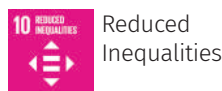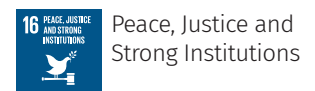|			
No Poverty	Good Health and Well-being	Quality Education	Gender Equality
Decent Work and Economic Growth	Reduced Inequalities	Climate Action	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

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2. Over the coming year, reporting on SDGs will go into more detail at the target level.

Papua New Guinea *Simon Fenske, Australian volunteer Livelihood Support Mentor at Adventist Development and Relief Agency with farmer Mai Namalang at Munix village, Lae.*

Partnership plans are developed collaboratively by partner organisations and in-country program staff. The plan maps the volunteer activities that will support the partner organisation's capacity development over a three-year period.

"I have been exceptionally satisfied and grateful for the three most recent volunteer assignments we have had since 2017. Through these three assignments the organisation has improved its capacity to provide essential and quality support services, improved management skills and staff capacity building opportunities. Our successes over the past year can be attributed in part to these three professionals who have become friends of the organisation and staff for a lifetime. We will forever be grateful for their time and commitment to our cause and look forward to meeting up with them again in the very near future. We welcome more of these types of people."
- Partner organisation, Samoa

The program has continued to ensure alignment between the work of our partners and Australia's strategic investments including the priorities as set out in the *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*. When surveyed, a majority of DFAT Posts (85%) felt the program aligned well with Aid Investment Plans and other Australian aid initiatives. As well as the strong alignment between Country Program Plans and Aid Investment Plans, the program has benchmarked assignments against the three impact areas as defined in the Global Program Strategy. Focus Area 6: Program themes (page 33) provides further details.

Intermediate outcome: Partner organisations have strengthened their capacity and gained from the program

At the end of each assignment, partner organisations are asked to rate to what extent the volunteer assignment has achieved its objectives. Across the program, 76% of assignment objectives were rated by partners as being positively achieved (a score of 4 or 5, with 38% for each). A further 17% of objectives were rated as somewhat achieved, with 7% of assignment objectives showing low levels of achievement. This broadly compares to ratings given separately by volunteers (see Section 6.3).

Volunteers are asked to report on the areas they feel they have strengthened capacity within their partner organisations. Capacity is seen at three different levels: at the level of individual staff within an organisation; at the level of the organisation itself (and how it works with its stakeholders and beneficiaries); and at the level of a partner organisations' networks and links with other stakeholders.

Across 26 countries, volunteers reported strengthening partner capacity most often at the organisational level (with 90% of assignments contributing at this level) and individual level (86%), with 62% strengthening capacity at the network and linkages level.[3]

Partner organisation rating of achieving assignment objective

1 Minimal achievement	2	3	4	5 Maximum achievement
3%	4%	17%	38%	38%

Strengthening partner capacity at different levels – reported by volunteers

Individuals	The organisation, its beneficiaries and stakeholders	Networking and linkages
86%	90%	62%

3. A volunteer may strengthen capacity at multiple levels, so the percentages add up to more than 100.

Tonga *Australian volunteer National Pearl Farming Development Facilitator Emma Krusic (right) with Vetekina Pau'u, Fisheries Science Assistant at the Ministry of Fisheries.*

Examples of changes reported directly by our partner organisations in each of these three levels

Changes at the individual level:

"As a scientist working in Vanuatu we don't have a lot of peers, as there are no scientific institutions in Vanuatu other than the government departments. In science, methodology and principles are really important and if attention is not paid to them it can be easy for it to slide. Having a volunteer with a science background and who has worked in organisations that do have a lot of scientific peers is really useful for the early career scientists in Vanuatu. This is true even if the work is not strictly research but more applied, such as using biological and ecological information to inform good tourism practices. It ensures that organisation, logic and good principles are easier to uphold than if the scientists are working in isolation."
– Partner organisation, Vanuatu

Changes at the organisational level:

"The Tanzanian government had introduced a system to vet [the] standard of performance of medical clinics across the country known as Big Results Now. Through the volunteer's input to improve quality standards... the clinic was able to meet the standards by 56% which is more than half what was achieved in the previous years. Longer assignment terms will be of great impact to the organisation and the community around as the volunteers take time to adapt to the organisations and environment."
– Partner organisation, Tanzania

Changes at the networking level:

"Through the contribution towards the peer review journal, [the volunteer] will be putting the work that he and his counterpart have done with communities at an international level. This would mean [the partner organisation] would get noticed, and this would also expose New Ireland Province and the communities involved. [The volunteer] has done a great job in a relatively short period of time. Thank you for identifying him and sending him to us."
– Partner organisation, Papua New Guinea

Changes across multiple levels:

"This is a fantastic program with a large number of benefits to the partner organisation. Some of the major struggles are financial for a lot of the host organisations, however the Australian volunteers are vital when mentoring local employees. The direct benefit for the individuals that work with volunteers is tremendous with regards their personal development helping them to become more independent and skilled. This in turn translates into a more efficient organisation with better run programs. This directly influences the success of, in [the partner organisation's] case, sport for development. It transcends through the participants into those that become community leaders, giving added roles and responsibilities to individuals within the community which certainly brings about positive change. It is great to see the programs continue to run after the volunteer leaves making these activities sustainable."
– Partner organisation, Fiji

Capacity strengthening at different levels — reported by partner organisations

Individuals

Capacity building of an individual	**80%**
Staff leadership skills developed	**11%**
Processes and systems developed that support strong team culture	**5%**
Networking capacity & public diplomacy skills built	**4%**

The organisation, its beneficiaries and stakeholders

Technical skills/infrastructure developed	**23%**
Effectiveness & impact of program improved	**21%**
Systems for organisational strategic planning developed & implemented	**14%**
Other	**11%**
Communications capacity built	**6%**
Meaningful inclusion of gender, disability & other marginalised groups in the program	**6%**
MEL framework for program developed & implemented	**4%**
Organisational policy developed & implemented	**4%**
Systems developed for program planning & design	**3%**
Capacity to fundraise from a variety of donors developed	**3%**
Training/outreach capacity improved	**3%**

Networking and linkages

Organisation is able to work with others - partner organisations, local communities & decision-makers	**78%**
Organisation's capacity to promote its programs & achievements using social &/or print media developed	**12%**
Organisation's capacity to conduct stakeholder analysis developed	**10%**

Partner organisations also report the specific types of change they believe volunteers have contributed to at each level, indicating the nature of the organisational capacity being strengthened.

A large proportion of partner organisations (82%) report that the assignment has supported them to strengthen or establish new partnerships with other organisations.

Partner organisations were also asked what measures have been taken to ensure the sustainability of the volunteer's contributions. Of those that answered the question, the majority (35%) noted skills transfer to local staff. Other frequent responses were: policy changes to mandate new processes or approaches (25%); volunteers' initiating changes in the organisation structure to support new systems (16%); and production of manuals and guidelines (14%).

Intermediate outcome: Partners have a strategic rationale for participation in the program and provide a safe and productive working environment

A full assessment of the proportion of partner organisation objectives that align with country program plan priorities will be possible at the end of the year when a larger sample of completed partnership plans will be available for analysis.

Asked about their satisfaction with the program overall, 87% of partners said they were very satisfied (with scores of 4 = 39% or 5 = 48%). This is a very similar result to the previous reporting period. Ninety-two per cent of partners said they would like to have another Australian volunteer in the future, with a quarter of those already having a new assignment in the pipeline.

Partner organisation satisfaction with the program

1 – Very dissatisfied	2	3	4	5 – Very satisfied
0%	1%	12%	39%	48%

Partner organisations that want another Australian volunteer in the future

No	Not sure	Yes (and already in the pipeline)	Yes (but nothing organised yet)
3%	5%	26%	66%

A few common themes can be seen in the feedback from partners who gave more critical scores. In relation to volunteers, some partners felt that their volunteer did not adapt well to the context, or that they lacked professionalism.
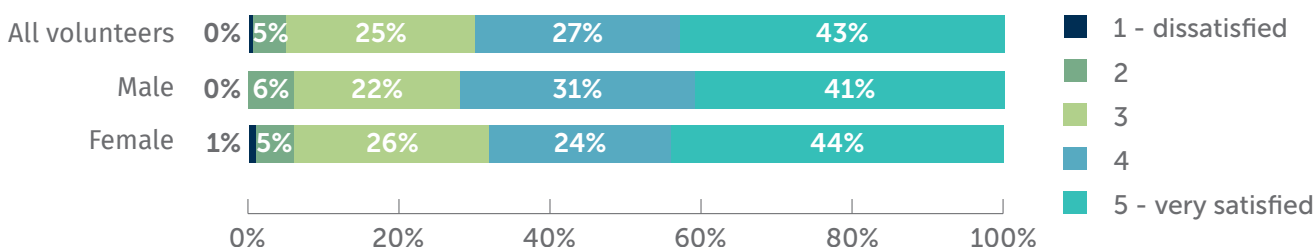
Feedback also suggested that in some instances, the program needs to do more to support volunteers socially (particularly where volunteers may be more isolated by the security situation or language), and some partners experienced a lack of communication from program staff. Another common challenge noted was the duration of the assignment was felt to be too short.

Where partners provided positive feedback, it was often in relation to praising the skills and ability of their volunteer or, in some cases, in relation to the program's ability to help manage a more challenging assignment. The responsiveness, administrative support and communication of the program was also mentioned, as were requests for an extension to a volunteer's assignment or another Australian volunteer in the future.

A majority of volunteers (69%) were positive about the safety and security management of the program, with 25% somewhat satisfied and 5% dissatisfied. This is similar to the previous reporting period, when 68% were positive and 25% were somewhat satisfied. Volunteer perceptions of safety has stayed consistent, and is often higher in countries with a higher risk level. There were no significant differences in the reported level of satisfaction between female and male volunteers: 69% of women were positive and 72% of men. Nor were there any significant differences for people identifying as living with a disability.

While for a small minority of volunteers the program can clearly do more to improve safety and security management, it is positive that there are no apparent differences between volunteers of different genders or abilities.

Safety and security management satisfaction rating

	1 - dissatisfied	2	3	4	5 - very satisfied
All volunteers	0%	5%	25%	27%	43%
Male	0%	6%	22%	31%	41%
Female	1%	5%	26%	24%	44%

Focus Area 1: Partnerships

The program has continued to focus on diversifying and deepening partnerships and strengthening linkages between Australian and overseas partner organisations. The Australian Organisation Engagement Strategy and Partner Organisation Engagement Strategy were approved by DFAT in March 2019.

The program values its partnerships with Australian organisations and appreciates the benefits these partners bring to the program. The program has collaborated with over 70 Australian organisations to facilitate partnership arrangements which directly support a range of assignments in areas such as climate change, health, gender equality, inclusive economic growth and food security. Australian organisations work with overseas partners to develop volunteer assignments which will support locally-led development objectives.

Engagement with Australian organisations has included:

- Supporting professional mentoring opportunities between their staff, volunteers and overseas partners
- Linking organisations for information exchange
- Assisting with the recruitment and selection of volunteers, by referring candidates to the program and promoting assignments to their networks
- Promoting the program and the value of volunteering to their networks

Through a survey, Australian organisations have provided positive feedback about their partnership. Forty-three per cent of Australian organisations who responded feel that the partnership fully delivers on their organisation's expectations and requirements; with another 43% reporting it delivers to some extent. The remaining 14% felt the program only partially met their expectations

The program has supported the development and implementation of the *Farmers Without Borders* project between ACIAR and DFAT. This project sends volunteer Australian farmers to build the capacity of farmers working with ACIAR projects in developing countries. Two volunteers contributed to livestock projects in Timor-Leste in the reporting period, and there will be agricultural assignments in Samoa and Myanmar in the coming year.

The program also has a collaborative partnership with Engineers Without Borders (EWB) Australia. Through this partnership, EWB supports the partner organisations to develop their assignments, leverages their extensive network in Australia to refer candidates and provides additional support to the volunteers whist on assignment.

While these partnerships require significant time investment in the development stage, they will ultimately provide greater value to our partners in country and in Australia, our volunteers and the program more broadly.

A corporate volunteering concept paper was developed and discussed with DFAT to support their strategic engagement with Australian corporations. The program is ready to support the implementation of a pilot corporate volunteering stream in the next reporting period.

This year has seen a strong focus on the development of the foundational systems and processes that are required to support and document partnership activity. A suite of tools has been developed to map and understand the program's reach and impact over time, and to enable the program to provide meaningful and timely information to DFAT. These tools also support a more strategic approach and improve the forecasting and planning of assignments over a 12-month timeframe.

This planned approach is particularly helpful to Australian organisations who support multiple assignments, such as ACIAR, Engineers Without Borders, Australasian College for Emergency Medicine, the Crawford Fund and the Pacific Sports Partnership. The program's engagement with Australian organisations enhances the diversity and reach of the program, increases the number of assignments and provides opportunity to strengthen relationships with local partners so we can support mutually beneficial outcomes.

Partner organisation workshops, facilitated by in-country staff, were held in 22 countries to engage existing and new partner organisations. Partnership plans, which have been designed to consider program contributions to the organisations over a three-year timeframe, were introduced and rolled-out at the workshops. The plans will assist partners, volunteers, and the program to maximise outcomes by supporting a more strategic approach to volunteering.

Two *Partnerships for Impact* workshops were held in Melbourne in May 2019. The workshops provided training and support to international staff, focusing on the new partnership planning process. The workshops also provided an excellent opportunity for the program's Australian partners to meet with other partners and international and Melbourne-based staff to explore volunteer opportunities and strengthen networks. Over 100 participants, including 42 international staff, attended these events which were very successful in creating new connections.

Focus Area 2: Diversity and inclusion

The program continued to develop and strengthen its approach to diversity and inclusion in 2018/19. The program's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, approved by DFAT in November 2018, focuses on mainstreaming inclusion across all aspects of the program. The aims of the strategy will be achieved through attracting more diverse volunteers from across Australia, and by emphasising inclusive development practice in the countries and communities the program operates in.

Underpinning the program's approach is capturing a strong evidence base. Research undertaken to strengthen the program's approach to diversity and inclusion included:

- An in-depth evaluation of volunteer diversity which looked at all volunteers through the program from 2011–2017
- A review of the Classic Wallabies Indigenous Exchange
- Formative evaluations and reviews on gender equality, disability inclusion and on LGBT+ inclusion and support

Consistent with the key inclusion concept of "nothing about us without us", this research was led by experts with diverse lived experiences, and drew on the lived experience of current and returned volunteers, and program staff.

The program also focused on building the diversity and inclusion capacity of staff, volunteers and partner organisations, through a series of workshops held in nine countries. This in-depth, two-way learning program was supported through the development of resources to build staff and volunteer understanding of different aspects of diversity. Volunteers also attended dedicated sessions on inclusive practice at pre-departure briefings.

Disability inclusion was strengthened by supporting volunteers with disabilities through Access and Inclusion Plans which provide additional support while on assignment. During the year, an in-country assessment of disability access was conducted in Bhutan, with the aim to improve the process for building in-country teams' capacity to host more diverse volunteers.

The program added questions relating to different aspects of diversity to the application process. This aims to identify individual needs and provide better support to a diverse range of Australians during their assignments. It will also support improved data collection, which will help to track the program's progress towards achieving better diversity and inclusion outcomes.

In 2018/19, there was an increased focus on sharing stories of diversity, and using inclusive language across the program's activities and on the program's website.

Through all these measures, the program progressed the mainstreaming of diversity and inclusion across the program in 2018/19, helping to make diversity and inclusion a more intentional and visible part of the program's overall approach.

Indigenous inclusion

An independent review of the Classic Wallabies Indigenous Exchange was completed in July 2018. A key recommendation was to recruit an Indigenous staff member, and the new position of Indigenous Programs Coordinator has been created. Preparatory work also commenced on the redesign of a new Indigenous program.

This was the sixth year of the Classic Wallabies Indigenous Exchange, and 19 young Indigenous Australians volunteered in South Africa. There were two groups, each completing five-week assignments with two partner organisations.

Gender equality

The first gender analysis of the program was undertaken between December 2018 and March 2019. The analysis identified that there is a need to reframe and clarify key gender related concepts and how they apply in the program.

A large majority of survey respondents agreed that the program has the mandae to advance gender equality in programming, with the below showing the rate of positive responses from key cohorts:

- Current volunteers 94%
- Returned volunteers 88%
- Program staff 92%
- DFAT staff 86%

A Gender Equality Action Plan is now being developed from the findings and recommendations of the analysis, which will increase attention to gender equality and women's rights in all of the program work to achieve gender equality and women's rights outcomes.

Disability inclusion

Work over the past year has shown that persons with disabilities already are key contributors to the program. The review of disability-inclusion indicated several key learnings in this area:

- the benefit of telling stories of success and communicating a clear vision on disability-inclusion
- the importance of demonstrating that the program is accessible to and supportive of persons with disabilities
- the need to build staff and volunteer capacity
- the importance of in-country disability organisations as local resource
- the need to mainstream disability-inclusion across all development work

Timor-Leste *Australian volunteer Michelle Knight volunteers at HIAM Health as a Horticulture Mentor (Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture), Dili.*

6.2. Promoting the value of international volunteering in Australia and internationally

The program aims to promote the value of volunteering and attract a broad range of Australians to participate in the program through a variety of stakeholder engagement and communication activities.

During the reporting period, more than 80 events and outreach activities were delivered across the program to engage new and existing stakeholders, increase awareness, and generate stories and media interest. A number of the events were part of a successful International Volunteer Day campaign, with the theme *'International volunteering counts'*, which included events, social media and media activity.

In 2018/19, a range of program communications were developed, including brochures, country fact sheets, videos, web stories and social media content. A new stakeholder newsletter was also launched. The newsletter, sent bi-monthly to volunteers, partner organisations and Australian organisations to provide program updates and highlights, had an average open rate of 67%.

End of program outcome: The public in Australia better appreciate the value of volunteering

The Australian Volunteers Program aims to raise awareness, understanding and appreciation of the value of volunteering among the Australian public. In order to determine if the program has achieved this outcome at the end of the program, research was commissioned in 2018 to develop a baseline on perceptions of international volunteering.

The research also identified segments of the Australian population that could become more supportive of volunteering, and messaging that will promote the value of volunteering. Key findings from the research are informing a number of public diplomacy activities.

A small number of opinion leaders were interviewed as part of the research. These interviews supported the program's contention that authentic stories are the best way to engage and inspire people. The program continued to develop and refine its storytelling approach, developing powerful human stories of volunteers, partner organisations and program impact.

The research indicates that word of mouth is the main way for people to hear about the program. Thirty-nine per cent of respondents who were aware of the program had heard of it from family, friends or colleagues. The program continued to support and encourage volunteers – past and present – to share their volunteer experiences with their personal and professional networks.

Vanuatu *Jessica Richardson (left), Australian volunteer at Vanuatu Association of Sport And National Olympic Committee with Friana Kwevira, who won her country's first ever Commonwealth medal at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games.*

The research also provided information about the characteristics, lifestyles and values of the population segments that the program could target to increase support for international volunteering. This information is informing marketing and communications activities, including an awareness campaign planned for the next reporting period.

Intermediate outcome: Australian organisations, partner organisations, champions, volunteers and DFAT promote the benefits of volunteering to their constituencies

Volunteers

The program supports volunteers – current and returned – to promote the program. Volunteers are provided public diplomacy training at pre-departure briefings and Return Workshops, and provided additional guidance when they participate in activities such as media engagement or presentations. More than 80 volunteers were supported to participate in media interviews across radio, print, digital and television. With a transition to new monitoring forms during the year, the sample of volunteers who completed the new feedback questions relating to support for public diplomacy was too small for results to be useful to the current reporting period.

The *Stories for Home* project was launched to encourage volunteers to share their story. Volunteers receive a 'story brief' – a short communication task and tips to help complete the task. Volunteer submissions were shared on the program's social media channels and website, and volunteers were encouraged to publish the content on their own social media channels. In 2018/19, three story briefs were sent, and more than 65 submissions were received from volunteers.

Organisations

Our partner organisations in Australia and overseas actively promoted the program. Activities included attending or co-hosting events, social media posts, media engagement, and supporting the program's public diplomacy efforts. The completion of successful assignments encouraged partner organisations to share details of the program, as suggested by a partner in South Africa:

"It has been a great honour to partner with the Australian Volunteers Program. The organisation has seen the great impact of hosting a volunteer and will certainly be sharing information about the program with other organisations."

Reporting on partner organisation satisfaction with support provided for public diplomacy initiatives will be available in the next annual report.

Imagery is a key aspect of the program's brand identity and an important component of storytelling. Partner organisations in 15 countries contributed to the planning and participated in photo and video shoots. Interviews and story gathering were also an important part of the visits.

Australian organisations actively promote the program, information sessions and specific assignments to their networks, increasing awareness among broad and diverse audiences. Australian organisations activity also included articles in peak body publications, joint media engagement, and presentations at conferences and events.

In a survey of Australian organisations, 64% (from 14 organisational respondents) felt that they had been adequately supported by the program to communicate and promote the partnership, and/or recruit volunteers. The remaining 36% were unsure. Over the last year, 57% of Australian organisations had actively promoted the program, 36% had not and 7% were unsure.

Kiribati *Australian volunteer Patrick Chan (second from left), Policy Adviser at Betio Town Council with enforcement officers Taakenteatu Kamkeiti (right), Tamuera Tamoro (left) and Ioanne Teruruai (second from right).*

DFAT Posts

DFAT Posts contribute to promoting the value of skilled international volunteering through communications and events. In the 2018/19 period, 90% of Posts engaged in promoting the program though social media content or events, particularly International Volunteer Day activities. Eighty-six per cent of Posts reported that they were adequately supported to deliver public diplomacy activities related to the program. Seventy-one per cent of Posts rated active promotion of the program through their networks and channels as adequate or above, while 29% of Posts rated this as less than adequate

Stakeholder engagement events

International Volunteer Day (IVD) events were held in 16 countries, including workshops, photo exhibitions, blood donations, lunches, dinners and cultural activities. IVD was celebrated with partner organisations, DFAT Posts, other international volunteer agencies and invited guests. The IVD event in Melbourne was attended by 100 guests, including outgoing volunteers, returned volunteers, representatives from Australian organisations, and DFAT and program staff.

The Australian Volunteers Program participated in six conferences in Australia, delivering a range of sponsorship activities and presentations. The program engaged directly with inclusive education, agriculture, environment, health security, and international development networks through these conferences. Of particular note, the DFAT Secretary, Frances Adamson, commended the Global Program Strategy to delegates during her opening address at the 2019 Australasian Aid Conference. This generated significant interest in the program throughout the conference.

Information sessions were delivered in each Australian capital city to promote awareness of the program. More than 470 people attended the sessions to learn about the program's aims, the volunteer experience and how they can participate. A recorded information session was also available for audiences unable to attend the sessions – more than 350 people viewed the online information session.

Print and broadcast media

Media outreach was pursued in Australia and in-country media opportunities were supported. The program made 79 proactive media pitches and achieved 141 media hits during the reporting period.

Media highlights include:

- SBS Language services interviewed volunteers in English and local language for International Volunteer Day (Khmer, Tamil and Indonesian programs).
- A returned volunteer spoke with the *NT News* and *ABC Radio Darwin* about her volunteer experience in Bhutan, and promoted the program's Darwin information session.
- A Classic Wallabies Indigenous Exchange participant spoke with two Indigenous media outlets about his experiences, and explained why other Indigenous Australians should get involved.

Website

The new Australian Volunteers Program website was launched in November 2018. The website aims to raise awareness of the impact of skilled international volunteering, and enable potential candidates to find relevant assignments.

Nepal *International Volunteer Day 2018 was celebrated in Nepal by Australian volunteers and guests, including His Excellency the Australian Ambassador, Peter Budd, and Deputy Head of Mission, Graham Murphy. Activities included a cultural tour of the Budhanilkantha Municipality.*

Through sharing authentic stories on our website, the program has demonstrated the diversity of Australian volunteers, our partner organisations and the communities the program operates in. Thirty-two stories were published to share the experience of Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, couples and families, and diaspora on the program. Stories also featured partner organisations working to strengthen human rights, women's empowerment, and LGBT+ rights; improving mental health services and economic inclusion; and utilising technology in education and environmental monitoring.

Following the website launch, further enhancements were made. Search functionality was added and new content was regularly added to promote the value of volunteering. An accessibility review of the website has been completed and a number of changes will be made to improve accessibility in the 2019/20 period.

Social media

The Australian Volunteers Program launched its social media channels – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn – in July 2018. The channels enable the program to engage with a broad, diverse audience. After a period of organic growth and the launch of our new website, the program started sponsoring social media content to target specific audiences and drive them to the program website.

Of note, *Stories for Home* content has consistently demonstrated strong engagement on social media, generating up to nine times more engagement than standard content.

Social media channels, at 30 June 2019

Channel	Fans/ Followers	Engagement (clicked, liked, commented or shared)	Reach (number of times content shown in news feeds)
Facebook	3,444	31,244	374,271
Twitter	823	5,999	321,621
Instagram	1,189	3,100	Not available
LinkedIn	1,546	8,851	317,223

Share of voice

With the launch of the program's social media channels, the new hashtag '#ausvols' and handle '@ausvols' were introduced. There was 14% growth in use of 'ausvols' each quarter, resulting in 1,942 mentions in the reporting period.

The use of the program's hashtag[4] has been compared with other people-to-people programs and international volunteering hashtags. The comparison showed an increase in mentions of the program's hashtag from 20% at the start of the reporting period to 35% at the end of the reporting period.

The program increased engagement with volunteers and partners in Australia and overseas by tagging them in social media, which resulted in a significant growth in them tagging the program and increasing the program's share of voice. In December 2018, approximately two volunteers or partner organisations were tagging the program each week to share stories and images. By June 2019, the number had increased to more than 20 volunteers or partner organisations actively sharing content with the program via social media each week.

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4. #ausvols and #AusVols4Dev treated as one hashtag because the program transitioned from #AusVols4Dev to #ausvols in July 2018.

Focus Area 3: Innovation

The Innovation Fund was established in 2018/19, following approval of the design early in 2018. The Innovation Fund's goal is to identify, design and pilot new ideas and solutions that contribute to one or more of the three end of program outcomes. The Innovation Fund is taking a portfolio approach to innovation, seeking needs and opportunities for innovation across the spectrum, from foundational ideas that build on the program's existing strengths, to the exploration of transformative ways of working that may challenge the status quo.

The Innovation Fund priorities for the year were the establishment of the governance process for the Fund; identification of needs or opportunities for innovation in the program to establish the portfolio; and to have at least one innovation opportunity progressed.

The Innovation Fund governance body, the Innovation Pathway Group (IPG), was established and comprises a small group of representatives from DFAT Australian Volunteers Section (AVS), DFAT's innovationXchange and Australia-based and regionally-based program staff. It is accountable to the Program Management Group. The IPG meets quarterly and since its establishment in September 2018 has held three workshops for decision-making using a four-stage gated innovation process.

To seed the Innovation Fund, the program conducted generative research with partners, volunteers and program stakeholders to understand and develop insights into their experiences, unmet needs and wishes for the program. This generated a broad range of insights and possibilities for the IPG to establish an initial portfolio.

The Fund conducted discovery work across selected opportunities, with ideas showing early promise continued and others paused where the IPG determined they did not show significant enough potential to continue.

Key innovation opportunities pursued were:
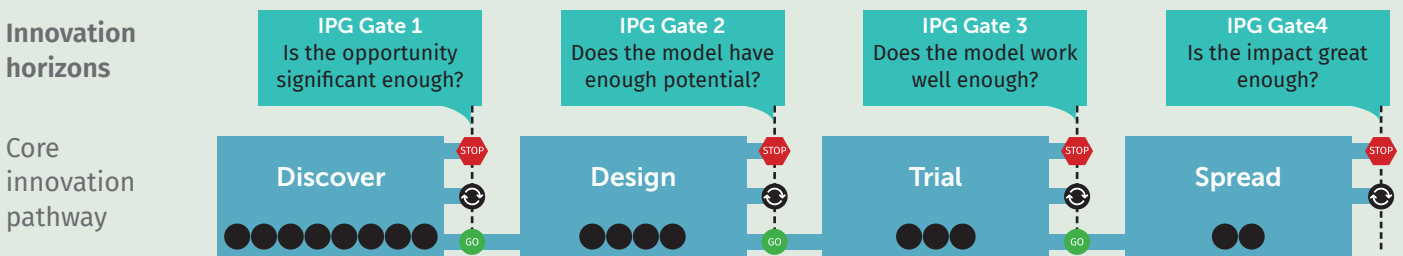
Design stage: Open Volunteering

Responding to a program priority of increasing the diversity of volunteers, the Innovation Fund explored mixed-mode assignments – that is, assignments combining time in-country and time volunteering remotely. The first prototype, dubbed Open Volunteering, resulted in 28 volunteers mobilised to 12 countries, with their assignments set to finish in Australia in October 2019.

The first Fund live prototype commenced for Open Volunteering and design for the next iteration is underway. This has already delivered critical learning for this mode of assignment and other outcomes have emerged for the program, such as reduced cost and time for mobilisation for assignments under six weeks due to process and policy adaptations driven by the prototype.

Discovery stage: Networked Volunteering

Our partners told us they see untapped potential in the program to connect partners together so that they can learn from each other or work together on common goals. The Innovation Fund began discovery work to explore how the program might create and support networks of partners, and this work will be progressed in the coming year.

Innovation Fund gated innovation pathway

Innovation horizons	IPG Gate 1 Is the opportunity significant enough?	IPG Gate 2 Does the model have enough potential?	IPG Gate 3 Does the model work well enough?	IPG Gate4 Is the impact great enough?
Core innovation pathway	**Discover**	**Design**	**Trial**	**Spread**

Developed by The Australian Centre for Social Innovation for the Australian Volunteers Program

Focus Area 4: Risk and safeguarding

Risk management

In 2018/19, the Australian Volunteers Program consolidated its risk management approaches through the Global Risk Management Plan 2018/19. This includes the contractual obligation to have policies and procedures in place regarding child protection, fraud, terrorism and PSEAH.

The program had a marked increase in the number of incidents reported, attributable to higher levels of volunteer awareness of reporting requirements. In 2018/19 there were 606 incidents reported, with minor health incidents making up 61% of these (or 370 incidents). The majority of the more serious incidents related to child protection incidents.

The program planned, monitored and responded to risks associated with elections and unrest in various locations. Natural disasters impacted the program in the Pacific, East Asia and Indonesia, but none of these events had significant or long-term impacts on program operations. The Sri Lanka terrorist attacks necessitated a reassessment of program operations and safety in-country. Sri Lanka program operations continue with close monitoring, and security advice and support.

In-country risk assessments were conducted in Papua New Guinea, Cambodia and Vietnam to support program expansion, validate desktop assessments and train staff.

In December 2018, the program delivered a week of scenario-based critical incident management training to senior overseas staff. The program's assistance provider, International SOS and the program's psycho-social support provider, Response Psychological, were involved in training delivery. In May 2019, the program delivered face-to-face training to overseas staff for implementation of AVI and DFAT policies on the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH).

The program subscribed to International SOS's Travel Tracker, which will provide a real-time communication platform for locating, alerting and confirming welfare of volunteers and staff. Online learning packages were also incorporated to address a range of risk areas. The program began deploying treated mosquito nets and repellent to assignment locations with high risks of mosquito-borne diseases.

Child protection and safeguarding

More than 200 current and potential partners attended 12 child protection policy workshops in nine countries. The workshops explored rates and impact of child abuse, introduced benefits of policy, reviewed program minimum standards, and promoted partner collaboration. Policy guide documents were revised to improve partner capacity to produce contextually relevant and compliant policies. Policies were also approved within timeframes to ensure minimal impact on recruitment and mobilisation.

Over the reporting period there has been an increase in child protection notifications, indicating there is a stronger awareness of child protection and risk among volunteers. Across the program, 12 child protection incidents were reported and managed.

The program's Child Protection Focal Point (CPFP) initiative was consolidated in 2018/19 through delivery of staff training. Twenty-three CPFPs and other staff were provided with training, and focal points have reported increased confidence in partner engagement and support to volunteers.

During 2018/19, a range of documentation was produced or updated to support child protection and safeguarding, including:

- Child protection and safeguarding procedures updated in the Operations Manual
- Updated volunteer online and pre-departure training with increased focus on incident reporting and risks for children living in residential care/voluntourism
- Dedicated in-country orientation program module was produced
- Child protection posters were developed to highlight the importance of child protection and child rights within the program

Nepal *Stephen Clark, Australian volunteer Tourism Plan Development Officer at Budhanilkantha Municipality, with women from the Himalayan Organic Farm stalls (left to right): Baby Bhandare, Bimala Achanya, Lata Kihatiwada, Milan Khadka.*

6.3. Supporting Australian volunteers to gain personally and professionally

The Australian Volunteers Program aims to ensure that volunteers gain personally and professionally. Over the year, 943 volunteers have been on 1,017 assignments.
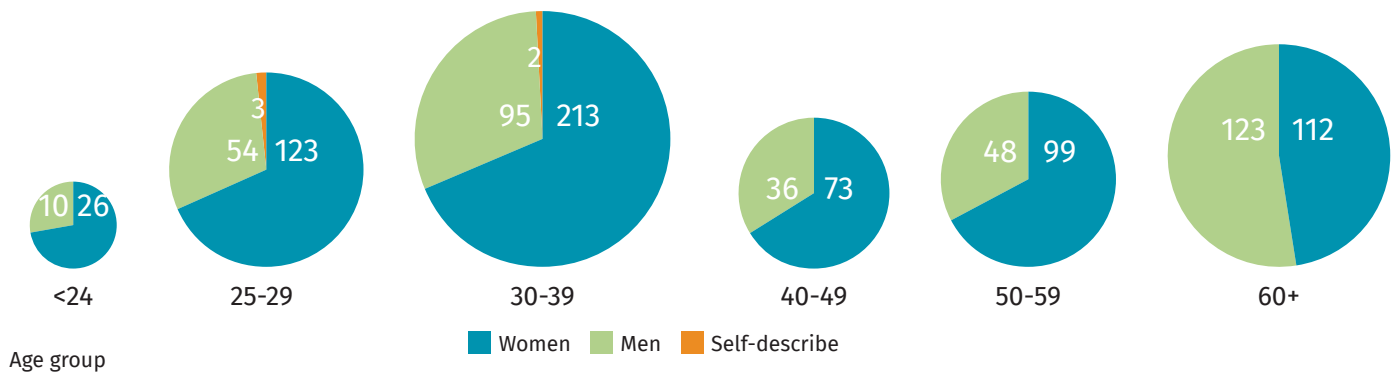
63.5% of assignments were filled by women, 36% by men and 0.5% by individuals who prefer to self-describe.

1.7% of volunteers identified as having a disability. A review was started at the end of the financial year to strengthen disability-inclusion as a key part of the program's broader diversity and inclusion agenda. Results will be provided in the next annual report.
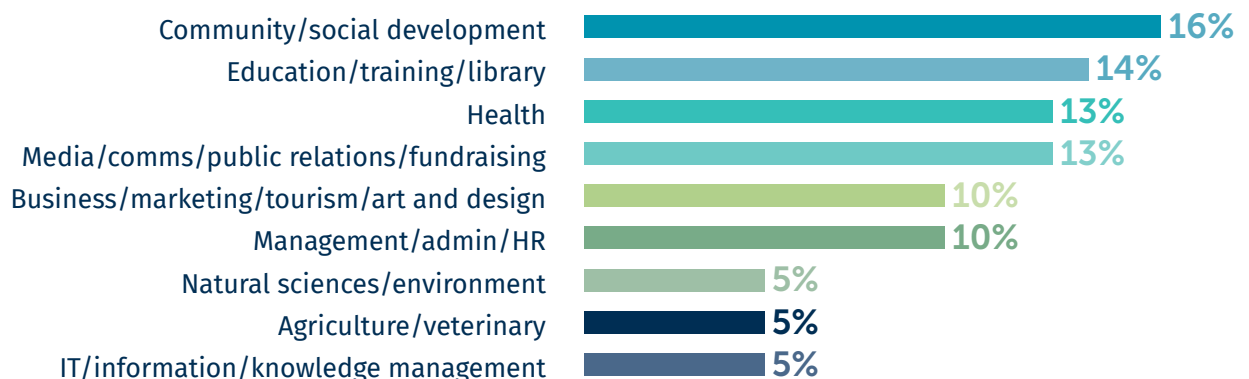
3.5% of volunteers were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. A majority of those volunteers were part of the Classic Wallabies Indigenous Exchange.

The majority of assignments were from seven to 12 months long (53%), 26% were shorter assignments, up to six months, and 21% were longer assignments over 12 months. The proportion of longer assignments has stayed the same as the previous year. However, there has been an increase in shorter-term assignments (16% in the previous year). This has been due to specific shorter-term volunteering schemes such as the new Open Volunteering model that was prototyped during the year and an additional Classic Wallabies Indigenous Exchange group assignment, as well as reflecting changes in the types of assignments many Australians are looking for.

Age range by gender and number of assignments

Age group	Women	Men	Self-describe
<24	26	10	
25-29	123	54	3
30-39	213	95	2
40-49	73	36	
50-59	99	48	
60+	112	123	

Most common professions of volunteer assignments

Profession	Percentage
Community/social development	16%
Education/training/library	14%
Health	13%
Media/comms/public relations/fundraising	13%
Business/marketing/tourism/art and design	10%
Management/admin/HR	10%
Natural sciences/environment	5%
Agriculture/veterinary	5%
IT/information/knowledge management	5%

Volunteers on longer assignments may be accompanied by a partner or family members (known as approved accompanying dependents). Dependents bring many benefits to the assignment and the program overall. Dependents are expected to join a pre-departure briefing and receive support from the program for their mobilisation and wellbeing in-country. One hundred and fifty-one dependents accompanied the 943 volunteers, increasing the total number of Australians mobilised and supported during the year by 16%.

"On a personal level seeing how my young children adapted and thrived in Samoa, demonstrating astounding resilience and a willing and keen sense of adventure. I am unsure how spending a year in Samoa for my boys will influence their lives in the future but I am confident it will have a positive impact and open their eyes and minds to global issues."
- Volunteer, Samoa

End of Program Outcome: Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally

To help measure the long-term impact of the program on the lives of Australian volunteers, the program started a longitudinal study that will look at if, and how, volunteers gain personally and professionally over time by tracking a small cohort of volunteers. In-depth qualitative data will be supplemented by a quantitative survey of the Returned Australian Volunteers Network (RAVN). This was delayed from 2018/19 but will take place before the end of 2019. New volunteer assessment forms introduced during 2018/19 will also allow increased reporting on how volunteers progress on specific key competencies over the course of their assignment.

Intermediate Outcome: Volunteers (current and returned) promote greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections between partner countries and Australia

Returned volunteers are a key part of the program's strategy of building stronger connections between partner countries and Australia, as well as raising awareness of the program and the value of international volunteering within Australia.

Returned volunteers are supported to stay connected to the program through RAVN, which aims to provide meaningful engagement and personal and professional development opportunities to volunteers long after they return to Australia. In July 2019 there were 6565 RAVN members with numbers increasing as volunteers return every month.

RAVN is partly delivered by a cohort of State Representatives – returned volunteers who commit to delivering a range of engagement activities for returned volunteers in their state throughout the year. The State Representative program helps to ensure that RAVN is volunteer lead and driven. In 2018/19, State Representatives delivered 34 events across Australia, with 697 attendees. The program also delivered 14 RAVN engagement events attracting 424 attendees.

The RAVN Go Back <> Give Back competition was delivered to recognise the contribution returned volunteers make to development in our region, to celebrate lasting connections between returned volunteers and their partner organisations. Returned volunteers were invited to develop a project brief in consultation with their partner organisation and submit a short video 'pitch'. There was a high level of interest in the competition and 72 entries were submitted.

The three competition winners completed their projects in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Vietnam between March and May 2019, contributing to women's health, wildlife conservation and emergency medicine outcomes. The competition also resulted in public diplomacy outcomes with an increase in RAVN social media audiences, and stories and photos produced and shared with the Australian public and Australian Embassies in Vietnam, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.

Intermediate Outcome: Volunteers complete their assignments well and have a positive volunteering experience

Volunteers are asked to assess to what extent they have achieved their assignment objectives. Volunteers typically have two assignment objectives mutually agreed between themselves and their partner organisation, and one standard objective common to all assignments that relates to social inclusion. One volunteer may provide a high score on one objective and a low score on another. Overall, there are no significant differences between volunteers' scores of their specific and standard objectives.

Two-thirds (67%) of volunteers thought they made good or excellent progress achieving their assignment objectives. Ninety-three per cent of volunteers reported achieving their assignment objectives (scoring 3 or above), compared to the previous reporting period, when 72% of assignment objectives were considered 'achieved' by volunteers.

Indonesia *Australian volunteer Peter Button (right) with Muhamad Said at the Institution of Engineering and Management Profession.*

South Africa *Australian volunteer Lowri Williams (right) with Anthony Ghillino (middle), General Manager of the QuadPara Association of the Western Cape.*

Progress on achieving assignment objectives – reported by volunteers

	1 Minimal progress	2	3	4	5 Excellent progress
Female	4%	8%	21%	38%	29%
Male	5%	7%	23%	42%	23%
Other	0%	0%	67%	0%	33%

There are no substantial differences in the achievement of assignment objectives as rated by men and women (67% of women and 65% of men rating good or excellent progress). Nor are there any substantial differences according to the age of the volunteer. The sample size for other volunteer characteristics is too small to draw conclusions from.

Progress on achieving assignment objectives – reported by partner organisations and volunteers[5]

	1 Minimal progress	2	3	4	5 Excellent progress
POs	2%	5%	17%	38%	39%
Volunteers	4%	8%	19%	41%	29%

Partner organisations also assess achievement of assignment objectives. Overall, volunteers and partners give broadly similar scores, though partners tend to score slightly higher.

Summary of the comments given by volunteers in relation to higher and lower scoring objectives

When asked to explain the achievement of their objectives, the most common themes for those volunteers who gave lower scores were:	Volunteers who scored the achievement of their objectives as 4 or 5 made additional comments relating to the following themes:
- Organisational change within a partner organisation - Time limitations / duration of assignment - Change in external context / legislation that affected the assignment objective - Lack of collaboration / engagement between different stakeholders - Partner organisation not ready / lacking capacity to host an Australian volunteer - Lack of shared understanding of assignment objectives - The gender of the volunteer, for a woman working in a male dominated environment	- Past experience and skills of the volunteer relevant to the role - Built capacity in specific areas / successfully delivered training - Specific activities completed successfully - Engagement of local communities - Academic research paper presented based on assignment - Additional funding secured for furthering the work of the assignment - Positive engagement of different stakeholders enabled success - New / improved systems, processes, policy documents - Key project documentation / plans / strategies produced - Raised awareness of an issue amongst stakeholders / wider community - Inclusion of / active promotion of marginalised groups during an assignment

5. Progress scores have been calculated only where both the volunteer and the partner organisation provided a rating for the assignment. As such, the percentages given in the table comparing assignment scores by volunteers and partner organisations are marginally different from those reported by volunteers alone.

Cambodia *Australian volunteer IT Officer William McLean (left) with his colleague Dwi Prameswari at the Asean Regional Mine Action Centre (ARMAC) in Phnom Penh.*

Ten per cent of assignments ended early. Reasons for early returns vary, ranging from an assignment not working as expected or the volunteer not being happy in their position, to the health needs of a volunteer requiring a return home.[6]
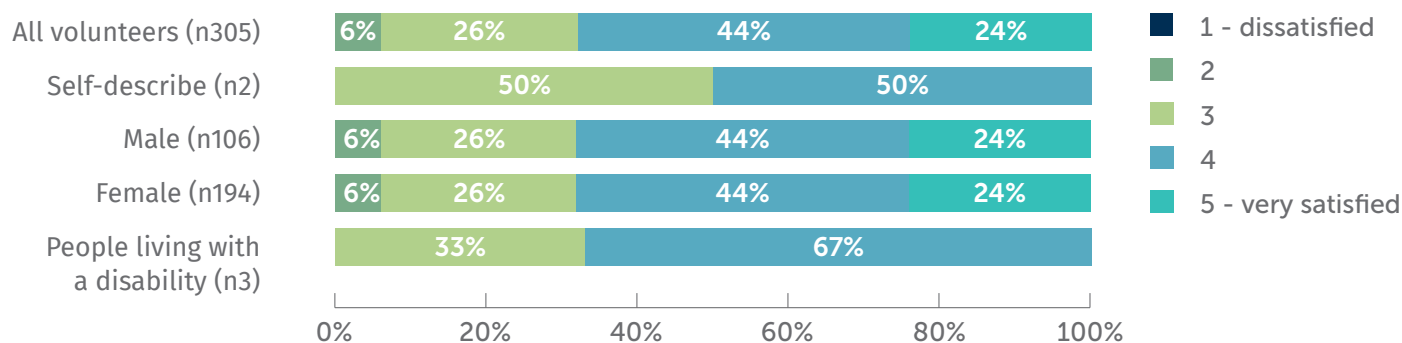
On the other hand, 9% of assignments were extended. This can be due to underestimating the time required for an assignment but can often be taken as a sign of a successful assignment where both partner and volunteer mutually agree to spend a little more time working together to fully complete objectives.

At the end of their assignment, volunteers are asked to provide feedback on the in-country management of the program (amongst other elements). Of those providing feedback during the current reporting period, 70% gave positive feedback, 21% were somewhat satisfied, and 9% were dissatisfied[7]. These scores vary by country, providing an important point for reflection by the program and an opportunity to identify where there is room for improvement.

Feedback from volunteers on the overall level of satisfaction with the program remains high, with 68% giving positive scores.[8] A majority of volunteers were satisfied with the program overall. Ninety-four per cent gave a score of 3 or above, with no substantial change from the previous reporting period (96%)[9].

Volunteers who preferred to self-describe their gender identity as other than male or female had broadly the same overall level of satisfaction as all volunteers taken together, but did not provide the same level of highly positive feedback. Likewise, volunteers who identified as having a disability broadly reported similar satisfaction levels. The sample size of these groups is too small to draw conclusions at a single point in time. The program will continue to monitor relative satisfaction based on the identity of volunteers, and make improvements to this monitoring process.

Overall satisfaction with the program

	1 - dissatisfied	2	3	4	5 - very satisfied
All volunteers (n305)		6%	26%	44%	24%
Self-describe (n2)			50%	50%	
Male (n106)		6%	26%	44%	24%
Female (n194)		6%	26%	44%	24%
People living with a disability (n3)			33%	67%	

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6. Future reports will be able to provide further details on reasons for early returns
7. 266 volunteers provided feedback to this question
8. 229 volunteers provided feedback to this question
9. There was a slight change in the phrasing of the question asked between the two reporting periods but the results can be taken as broadly similar and comparable.

Common reasons for dissatisfaction with the program or the assignment include a range of issues. Some of these relate to working in a different country, language difficulties and cross-cultural communication are common challenges. Getting to know a new environment and dealing with specific issues such as pollution or local transport restrictions are often mentioned by volunteers.

Health issues, being away from friends and family, and in some instances the identity of the volunteer themselves presented difficulties for volunteers. For example, a young woman working in a patriarchal industry explained that:

"It has been difficult to be a young, female, non-doctor in an industry of older, male doctors. This has been confronting and challenging on many occasions, but has given me an opportunity to develop an assertiveness around what I bring to the table and who I am as a public health practitioner."
- Volunteer

Some issues relate to the management of the program, such as communications from program staff, and problems with visas or other administrative elements of the assignment. A few people reporting on their assignment during the last year were part of the novation of volunteers from AVID to the new program and some experienced difficulties in that transition.

The final grouping of common challenges relates to volunteers' experiences within their partner organisation. Some issues relate to personal relationships with counterparts, or to the workplace culture of their organisation. Dealing with low-resource environments, or a slower pace of change than expected was also challenging.

When asked what the most successful or beneficial element of their assignment has been, volunteers' responses are varied but some common themes emerge.

Relationships formed with counterparts and other individuals	*"I absolutely loved working beside my teammates every day. From the head of the Foundation to my peers everyone went out their way to make me feel welcome, included and like my work was making a positive impact. The women I have had the pleasure of working with are some of the brightest and most talented women that I have ever had the pleasure of working with. They have inspired me to constantly continue my professional development as well as look at ways I can be more actively engaged in civil society back home."* - Volunteer, Mongolia
Getting to explore a different country, language and culture	*"The opportunity to experience living and volunteering in Laos has been a privilege. Being able to work alongside my counterpart and the leadership team to enhance their skills through knowledge transfer and mentoring is an amazing two way process as I also learn and gain a deeper understanding of the Lao context."* – Volunteer, Laos
Opportunities for professional development	*"My colleagues have been amazing to work with and I have established very good professional and personal relationships with them. The work that the organisation does (LGBTIQ human rights and direct service provision) is the sector that I want to spend the rest of my career working in, so it has been very beneficial to gain more solid experience in this field."* – Volunteer, South Africa
Gaining new insights into technical issues and global development	*"The opportunity to experience community fisheries has allowed me to better understand their plight when it comes to sustainability issues and the impacts of globalism on communities like those in Tonga. Being part of the Community team in the Ministry gave me the opportunity to experience what the process is like, and the outcomes, of support from NGOs and organisations like the Asian Development Bank, The World Bank, and DirectAid from the Chinese as well."* – Volunteer, Tonga
Seeing first-hand the impact of one's work	*"Working with my partner organisation, and the staff has been amazing. Seeing the impact of our programs on young girls, then working with empowered young women, who believe they can make changes in their communities and are actively doing this is great. I have also been proud to have been able to increase the funding for [the organisation], and am hoping to soon hear that we were able to secure a new major grant because of my work."* – Volunteer, Tanzania

Focus Area 5: Research and learning

Learning is a guiding principle for the program. The program is committed to operational and programmatic excellence, through continuous improvement in our ability to systematically document, analyse and measure results. That commitment is embodied in the program's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, that establishes a cycle of reflection and a strategy for ongoing research and evaluation to inform program decision-making.

The first program-wide reflection events were held in August 2018, bringing together staff from every country in regional groupings, with Melbourne-based teams and DFAT staff. A key output of the reflection events was the management actions given in the 2017/18 annual report. Feedback from participants was very positive. The opportunity for peer-learning at the regional level, and the input and engagement from DFAT, were particularly valued. In a survey of program managers ten months after the events, 69% said they took home ideas and insights from the reflections that helped them improve their management of the program.

Reflection and learning require evidence from monitoring and evaluation activities. Over the last year, the program has upgraded its online monitoring tools to collect more useful and timely data. That data has informed much of the writing of this annual report. The program has also invested in a number of strategic research and evaluation activities.

Of the four strategic evaluations given in the 2018/19 Annual Plan, all are completed or ongoing. Research has been conducted to:

1. Map the global footprint of the program against the Global Program Strategy's thematic impact areas (related to outcome one)
2. Inform and baseline public diplomacy activities through a study of public opinions of international volunteering (related to outcome two)
3. Inform and baseline the Diversity and Inclusion strategy (cross-cutting but particularly related to outcome three)
4. A longitudinal study of Australian volunteers has started, and will continue for the duration of the program (related to outcome three).

A number of smaller reviews have also been conducted. A review of the Classic Wallabies Indigenous Exchange was completed, an external gender analysis of the program has been carried out, a disability inclusion review has commenced, as has a small internal study into the role and value of approved accompanying dependents.

For the Australian Volunteers Program to meet its commitment to learning and continuous improvement, program managers need data and stories to inform their decision-making. When surveyed, they have also identified the need for the time and space to reflect on lessons learnt. Regional reflection workshops are one occasion for that, but several country program managers also noted that the operational demands of the program during the last year meant they did not always have the time or opportunity for acting on evidence to improve practice. To learn from this experience, the program will continue to look for ways of supporting and empowering decision-makers at all levels to reflect, learn and adapt.

Focus Area 6: Program themes

The Australian Volunteers Program works to support partner organisations achieve their own development objectives. Those partners work across a wide range of development sectors and their developmental objectives can be mapped to each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The Global Program Strategy 2018-2022 identifies three thematic impact areas that act as lenses to understand the program, and help the program demonstrate policy alignment with Australian Government priorities. The impact areas were informed by the *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*. The program is not limited to the three impact areas, but they provide a means of looking in more detail at the work the program is doing.

The thematic impact areas are:

- Human rights
- Climate change, disaster resilience and food security
- Inclusive economic growth

In 2019, the program conducted a baseline mapping exercise to better understand alignment to the impact areas. The study found that 62% of assignments aligned with one or more impact areas. Of the 38% of the portfolio that did not align to an impact area, the vast majority were in the health and education sectors (although some assignments in the education and health sectors did also align with the impact areas, for example girls' education also maps to human rights), which have historically been strong areas for the program.

More volunteer assignments aligned with human rights (31% of assignments) and inclusive economic growth (31%) than with climate change (15%).

Alongside the impact areas, the program seeks to support a number of cross-cutting issues. All volunteer assignments have an objective related to cross-cutting issues.

Volunteers must demonstrate how, in their assignment, they are using strategies that promote:

- gender equality
- inclusion of youth and people with disabilities
- child protection and safeguarding
- inclusion of other marginalised groups

Of volunteers providing feedback on addressing cross-cutting issues during the year:

- 80% of volunteers reported addressing gender equality
- 46% reported addressing disability
- 28% as addressing child protection
- 13% as addressing the inclusion of marginalised groups

At the end of their assignments volunteers are also asked to rate their achievement of the objective related to social inclusion. Sixty-eight per cent of volunteers reported good or very good progress against this objective, with a further 18% reporting satisfactory progress. This compares to 66% and 22% for all other assignment objectives, suggesting that volunteers feel as able to address the standard objective on social inclusion as they do their role-specific objectives.

Gender equality has been a focus for the program during the year and a gender equality review was commissioned to support work in this area. While a high proportion of volunteers report addressing gender as a cross-cutting issue, the review found that, as of January 2019, only nine volunteer assignments focused primarily on gender equality (a further six assignments could have been classified as focused on gender equality but were not coded as such). This highlights the need for a shared understanding of gender equality across the program and for ongoing improvements in how assignments are coded.

During the year, additional guidance has been developed to help volunteers better consider these diversity and inclusion elements in their assignments, and a gender action plan is being developed to strengthen gender equality across the program. A disability inclusion review has also been commissioned.

The challenge for the program is in strengthening engagement in a relatively large number of priority areas, while also maintaining the breadth and quality of assignments overall.
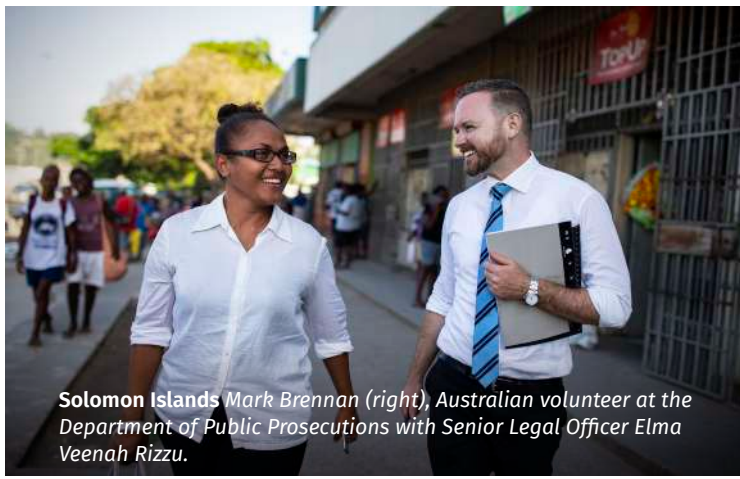
Solomon Islands *Mark Brennan (right), Australian volunteer at the Department of Public Prosecutions with Senior Legal Officer Elma Veenah Rizzu.*

Philippines *Marie-Carine Cesar, Australian volunteer Enterprise Officer with the Local Government Unit of Lamut, Ifugau Province.*

6.4. Program foundations

Program governance

The program has established clear and comprehensive governance arrangements. The Program Management Group (PMG), chaired by DFAT, is the primary governance body responsible for strategic oversight of the program. The PMG met twice during the year in November 2018 and in May 2019.

Regular progress meetings between DFAT AVS and the Program Director and Deputy Program Director have continued throughout the year and have provided an opportunity for ongoing dialogue on a range of issues across the program. This forum has continued to contribute to strong and positive working relationships.

Outside of the governance arrangements, the program has a Consortium Group, which is an advisory group made up of senior representatives from AVI, Cardno and Whitelum Group. The Consortium Group is chaired by an AVI board member. Its role is to ensure a strong partnership between consortium members that supports high quality delivery of the program. The Consortium Group continues to be active and engaged in the program and met four times during 2018/19.

Annual planning and ongoing implementation

The program's senior management team invested heavily in the development of the 2019/20 Annual Plan, which is the main operational document for the program and outlines the key activities, approaches and timelines for the coming year. This process commenced in February 2019 with high-level discussions with DFAT, chaired by DFAT's Assistant Secretary (NGOs and Volunteers Branch). Throughout March to May discussions continued within teams across the program, with DFAT AVS and with DFAT Posts to ensure the plan reflected an agreed consistent and coherent approach for 2019/20. The draft Annual Plan was delivered on time on 31 May 2019 and was followed by a meeting in June 2019 with senior AVS staff. With some minor additions the Annual Plan was approved by DFAT on 9 July 2019.

From an operational perspective, 2018/19 was a year in which foundational strategies were implemented, and systems and processes were developed and rolled out. At the same time AVI undertook a major IT transformation project, moving away from its bespoke volunteer management system to a new and improved volunteer management system (Salesforce). In November 2018 the program's new website was launched. A newly developed self-service volunteer recruitment process was also implemented incorporating new recruitment practices, such as video interviewing and online reference checking to ensure an efficient, effective recruitment process for prospective volunteers.

In-country teams continued to focus on activities to support the aims outlined in the Global Program Strategy and the Global Risk Management Plan. Of paramount importance was the ongoing focus on the health, safety and wellbeing of all program participants so that they were safe and felt supported whilst on assignment. Assisting volunteers to develop strong and respectful relationships and partnerships in-country was also of critical importance, as were activities to ensure the locally-led capacity development of partner organisations.

Procurement continued to be a focus of the program, particularly in relation to public diplomacy, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) and partnerships activities. Against a reforecast budget of AUD$3,600,500 for program activity costs in 2018/19, the program expended AUD$3,599,674 or 99%. The majority of this expenditure was related to key public diplomacy activities, such as a new and enhanced program website and volunteer recruitment portal, stakeholder engagement events and RAVN activities. There was also a significant investment in the program's ability to roll out partnership plans across the program, and formative MEL research activities.

Volunteer recruitment

A key focus throughout 2018/19 was the implementation and embedding of new recruitment processes that were developed in the previous year. Feedback on the pre-departure briefings has been largely positive, with 89% of participants strongly agreeing (35%) or agreeing (54%) that it helps people better prepare for their assignment.[10] Participants have provided useful feedback that is used for the continuous improvement of sessions.

Work was also undertaken to review and refine the content of the Return Workshops that are offered on a monthly basis, as well as to develop a new online module to support volunteers with strategies for transitioning home and readjusting to help them navigate the challenges that can arise with return.

Key achievements this year include:

- **Improved recruitment processes**
  In line with the implementation of the new volunteer management system (Salesforce), key components of the recruitment model developed during 2017/18 financial year were able to be fully implemented. This included the introduction of a new video platform for applying for an assignment. The submission of a recorded video has created a greater opportunity for our in-country teams, and partner organisations, to be involved in the initial screening and shortlisting of applicants. This has generated some positive feedback from partners, with one organisation representative from Cambodia noting how beneficial it was "being involved in [the volunteer's] recruitment and having a big influence on the successful candidate being the best person for the job both professionally and as a member of [our] team."

- **Streamlined mobilisation experience for volunteers**
  The new self-service online portal for volunteers was introduced, providing a more efficient and streamlined process for people throughout the volunteer journey. The portal enables individuals to take greater ownership and responsibility for their volunteer journey by providing relevant information at each of the key stages of the volunteer lifecycle – applying for a role, recruitment and on-boarding, being on assignment, and returning home. Further resources to support the navigation of the volunteer lifecycle for both staff and volunteers, will be rolled out during the coming year.

- **Supporting volunteer development through learning**
  Continuous improvement of the learning journey for volunteers was undertaken throughout the year. This included a review of and, where required, an update of existing online modules, as well as the development of two new online modules: fraud and return support. Additionally, development of standardised content for both the MEL and child protection sessions that are delivered during the in-country orientation program was finalised to ensure consistency of key information across all countries.

During the year, the program has recruited and mobilised 611 new volunteer assignments. There was a particular increase in the number of volunteers starting their assignment in the last six months of the reporting period, with almost twice as many in the last six months of the year as there were in the first. This was partly due to system changes and the heavy investment of staff time required to support AVI's IT transformation project in the first half of the year. The table below also shows the change from the previous reporting period, covering January to June 2018.

Number of new assignments starting over time

400
300
200
100
0

402
219
209

February to June 2018   July to December 2018   January to June 2019

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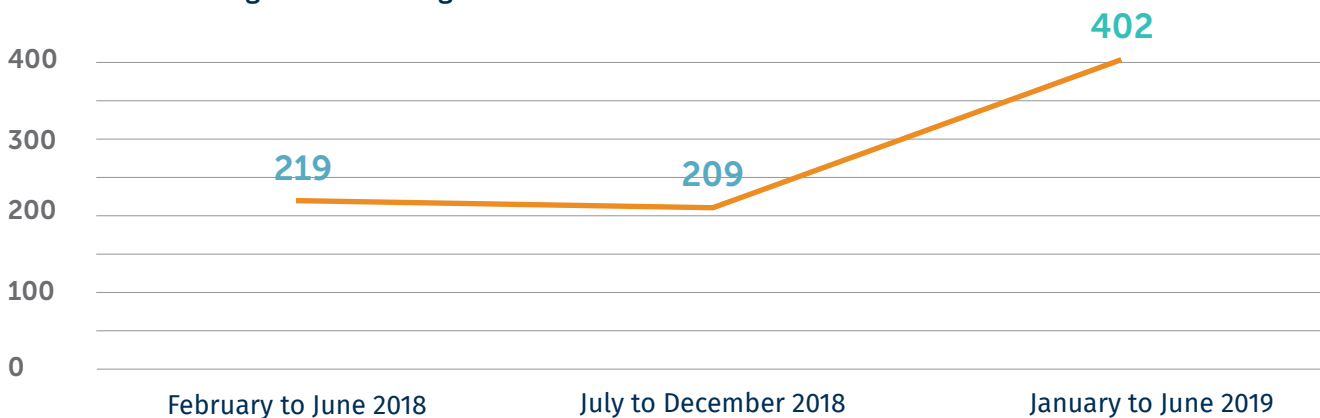
10. 10% were neither satisfied or dissatisfied, and 1% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the pre-departure briefings achieved that aim.

Myanmar *Australian volunteer English Trainer Kathleen Magee at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation with students.*

Federated States of Micronesia *Tim Patrick (left), Australian volunteer with colleague Atin John, at the Akoyikoyi School.*

Finance

The program's expenditure for 2018/19 was AUD$37,281,338. This represents an underspend of 12% against the original annual budget and 7% against the final quarterly reforecast. The underspend related to a number of factors, most notably lower than expected volunteer mobilisations in the final quarter of 2018/19.

Management Information System

The ongoing development and enhancement of the program's Management Information System (MIS) continued in 2018/19. Of particular note, program staff worked with DFAT AVS staff to develop and expand the program's MIS dashboards, to ensure timely, accurate and useful information is available to DFAT. Training was provided to DFAT AVS staff in November 2018 and June 2019 to ensure that they have the skills to develop reports to support internal requests. In February 2018, DFAT staff from three Posts (Jakarta, Yangon and Hanoi) were invited to participate in a trial to access the MIS dashboard. Training was provided to Hanoi-based staff in April 2019.

Regular meetings with DFAT have also provided an opportunity to share ongoing developments of the dashboard and to enable reports to be built that reflect DFAT and program implementation needs.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

The year saw a significant change in the MEL tools and processes used by the Australian Volunteers Program to capture feedback from volunteers and partners, with a move to a fully online system integrated with the program's volunteer management system and MIS. While this took considerable effort to develop it will bring significant improvements to the ability of the program to capture and learn from real time data and allow for deeper insights. The transition from one system to another in the middle of the reporting period has complicated data analysis but will allow more detailed analysis during the year ahead.

The MEL team, including Regional MEL Coordinators, have been active in supporting this transition, socialising the new tools with country office staff and with volunteers and partners through in-country orientation programs and partnership workshops. They have provided advice, training and support across all 26 countries. The MEL team also organised a series of regional reflection events in August 2018, to bring together program and DFAT staff to reflect on the previous year, draw out lessons learnt and help refocus and adapt program strategies and activities for the year ahead.

Several formative research activities were also completed during the year. These are described in Focus Area 5: Research and learning (page 32) and have informed many parts of this report.

Human Resources

As at 30 June 2018, there were 45 staff working from the Melbourne head office and 75 staff based overseas.

In 2018/19, 18 new staff were recruited, selected and inducted onto the program, as well as additional support staff and contractors. New roles included the Indigenous Programs Coordinator, and Compliance and Procurement Manager.

There were ten resignations from program-funded positions in this reporting period, including the Operations Manager, Global Security and Risk Adviser, Publicist, and Human Resources Business Partner.

Staff training was provided throughout the year, using online learning and teleconferencing platforms. Face-to-face training in critical incident management for country office staff was a highlight of the year. Significant investment in training in-country staff on how to work effectively with partner organisations to develop and roll out partnership plans was also a key focus for 2018/19, with workshops successfully delivered in May 2019. AVI continued to provide training to all program staff in its newly developed volunteer management system.

7 | Lessons learnt

The Australian Volunteers Program is a complex program – operating in 27 different locations around the world (including Australia), over a wide range of sectors and across all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The second series of reflection events held in August 2019 provided the opportunity for program staff and DFAT staff to again consider program strengths, challenges and lessons learnt over the reporting period. Key challenges and lessons identified during this reflection process included (but are not limited to):

- **The program has performed well and learnt a great deal from implementing the first annual plan** in 2018/19. Learnings from 2018/19 have informed many aspects of the approach for the 2019/20 annual plan. This has included working with DFAT to ensure the program has the flexibility to respond in periods of peak operational needs and to emerging issues. The benefits of these learnings will be realised in the year ahead.

- **The program has scaled up activities and processes to support over 1,000 volunteer assignments and more than 600 partner organisations.** It has done so while providing high quality support to volunteers and partners, maintaining strong satisfaction and achievement of assignment objectives. It can be challenging to maintain both the quantity and quality of assignments – to maximise value for money, enhance the impact of Australian aid, and ensure the benefits provided to partner organisations support them to achieve their development objectives.

Achieving both is not always easy, and too strong a focus on indicative targets can be to the detriment of the quality of assignments. Attracting suitable partner organisations to the program also takes time and effort.

- **The complexity of the recruitment and mobilisation process, and the resourcing required, should not be underestimated.** While the broad awareness raising campaign in Australia was not able to go ahead as planned, other marketing activities (including information sessions and paid advertising) were run instead and effectively reached a diverse range of Australians who might be interested in volunteering. However, there is more to be done to further broaden the reach of recruitment messaging in Australia, and to attract skilled Australians in very specific, hard to fill roles.

- **Partnership plans are a key component of the program design but, as a new tool, have proved more time consuming to implement than expected.** Progress has been made establishing the systems and resources to roll-out partnership plans, holding partnership workshops and working with partners to understand and draft them in many countries. The time required to invest in and formalise these relationships is often considerable and not to be rushed.

As a new approach for the program, in-country teams are continuing to develop their understanding of how to implement the plans in different contexts and with different types of partners. It may take some time to realise the value of the plans for identifying a pipeline of assignments, developing more strategic relationships with partners, linking Australian organisations with local partners, and measuring capacity change.

- **Strong coordination and collaboration between teams and different stakeholders takes time and effort but pays dividends.** The program has done very well communicating with and managing its range of stakeholders, developing positive relationships which are critical to effective program delivery. Providing consistent and frequent communication with volunteers and partners was identified as a priority issue last year, and important steps have been taken to do this, for example with a regular program newsletter being initiated in April 2019. Ensuring relevant and timely communication, with volunteers and overseas and Australian partners, will remain a priority this year. In addition, improving our internal communication across the program is a priority to ensure that even during particularly busy periods, communication channels are strong.

- **Integrated systems development within AVI is providing efficiencies for the program, but was a challenge to implement, requiring significant investment by staff** over and above normal workloads. AVI's IT transformation project has been a major investment and is providing significant benefits to the program (such as the new self-service volunteer recruitment process). There was a heavy demand on staff time, particularly in the first half of the year, in testing new systems and becoming competent users. The need for additional staff training, and some systems improvement, will continue in 2019/20.

- **Relationships between program teams and DFAT, at Posts and in Canberra, are crucial for successful implementation of the program.** Strong and effective relationships between DFAT Canberra and the program leadership team in Melbourne have proven critical to program progress and managing challenges. Regular catch-ups between Posts and in-county teams are generally working well with more regular updates on assignments proving useful for all and paving the way for strong coordination.

Coordinating with DFAT sectoral program managers at Posts can add value to the program and bring in specialist expertise, but needs to be done with shared expectations and strong communication.

- **The program is being strategic but it can be challenging to manage a range of priorities.** There is strong alignment in the strategic objectives of the program and Australian aid priorities. The program's flexibility is also valued by DFAT. There is a lot for staff to consider when creating individual assignments, with each assignment being cognisant of multiple elements, such as: partner organisation objectives; host government priorities; DFAT country and global priorities; program impact areas and cross-cutting priorities (e.g. gender equality); and the Australian labour market. Balancing all these elements is a challenge, but the program is broadly doing so successfully. With more of the operational systems for the program now established, there is scope for strengthening the strategic engagement of the program, particularly in relation to the impact areas.

- **The ambitions of the program need to be carefully balanced to avoid overwhelming small in-country teams.** The program requires varied skillsets from small in-country teams – from providing pastoral care to volunteers, brokering new partnerships with local organisations, and maintaining relationships with government ministries and DFAT Posts. In-country teams are also required to manage local operational issues, and understand the budgetary requirements of the program for their locations. The guidance and training provided to staff during the past year has been valuable, however for the coming year there will be a more planned approach to staff learning and development.

- **Providing the space and time to staff and DFAT to reflect on progress has helped the program adapt and improve.** Acknowledging shortcomings and celebrating successes are appreciated by everyone. Reflection workshops have been valuable for peer learning, sharing good practice, strengthening relationships between program staff and DFAT, and identifying opportunities to improve effectiveness. Feedback from volunteers and partners has directly led to changes in the ways the program works, for example, improving communications with volunteers. However, the operational tempo of the program over the last year has often been too high to allow program managers the time or opportunity to act on evidence to improve practice. The program will strengthen the means provided to staff to help them reflect, learn, adapt and improve.

8 | Management actions and forward priorities

The program team is very proud of the achievements over the last 12 months. As the program moves into 2019/20, it will have a strong focus on full scale and effective program implementation, while continuing to ensure that the health, safety and security of volunteers remains of paramount importance.

Key management actions that will be taken forward from issues raised in consultations to produce this annual report include (but are not limited to):

- **Strengthening recruitment and mobilisation strategies.** Actions will include: stronger forward planning of the recruitment pipeline, the creation of new recruitment avenues (such as talent pools), and the use of 'surge' support during peak periods if required. There will be more targeted recruitment marketing and program awareness raising activities. There is also scope for leveraging and creating linkages with other DFAT-funded programs and organisations.

- **Supporting partner organisations to strengthen impact.** This will include actions that progress the roll-out, understanding and utility of partnership plans; providing effective support to partners to be 'volunteer ready'; reaching out to potential new partner organisations aligned with the program's strategic priorities; creating links with Australian organisations; and examining opportunities to harness local expertise to build the capacity of partners and volunteers in specific areas.

- **Improving data quality on the MIS and ensuring a strong quality focus across the program.** Actions will include: continued improvements of the MIS to make information available to program managers and DFAT; improved coding of assignments to better track strategic alignment to impact areas and cross-cutting issues; and making time to meaningfully review key aspects of program quality (i.e. quality of our volunteers, our services, and our results).

- **Strengthen communication and relationships with DFAT Posts.** While communications are generally working very well, and relationships are positive, the program will apply greater consistency of service across our in-country teams, increase our public diplomacy support to Posts, and ensure program and DFAT staff continue to strengthen agreed ways of working.

- **Continuing to provide high quality support to volunteers.** While volunteer satisfaction with the program remains high, the program will continue to invest in improving our service to volunteers. Actions will include: more support to volunteers to navigate the self-service portal; additions to our FLEX learning platform; the roll-out of recommendations from a comprehensive review of volunteer allowances; and providing new offerings to returned volunteers (e.g. a mentoring program).

Tuvalu Gabi McMahon (third from left), Australian volunteer Advisor, Child Protection Policy Implementation with colleagues from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports greeting foreign dignitaries and delegates at the airport.

- **Improving planning and coordination of staff training and capacity development.** While the guidance and training provided to staff during the past year has been valuable, there is an opportunity in the coming year to take a more planned approach, across the program as well as across AVI as an organisation. Additional resourcing in-country in the areas of finance, and security and risk, will also assist in building important peer-to-peer networks and competencies in these areas.

In addition, the program will deliver on the program priorities highlighted in the 2019/20 Annual Plan, which include:

- **Supporting the Australian Government's 'Pacific Pivot'** and 'Step Up' efforts including by:
  - Maintaining a strong footprint of Australian volunteers in the Pacific region and Timor-Leste to support the critical development needs of our closest neighbours.
  - Increasing the number of volunteers going to Papua New Guinea, recognising Australia's enduring partnership with Papua New Guinea.
  - Strengthening capacity development in the impact area of climate change/disaster resilience/food security, working with partners across the Pacific.

- **Increasing our efforts to improve gender equality and inclusion outcomes** across the program:
  - With a focus on gender equality, disability inclusion, Indigenous inclusion, and LGBT+ inclusion and support.
  - In line with the impact area around human rights and in support of the focus of Australia's aid policy on disability-inclusive development, gender equality and empowering women and girls.

- **Promoting the program to support volunteer recruitment and celebrate the value of volunteering**, through activities including:
  - A major program conference in March 2020, in Melbourne, to recognise the impact and value of skilled international volunteering
  - A broad awareness advertising campaign, to reach a diverse range of Australians, increasing awareness and understanding of the program with a strong focus on regional Australia.

List of abbreviations

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
AVID	Australian Volunteers for International Development
CPFP	Child Protection Focal Point
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFAT AVS	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Volunteers Section
INGO	International non-government organisation
IPG	Innovation Pathway Group
MIS	Management Information System
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NGO	Non-government organisations
PMG	Program Management Group
PSEAH	Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
RAVN	Returned Australian Volunteers Network
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

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Inside cover	Harjono Djoyobisono	Page 23	Darren James
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