Australian
Volunteers

Supporting remote
assignments in Nepal

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Matching in-country Nepali national volunteers with remote Australian volunteers to support partner organisation goals

Complete
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Cover image: AVI staff member Deb. Photo: Harjono Djoyobisono.

Summary

With this project, the program explored how national volunteers in Nepal might be included in program volunteering activities. Taking inspiration from the youth volunteer project in South Africa (*Volunteering your way into the job market*), the program developed an idea to include an in-country Nepali national volunteer in the existing remote volunteering framework.

In this project, an early-career Nepali national volunteer and remote Australian volunteer worked with the Ilam Municipality in Nepal to build their tourism development plan. In testing this idea, we sought to understand and predict barriers to remote assignments and find out if there is value in this type of volunteering for early-career Nepali professionals.

Our objectives

- Explore how including an in-country Nepali volunteer into the existing remote volunteering framework will impact the overall assignment.

- Understand what values Nepali and Australian volunteers could gain from completing a co-volunteering assignment.

- Learn what support must be available to volunteers and partners for the co-volunteering dynamic to be effective.

Our approach

This project moved from 'idea' to 'live prototype' quickly due to the circumstances. The in-country team was already actively working with a remote Australian volunteer who had previous experience in Nepal and had found a potential Nepali volunteer. In situations like this, sometimes the best approach to testing an idea is to jump straight in and both volunteers were engaged in a three-month assignment supporting Ilam Municipality to create their tourism development plan.

Through actively documenting and tracking the experiences of both volunteers and their partner organisation, we learned:

- adjustments that could be made to support volunteers

- necessary preparations for all stakeholders

- existing program systems and policies that enable or limit this type of volunteering

One assignment was completed with positive results and we had hoped to test this again with a new set of volunteers, however, it was difficult to find more partners in geographically remote locations where this idea had been considered of most benefit.

What we learned

- Setting clear expectations early on around roles and responsibilities is essential. These expectations should be re-visited regularly throughout the assignment to ensure clarity for each volunteer.

- While remote volunteering opened opportunities for partner organisations in more physically remote locations to receive volunteers online, the addition of in-country national volunteers has helped overcome some of the language and cultural barriers that can be present in remote areas.

- While national volunteers bridge language and cultural barriers, they should also be recognised for technical skills, abilities, and contributions beyond geographic and contextual knowledge.