# Australian Volunteers

# Volunteer support network prototype

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Investigate what it takes to effectively support networks for volunteers, and how they may affect larger outcomes.

**Complete**
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Cover image: AVI staff members Leo and Kylie. Photo: Harjono Djoyobisono.

# Summary

The program wanted to test the value of developing a global volunteer network with a small cohort of diverse volunteers sharing knowledge, skills and resources across assignments, roles and locations. This project identified whether connecting volunteers across countries and regions lead to increased outcomes for volunteers and partner organisations.

# Our objectives

- Create an environment for shared learning and collaboration between volunteers.

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- Provide a space to share experiences across regions and countries.

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- Create a dialogue about current sector-based practices and trends that benefits volunteers and partner organisations.

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- Explore ways to successfully create networks.

# Our approach

This project required a large amount of background research. A desk review of existing network models and modes of delivery was completed, and resources to support effective network creation and maintenance were identified. The desk review also explored how these models might be tailored to suit the project.

Organisations and program staff were consulted, including conversations with program staff that supported volunteer networks in Timor-Leste, Indonesia and Vietnam. We had conversations with Innovation Associates and staff who understood current volunteer networks and opportunities for returned volunteer involvement.

This research identified two potential prototype network categories:

1. Cross-Sectional Knowledge Networks: Broad cross-section of volunteers come together to share knowledge, skills and recourses across assignments, roles, sectors and regions to improve outcomes

for their partners.

2. Strategic Sector Networks: Broad range of volunteers working in the same sector but across regions, come together to gain a deeper understanding of what is happening in their sector. They can apply these learnings to increase their partners capabilities.

Following the research, a prototype was developed with 15 remote volunteers participating over a three-month period. The prototype included:

- Fortnightly online peer sessions for professional knowledge development.

- An online platform providing a space for volunteers to connect and share knowledge and resources between sessions.

- Fortnightly one-on-one online connection session between volunteers to deepen relationships and build on their level of support.

## What we learned

- Networks take time to develop into something that is useful for those involved.

- Clear purpose, role and activities are necessary to create a self-sustaining network.

- Feedback from trial, one of many types of networks that the program was testing, will be used to generate new offerings.

- People are really looking for connection, which drives volunteers to return. Enabling different forms of connection is particularly important for remote assignments.