

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEERS PROGRAM MANAGEMENT RESPONSE – PROGRESS REPORT – JULY 2024

Summary of progress made on management actions

DFAT commissioned an independent evaluation of the Australian Volunteers Program in October 2020 to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and future direction of the program. The final evaluation report was submitted and accepted by DFAT on 30 April 2021 and contained valuable findings on the program's performance, as well as recommendations on how to ensure the program can continue to deliver results within an evolving global context.

DFAT finalised its management response to the [independent evaluation in September 2021](#). The first progress report outlining progress made against management actions was published in December 2022. The following document outlines progress to July 2024, and shows that all management actions are now complete.

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action Plan	Timeframe	Status
1. That DFAT and the program work together to refresh the program's outcomes and logic. This is an opportunity to reposition the program in an evolving global context, to consider the benefits of alternative volunteering modalities, and test and recalibrate priorities to help to build a consensus amongst program stakeholders.	Agree.	DFAT agrees that the changing global context as well as evolving foreign policy priorities since the program was first designed warrant a re-examination of the program's outcomes and logic, with a view to making any necessary updates.	DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff will work together to revise the program logic, with the assistance of external specialists as required.	Completed by 30 November 2021.	Complete. The new outcomes and program logic are available on the DFAT website.
2. That current strategic partnerships are expanded, and new partnerships are explored to identify and scale up new volunteering modalities, multiply capacity development outcomes, and increase the program's profile and outreach through leveraging international networks.	Agree.	The program has proven over time that strategic partnerships (between Australian organisations, partner organisations in-country and DFAT) lead to effective capacity building outcomes in the long term. There is value in exploring new partnerships to enable a wider reach of the program and generate new volunteering modalities. Experience shows that strategic partnerships are resource intensive, and it will be important to ensure there	DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff will work together to seek out new partnerships that add value to the program's aims, within Australia and overseas.	Commenced in FY2021-22.	Complete. The program, over time has addressed this recommendation with expanded strategic partnerships and implemented new volunteering modalities (remote and hybrid).

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		is adequate management capacity (within DFAT and the Program).			
3. That consideration is given to establishing appropriate, consultative, or advisory mechanisms in-country to engage government, peak bodies representing the private sector, small and medium enterprises, and civil society with DFAT and program managers at a strategic level.	Agree.	The establishment of an advisory mechanism relevant to a specific country context may provide an additional forum where partner governments, diverse community voices and other sectors can be consulted – ensuring both greater ownership and ‘voice’ from counterparts in-country as well as from our DFAT posts.	DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff will develop terms of reference for two pilots which will be conducted in two countries to test how this mechanism can be established and inform future program operations.	Beginning in January 2022 and further expanded in FY2022-23 upon successful completion of pilots.	Complete. Pilot mechanism trial 2024-25.
4. That in refreshing and recalibrating the program’s outcomes and logic, particular attention is given to reviewing two of the three End of Program Outcomes, ‘The public in Australia better appreciates the value of international volunteering’ and ‘Australian volunteers gain professionally and	Agree.	After nearly five years of implementation, it is timely that DFAT examine whether the End of Program Outcomes remain relevant and align with policy priorities.	DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff will work together to revise the program logic, with the assistance of external specialists as required.	Completed by 30 November 2021.	Complete. As per recommendation 1, the program logic has been refreshed. In line with input from the consultation process and DFAT standards, the second outcome (previously ‘The public in Australia better appreciates the value of international volunteering’) has been given a sharper focus on ‘key stakeholders’ to enable it to be a more realistic, achievable end of program outcome. This outcome

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<p><i>personally,</i>’ to ensure logical articulation into program goals, a description of the desired future ‘end state’ and compliance with DFAT standards.</p>					<p>also references stakeholders in partner countries, recognising that the program works to increase the value of volunteering with specific target groups outside of Australia. The logical causality of the third outcome has also been amended, to clarify that ‘volunteers gaining personally and professionally’ is a precursor to the end of program outcome relating to volunteers gaining greater cultural awareness. This then flows on more logically to the revised objective-level statement relating to strong, mutual relationships across the region.</p>
<p>5. That DFAT examine the value for money assessment and build on it by commissioning relevant follow-up work as required.</p>	<p>Agree.</p>	<p><i>Revised for operational reasons, please refer to hyperlink above for original text:</i></p> <p>The Value for Money Assessment undertaken by the Australian Volunteers Program comprises a ‘proof of concept’ and was envisaged to be an initial overview assessment to be followed by a more extensive assessment in</p>		<p>To be conducted during the second phase of the program (2022-2027).</p>	<p>Complete. Incorporated into broader end of program evaluation, to commence in August 2024.</p>

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		<p>the second phase of the program (2022-2027).</p> <p>Given the significant and ongoing changes in global context due to COVID-19 and subsequent changes to the Australian Volunteer Program's scope and scale, DFAT will not commission a further value for money assessment at this time. However, the Australian Volunteers Program will conduct a follow-up assessment in the second phase of the program (2022-2027).</p>			
<p>6. That DFAT and senior program staff work together to address the role of the Program Management Group to ensure that it is fulfilling all of its mandated functions and DFAT is receiving an appropriate level of performance assurance and transparency commensurate with its</p>	Agree.	As the program's governance body, the Program Management Group provides DFAT and senior program staff with a mechanism to discuss program issues at a strategic level bi-annually.	Through a process of internal review and consultation, DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff will scrutinise how the Program Management Group is currently functioning and measures that can be taken to strengthen its functions. This will include updating the Program Management	Completed by 30 November 2021.	Complete. An updated terms of reference was approved by the Program Management Group in February 2022.

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role as the program's funding body.			Group's terms of reference.		
7. That DFAT and senior program staff work together to update the program's approach to risk management to include all main categories of risk.	Agree.	DFAT welcomes the opportunity to ensure all relevant risks in the program are adequately captured within the program's risk approach and aligned with DFAT's aid risk management framework, noting that risk review, monitoring and mitigation is an ongoing process.	The program's Risk Management Committee (which includes representation from DFAT) will review the program's risk management documentation to ensure all relevant categories of risk are captured within the program's risk approach.	Complete by 30 November 2022.	Complete. A Risk Assurance Framework was developed and approved at the Program Management Group in February 2022 and subsequent revision of the Global Risk Plan and Register in 2022 to capture all main categories of risk.
8. In refreshing the program logic and End of Program Outcomes, thought should also be given to how best to incorporate alternative modalities within the program logic, and how success or failure of such modalities is to be determined.	Agree.	DFAT agrees that the onset of COVID-19 and the significant restrictions on international travel presents an opportunity for the Program to explore additional ways it can achieve its End of Program Outcomes. This includes ways the Program can encourage and promote volunteering at local levels.	This will be considered as part of the program logic refresh process completed by DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff.	Completed by 30 November 2021.	Complete. Changes have been made throughout the program logic to reposition the program in an evolving context and to allow for alternative volunteering modalities, including remote and hybrid volunteering and the program's shift to include working with volunteers (directly or through national peak bodies) at the national level in partner countries. Changes also allow for more flexibility for the program to innovate and adapt. The program's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework was updated in July 2022 to reflect changes in

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					the program logic, including indicators relating to a new intermediate innovation outcome; details on how data will be disaggregated between different volunteering modalities, and, how program components like Impact Grants will be assessed.
<p>9. That the contribution of the Innovation Fund to achievement of program goals is clarified and given more visibility in the program logic and the fund continues to be used as a vehicle to help the program stay strategic in approach and remain relevant as wider social issues shape the aid sector. In doing so there needs to be commitment not only to piloting alternative volunteering modalities but to mainstreaming them within the program.</p>	Agree.	DFAT agrees that the Innovation Fund’s unique and rigorous model of piloting and testing new approaches and modalities should be given more prominence within the program logic and become formally embedded as part of program implementation going forward.	This will be considered as part of the program logic refresh process completed by DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff.	Completed by 30 November 2021.	Complete. Explicit mention of the program’s innovation work was added to the program logic at the intermediate outcome level, and to the second of the outcome areas (under the End of Program Outcome ‘Key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries appreciate the value of volunteering’). As noted in the narrative, innovation cuts across the program logic and feeds into other outcome areas.