

# Volunteer media and communication guide

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## Introduction

As an Australian volunteer living and working with developing communities around the globe, there will be many people interested in hearing your story and about the activities of your partner organisation – both while you are on your assignment and when you return home.

This document provides guidance on media and communication protocols when conducting activities such as media interviews, speaking opportunities and social media posting.

Sharing your experiences and the work of your partner organisation is an important part of your volunteer assignment. There are many ways you can do this, including:

- Media interviews (eg: local newspapers or radio, online news sites etc)
- Speaking engagements (eg: industry association events, DFAT events, conferences etc)
- Online blogs, websites, newsletters
- Community engagement (eg: attending local community events)
- Social media (eg: your social media channels, DFAT’s and AVI’s social media channels)

## Responsibility, respect and your role

Australian volunteers are actively encouraged to share their stories by participating in media, publicity, social media and community engagement activities. These activities might be generated by DFAT or the program’s Public Diplomacy team in Australia, they might be initiated in-country by DFAT or your in-country team, or you might identify opportunities yourself.

With all opportunities, Australian volunteers must take a **responsible** approach, **respect** the way you represent the communities you live and work with and remember your **role** as an Australian volunteer.

Taking responsibility, being respectful and taking your role seriously means:

- **Gaining the necessary approvals.** Before speaking with the media or publically about your experience as an Australian volunteer, it is important to ensure your partner organisation is comfortable with being featured. You must also discuss the opportunity with your in-country team or the Public Diplomacy team in Melbourne, who will liaise with DFAT and let you know if you can proceed with the media activity.
- **Do not comment on local or global sensitive issues.** Engaging in these issues create could challenges for you, your local partner organisation, the community you work with or your colleagues.
- Remember you are always seen as a representative of your partner organisation, the Australian Volunteers program and Australia.
- **Respect the culture and community where you live and work** when promoting your partner organisation, your volunteer assignment and the Australian Volunteers program.

## Media activity

### Engaging with media

Australian volunteers are encouraged to participate in positive media activities both in Australia and overseas. Media opportunities help increase awareness of international volunteering and the positive contribution of volunteers make to our region, and promote the work Australian volunteers and their partner organisations are involved in.

DFAT and the program are regularly contacted by media in Australia with requests to interview current and returned volunteers. While on assignment, Australian volunteers are sometimes directly approached by media for stories about their work, their experience as a volunteer or the activities they are involved in with their partner organisation.

### Steps for media engagement (including approval process)

While we encourage volunteers working in the field to be involved in positive media activities, it is important that you:

1. Inform your in-country team or the Public Diplomacy team prior to any media activity so we can liaise with DFAT to get approval for the media activity to proceed.
  - Approval is required for pro-active media (you have identified a story that may be of interest to media) and reactive media (when a reporter contacts you regarding an interview or story).
  - DFAT approval can sometimes take several weeks so allow time to get approval when planning media activity.
  - DFAT aims to respond to reactive media requests within 72 hours.
  - Ask the media outlet to provide interview questions and forward them to your in-country team or the Public Diplomacy team. [media@australianvolunteers.com](mailto:media@australianvolunteers.com)
2. Inform your partner organisation about the media activity and confirm that they support your participation.
  - Your partner organisation can provide you with more background about the media outlet.

Connecting people, changing lives, reaching our region.

- It may be more appropriate for a partner organisation colleague to talk to the media, or for them to contribute to the story as well as you.
  - If your organisation is directly involved in a media issue, then a partner organisation representative should be the one to comment.
3. Limit your comments and answers to your partner organisation and your volunteer activities and experience.
- Do not comment on sensitive local or global issues, even if asked.
  - Do not comment on sensitive local issues, Australian Government policies, emergency situations or other sensitive issues.
  - Engaging on these issues can create challenges for you, your local organisation, the community where you live and work or your colleagues.
  - The Public Diplomacy team can help you prepare for the interview, including drafting key messages.
4. Send media articles and links to your in-country team and the Public Diplomacy team.

**Do not proceed with any media interview without checking with your in-country team first.**

### **Undertaking a media interview**

Once you have received approval to participate in a media interview or activity, the following tips will help you prepare:

- Clarify the context of the interview:
  - Is it a live or pre-recorded radio interview?
  - How long it will the interview be?
  - Will there be other interviewees?
- Ask what the interview will focus on and request the questions so you can prepare your responses in advance.
- Will photographs be required?
- Identify what *you* want from the interview – what points do you want to make, what stories do you want to get across, are there some dates or contact details you need to convey.
- Don't answer any questions you don't know the answer to or feel uncomfortable about. If you are not sure, just say so.
- Don't answer sensitive questions. Just because you are asked a question does not mean you need to answer it. Indicate you are not in a position to answer the question.
- Assume everything is 'on the record' so do not make any comments that you don't want made public.
- Relax and remember you are the expert on your volunteer experience!

The Public Diplomacy team and your in-country team can provide you with support and assistance.

## Social media

Volunteers regularly use social media channels to let their family, friends, and other networks know about their volunteer experience. Social media can be a positive way for volunteers to share their experience and for others to participate in the volunteer journey. Social media channels include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, blogs etc.

### Remember who you are representing

On most occasions social networking is in the public sphere and as a current Australian volunteer, you are representing the Australian Volunteers program, your partner organisation and Australia.

You are responsible for your posts on social media sites. Do not post negative, sexist, defamatory, obscene, racist language or political commentary. This activity can have an impact on your role and all the organisations you are representing and individuals you are associated with. If you blog or post comments that may have a negative impact on the organisations and community you are representing and/or cause security concerns for you, we will contact you request that you remove the post.

### Social media tips

- Content on social media is public and reflects on many stakeholders including yourself, your partner organisation, the partner country, the Australian Volunteers program, DFAT, the Australian Government and AVI *even if they're not referenced directly*. Be mindful of your impact as a participant of the Australian Volunteers program.
- Do not post any content that directly or indirectly criticizes your partner country government, your partner organization and colleagues, fellow volunteers or the Australian Government.
- Ensure your content is socially and culturally appropriate.
- Use appropriate photos with informed consent. Avoid sharing photos of children on social media.
- Be aware that some content (including photographs) which you may consider harmless can be seen quite differently by local communities and governments.
- Twitter and most blogs are accessible to the general public.
- Even if your social media accounts have strict privacy settings, remember that something you say in a 'private' forum online can quickly become public.
- Use the hashtag **#AusVols4Dev** when appropriate.

## Telling your story effectively

### Choose a topic to make an impact

As a result of your experience with the Australian Volunteers program, you probably have many subject areas you can speak about knowledgeably. However, a story/speech with a cohesive topic or theme is infinitely more interesting than a speech that rambles from one anecdote to the next.

### **Tips for good story telling**

- Pick a platform that works for you, for example a newspaper article, public speaking event, social media or radio interview.
- Introduce yourself and your assignment (who, what, where, when, why).
- Speak/write plainly – avoid jargon and acronyms.
- A picture is worth a thousand words – use suitable images to help convey your message.
- Spelling and grammar is important – carefully review your story before sending it off into the world.
- Personalise your story – sharing your personal story will help you to connect with the audience no matter which medium you choose.
- Share stories that encapsulate the experience of your volunteer assignment.
- Keep to one or two themes
- If your story is a presentation, make sure you stick to the timeframe.

### **Themes you might explore**

- An enduring relationship forged during your assignment.
- How you developed personally or professionally from your assignment.
- Something you and your partner organisation colleagues achieved together.
- A rewarding moment during your assignment.

### **How the Public Diplomacy team can support you:**

- Background information
- Ideas on what to talk about, or practice interview questions
- Media contact information
- Organise interviews for you
- If we organise an interview for you, we will give you the context of the interview.

## **The Australian Volunteers program**

AVI manages the Australian Volunteers program on behalf of the Australian Government.

When talking about your participation in the program, please use the following references:

- You are an Australian volunteer on an Australian Volunteers program assignment.
- The Australian Volunteers program is an Australian Government initiative.
- For more information on the Australian Volunteers program, refer people to [www.australianvolunteers.com](http://www.australianvolunteers.com)
- Refer media to DFAT or the Public Diplomacy team if they need more information about the Australian aid program.

### Key points about the Australian Volunteers program

- Since the 1950s, the Australian Government has supported more than 14,000 Australians to volunteer in Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean as part of the overseas aid program. The Australian Volunteers program is currently operating in 26 countries across the Indo-Pacific, and in some parts of Eastern Africa.
- The Australian Volunteers program matches skilled Australians from all walks of life with organisations in developing countries to help these organisations to deliver on their own objectives. The program uses international volunteering as a people-centered approach to capacity development.
- The Australian Volunteers program is part of the Australian Government's people-to-people program portfolio, connecting Australians to Australia's aid program and the region.
- Over the next five years, the Australian Volunteers program will aim 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 and governments in Australia and overseas better appreciate the value of volunteering.

### Contact

Contact the Public Diplomacy team at [media@australianvolunteers.com](mailto:media@australianvolunteers.com) or +61 3 9279 1788 for media approvals and further assistance.