



# Australian Volunteers Program Storytelling Kit

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# Introduction

Since the early 1960s, more than 17,000 Australians have been supported by the Australian Government to volunteer internationally in over than 50 countries. The experience is often life-changing for the volunteers – they form lasting relationships with their colleagues and communities, and gain new perspectives, skills and knowledge.

This Storytelling Kit is designed to empower members of the Alumni network to share their volunteer stories and act as powerful advocates for the Australian Volunteers Program. The kit highlights many of the ways alumni can share their story with the program and the general public. It includes resources to support volunteer storytelling, including ethical storytelling guidelines, how to join the program's storyteller register, program talking points and presentation tips.

## Alumni storytelling benefits

- Make new connection
- Inspire others with your experience
- Gain personal and professional development
- Promote the value of volunteering



*Past volunteer Ayman speaking at the Australian Volunteers Program International Volunteers Day event, December 2024*

Telling your volunteer story is a powerful way to:

- Advocate for international development
- Increase cultural awareness
- Raise awareness of partner organisation's work
- Reflect on your volunteer experience and the competencies you gained
- Highlight broader social issues

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# Ways to share your story

Storytelling opportunities can occur casually through personal and professional networks and more formally through speaking and media engagements.

Stories that reflect the program's guiding principles are ideally suited to the Australian Volunteers Program and Alumni speaking engagements.

Australian Volunteers Program guiding principles:

- Support locally led change
- Grow strong relationships and partnerships
- Value international volunteering
- Evolve best practice and embrace innovation
- Enhance diversity and inclusion
- Ensure accountability and value learning

Find out more about the program's principles:

[www.australianvolunteers.com/about-us/](http://www.australianvolunteers.com/about-us/)



*Past volunteer Ben Clare, Inclusive Education and Media Specialist, being introduced to Senator the Hon Penny Wong, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the Australian Volunteers Program International Volunteer Day Event at Parliament House 2022.*



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# Program speaking opportunities

Australian Volunteers Program events – offer opportunities for past volunteers to share their experiences with program stakeholders including partner organisation staff, prospective volunteers, fellow alumni and current volunteers.

Program events may include:

- **Significant day events** such as International Women's Day (8 March), National Reconciliation Week (May 27–3 June), NAIDOC Week (July 6-12), International Day of People with Disability (3 December) and International Volunteers Day (5 December).
- **Information sessions** are held in different locations across Australia to share information about the program with the public.
- The **Global webinar series** brings together our global community of partner organisations and volunteers.
- Please reach out if you would like to find out more about speaking at a program event: [alumni@australianvolunteers.com](mailto:alumni@australianvolunteers.com)



*Alumni and program staff at a Brisbane Information Session 2023*

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Australian Volunteers Program Alumni events offer opportunities for past volunteers to share their experiences with other fellow past volunteers and people-to-people stakeholders. For example:

- **Alumni Tuesday Chats** are a series of short and casual online sessions for past volunteers to gather and chat.
- **Alumni Representative-led** events bring past volunteers together for networking, volunteering and professional development opportunities.

- **People-to-people networking events** are held in different locations across Australia and help bring together Alumni with stakeholders from DFAT people-to-people programs including Australia Awards and New Colombo Plan.
- **Post Assignment Workshops** support volunteers to reflect on their experience and adjust to life after an assignment.

Discover upcoming Alumni events:

<https://www.australianvolunteers.com/alumni/alumni-events/>



*Alum Leo, speaking at a Naarm International Volunteers Day Event, 2024*

# Public storytelling opportunities

**Conferences** are a great way to share your story with professionals working in your sector. The program can provide resources and support for conference presentations. You can find presentation tips and program talking points in Appendix 1.

Sector conference examples:

Education

- [Australian Collage of Educational Leaders](#)

Fundraising

- [Fundraising Institute Australia Conference](#)

Health

- [Speech Pathology Australia](#)
- [National Allied Health Conference](#)
- [Occupational Therapy Australia](#)

International Development

- [Australasian AID Conference](#)
- [International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations Conference \(IVCO\)](#)

LGBTQIA+

- [Sydney World Pride Human Rights Conference](#)

## Workplace storytelling

Sharing your volunteer story with your Australian colleagues is a great way to promote the program and international volunteering.

This can happen in casual settings, such as paper bag lunches or in more formal settings such as work conferences, events, or in written publications.



*Alumni sharing volunteer stories during an online post assignment workshop, December 2024*





*Alum, Achini speaking at an Alumni/Australia Awards networking event in Naarm, Melbourne.*

**International Development and Humanitarian organisations** are a great avenue to share your story with professionals working in International Development and the Humanitarian sector.

- [Women in Aid and development](#) 'is a membership organisation for women in the aid, development and humanitarian sectors.'
- [Australian Council for International Development](#) 'is the peak body for Australian non-government organisations involved in international development and humanitarian action.'
- [Australasian AID Conference](#) 'brings together researchers from across Australia, the Pacific, Asia and beyond who are working on aid and international development.'
- [Australian International Development Network](#)
- [Research for Development Impact Network](#)
- [The Development Circle](#)

### **Local Members of Parliament**

Sharing your volunteer experience with local members of Parliament is a powerful way to raise awareness of the program and international volunteering. Information about how to connect with your local representative can be found in appendix 4 of this kit. The program talking points under appendix 1 are a useful resource to support conversations with local members of parliament.



Fiji

'Volunteering allows me to use my skills to make a positive impact'



Tonga Laos

Learning for a lifetime



Tonga

Strengthening food security in Tonga through climate-resilient...



Fiji Mongolia Tanzania Sri Lanka Cam:

Beyond the buzzwords



Papua New Guinea

Friendships formed through advocating for animal welfare



Fiji

Being flexible and focusing on the small things

# Australian Volunteers Program media

Past volunteers make valuable contributions to written and video program stories.

You can find a wide range of written stories on the [program website](https://www.ausvolunteers.com/) and program videos via <https://www.youtube.com/@ausvolunteers>. Past volunteer stories are also published in the [Alumni newsletter](#).

Get in touch if you would like to share your story [alumni@australianvolunteers.com](mailto:alumni@australianvolunteers.com)

# General media

Volunteer stories can be published in local, state and national newspapers as well as community and sector publications and websites.

Here are some things to consider if you are interested in engaging with the media:

## 1. Preparation and Planning:

- Research and understand the media landscape: Identify relevant journalists and outlets and tailor your outreach to their specific audience and focus.

## 2. Building Media Relationships:

- Engage with journalists directly: Reach out to journalists via email or social media, particularly those who cover your area of interest.
- Craft a compelling pitch: Highlight the most newsworthy aspects of your story and tailor your pitch to the specific outlet.
- Be strategic in your follow-up: Don't bombard journalists with follow-up emails but do ensure they received your pitch and have the information they need.
- Be responsive and reliable: Respond to media inquiries promptly and provide accurate information. But remember you don't have to answer all their questions. You are in control of your story and what you share.

## 3. Engaging with the Media:

- Develop clear and concise messaging: Think about the three most important things you want the audience to take away. Ensure your key messages are clear and easily understood. It's ok to use notes (when not on camera).
- Provide a fresh perspective: Offer unique insights and angles on stories, rather than simply rehashing existing information.
- Practice your delivery: If you're going to be interviewed, practice your responses to potential questions and ensure you can articulate your key messages effectively.
- Off the record doesn't really exist: Consider that everything you say to a journalist might contribute to their story.
- Promote your media coverage: Share your media mentions on social media and other channels to **amplify your message**.

Get in touch with us if you have an opportunity to share your volunteer story with the media so we can offer support [alumni@australianvolunteers.com](mailto:alumni@australianvolunteers.com).

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*Alum, Jelvie speaking at a HR Analytics Summit, London, 2023*

## Podcasts and radio interviews

Podcasts offer a great platform to share your story and reach prospective volunteers. Our website has a list of current podcast examples by industry

<https://www.australianvolunteers.com/alumni/storyteller-kit/podcasts/>

Radio interviews are another great avenue to share your volunteer story.

Get in touch with us if you have an opportunity to share your volunteer story through a radio or podcast interview so we can offer support

[alumni@australianvolunteers.com](mailto:alumni@australianvolunteers.com)

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# Social media

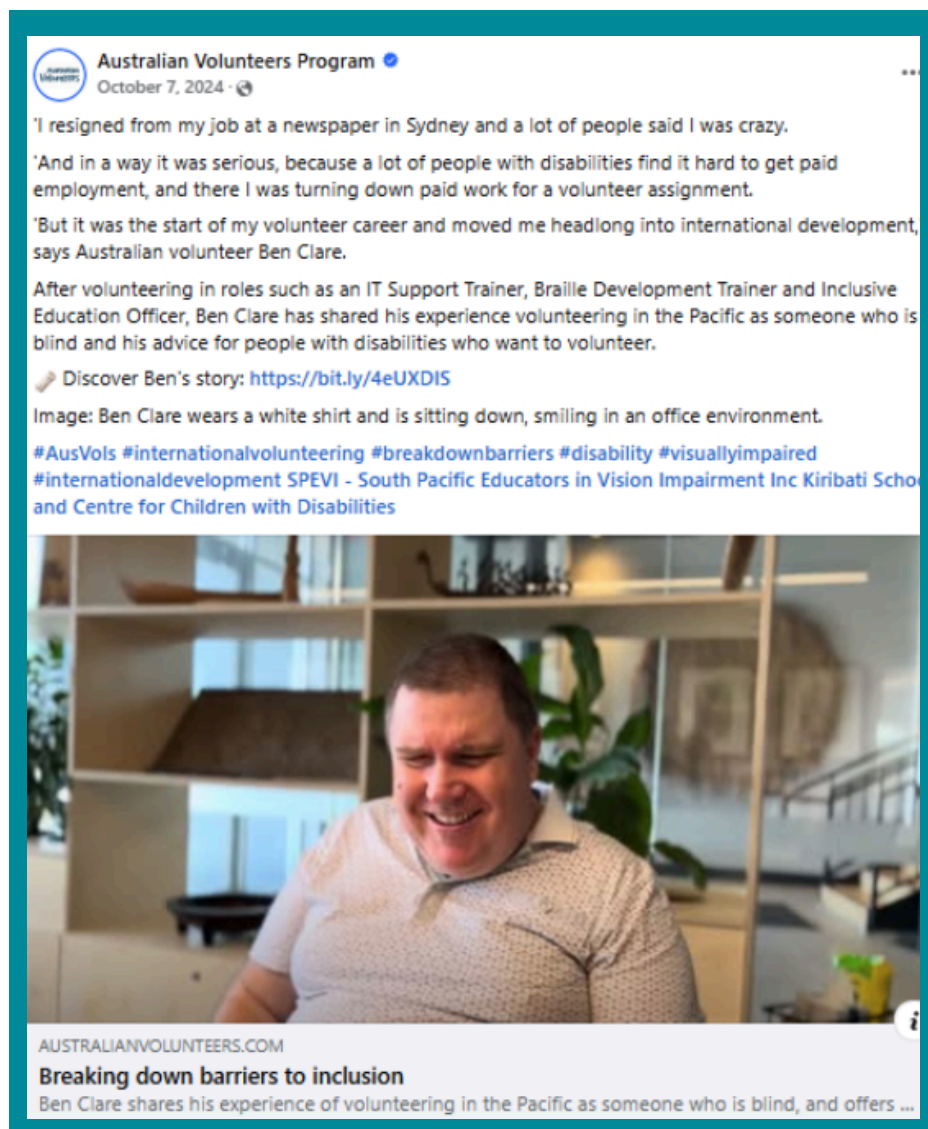
## Australian Volunteers Program social media

Past volunteer stories are often showcased on the Australian Volunteers Program social channels.

<https://www.facebook.com/ausvols>

<https://www.instagram.com/ausvols/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/ausvols/>



Read Alum Ben Clare's Facebook post

Past volunteers are encouraged to share their stories with the Alumni Facebook and LinkedIn groups.

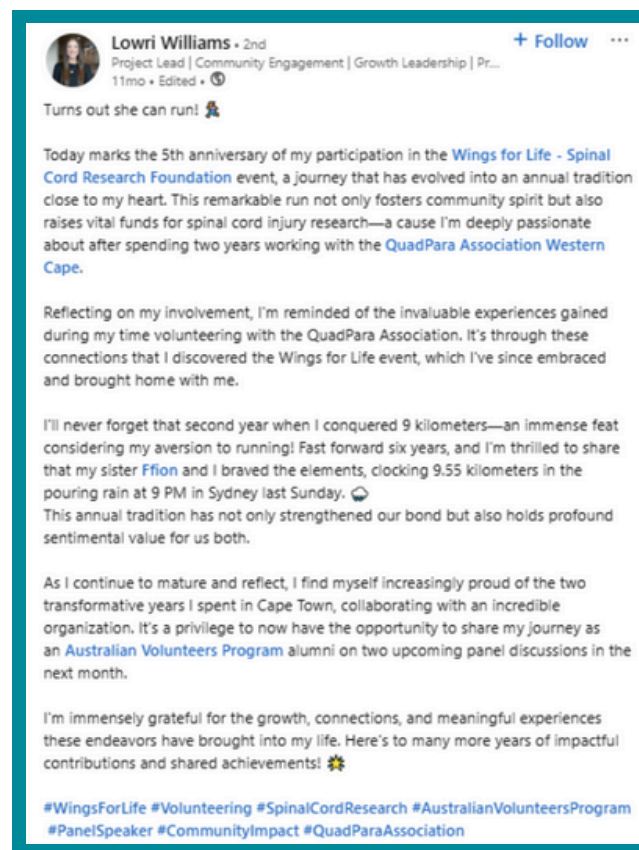


[Alumni Facebook Group](#)



[Alumni LinkedIn Group](#)

LinkedIn is a great networking platform for volunteer stories; it can help connect your audience with organisations, individuals and resources relevant to your volunteer experience.



[Read Alum Lowri's LinkedIn post](#)



*Alum, Nadera sharing her volunteer story at an Alumni/Australia Awards networking event in Naarm, Melbourne.*

#### General social media tips:

- Use hashtags to increase engagement and reach, tag the program on Facebook and LinkedIn #Ausvols
- Keep your post concise
- Consider including a call to action 'learn more, get involved, share your thoughts in the comments'
- Consider the following questions to address in your post: What motivated you to volunteer in your field? Have your volunteer experiences provided you with unique insights or perspectives that you apply to your work or life? Can you share a particularly impactful volunteer moment or project that resonated with you? Was there a local leader who inspired you during your assignment? What were some of the challenges you faced? How did you navigate and overcome them?



*Photo collage of alumni speaking at a range of program events.*

# Australian Volunteers program storyteller register

We hope you are now feeling inspired to share your story!

If any of the storytelling opportunities referred to in this kit are of interest, you can join the Australian Volunteers Program storyteller register.

The storyteller register is one way the program identifies current and past volunteers who are interested in sharing their volunteer stories and connects them with opportunities as they arise.

We'd love to hear from you if you'd like to join the storyteller register, receive support to share your volunteer story or share your volunteer story with us:  
[alumni@australianvolunteers.com](mailto:alumni@australianvolunteers.com)

Happy storytelling!



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# Appendix 1

## Program presentation tips

- Prepare and practice a short self-introduction or elevator pitch. This would include mentioning that you were an Australian volunteer who supported [PO Name] as an [Assignment Title].
- Please refer only to the Australian Volunteers Program, and not to AVI.
- Please refer to yourself as a 'past Australian volunteer'.
- Think about the key messages you'd like to share about your volunteer experience in advance.
  - This is an opportunity to showcase the work and impact of your local colleagues.
- What have you learnt from them and what have you achieved together?
  - Remember to centre your partner in the discussion.

## Program talking points

- The Australian Volunteers Program is an Australian Government initiative, connecting Australians like me with our international development program.
- The Australian Government has supported more than 17,000 Australians to volunteer internationally in more than 50 countries, since the early 1960s.
- The Australian Volunteers Program matches skilled Australians with partner organisations across the Pacific, Asia, and Africa to support them to achieve their own development goals.
- The Australian Volunteers Program is committed to locally led development.
- The program recognises that the most effective development is locally led and locally driven.
- We respect overseas partners' knowledge and expertise and work together towards achieving their development goals.
- There have been many iterations of the Australian Volunteers Program. The Alumni includes past Australian volunteers from all chapters of Australian-Government funded international volunteering programs.
- In print media and interviews, reference yourself as a past Australian volunteer through the Australian Volunteers Program, funded by the Australian Government.
- If an Australian organisation supported you or the PO, you can mention that they were part of the partnership.
- This partnership demonstrates the program's commitment to building long-term, respectful and equitable partnerships between individuals and organisations, and what can be achieved through such partnerships.



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# Appendix 2

## Ethical storytelling guidelines

If you are thinking about writing a book, giving a presentation or sharing your story in any capacity, we recommend following the below ethical guidelines for storytelling.

### Consent

- Always seek permission from individuals before sharing any identifying information or images. This includes obtaining consent from those featured in your photos, videos, or anecdotes. Consent should be clear, informed, and in writing. Provide details about how an individual's photos or stories will be shared, on a website, social media, in a book, at a talk etc.
- You might wish to record written consent in this [consent form template](#)
- Ongoing consent: consent is not a one-time process. Check in with individuals periodically, especially if their circumstances change, or if you plan to share the story in a new context (e.g., on a different platform or event).
- Refrain from telling any stories that involve identifying children.

### Privacy

- Refrain from sharing information that could be harmful or violate someone's privacy, such as health conditions, financial struggles, or personal traumas.
- If individuals prefer to remain anonymous, respect that decision. Ensure any personal identifiers (such as specific locations or other distinguishing details) are not shared.

### Exploitation

- Avoid using someone's difficult situation to gain attention. It is essential to portray people in a dignified and respectful way. Always highlight the resilience, agency, and empowerment of individuals rather than focusing solely on their struggles.
- Be aware of the inherent power dynamics in storytelling. Avoid positioning yourself in the role of a "saviour." Reflect on your role as a collaborator in the community.

### Tell your own story, not someone else's

- Avoid telling someone else's story without their permission or input. Every individual has their own narrative, and sharing it without their voice or consent is disrespectful. If you want to share someone else's story, collaborate with them, allowing them to be an active participant in how the story is told.
- Instead of speaking on behalf of others, aim to amplify their voices. Give them the platform to share their own experiences if they are comfortable doing so. Acknowledge their agency and contribution to the story, making sure it is clear that you are merely sharing a part of their journey.

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### **Avoid stereotypes and stigmatisation**

- Be conscious of the potential for reinforcing harmful stereotypes, especially when telling stories of groups experiencing vulnerabilities. Ensure that the portrayal is nuanced and free from oversimplifications. Avoid language that could perpetuate negative or limiting views about individuals or communities.

### **Respectful language**

- Use inclusive, respectful language that avoids stigmatising or reducing people to labels (e.g., avoid “the vulnerable,” “the disadvantaged”). Frame your story in a way that acknowledges individuals as complex, multifaceted human beings, not just their circumstances.

### **Cultural sensitivity**

- Be aware of cultural nuances and differences when telling stories, particularly when involving individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Avoid misrepresenting or oversimplifying someone’s culture and strive to portray stories with cultural respect and accuracy.
- If telling stories that involve specific communities, cultures, or traditions, consult with individuals from that community to ensure that their portrayal is accurate, respectful, and culturally appropriate.

### **Maintain integrity**

- Ensure that all facts in the story are accurate and verified. Misleading or incorrect information can harm individuals, organisations, and communities, and undermine the credibility of your story.
- Avoid sensationalising stories for dramatic effect. While a story may contain powerful moments, it’s crucial to stay true to the essence of the experience, without exaggerating details or manipulating emotions.

### **Balance emotion and objectivity**

- While storytelling often involves emotional engagement, ensure that emotions are conveyed in an authentic way. Manipulating emotions to elicit a specific response (such as excessive pity or outrage) can undermine the integrity of the story.
- Share stories that reflect the full spectrum of the volunteer experience, not just the most dramatic or heart-wrenching moments. This provides a well-rounded portrayal of both the challenges and successes.

### **Balance perspectives**

- When telling volunteer stories, emphasise the collective nature of volunteer work. Recognise that change happens because of team efforts and collaboration and avoid framing the volunteer as the hero or saviour.
- Acknowledge the broader context in which your volunteer work happened—such as systemic challenges, organisational goals, and community needs. This ensures that stories don’t oversimplify complex social issues.

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# Appendix 3

## General presentation tips

The following points can be a helpful resource when planning a presentation:

- Determine your presentation objectives
- Confirm how long you have to present
- Know your audience, consider their previous knowledge, experience and understanding of international volunteering and the Australian Volunteers Program
- Consider the takeaways you can give your audience:
  - A motivation to volunteer
  - An increased understanding of international volunteering experience
  - An increased understanding of another country and culture
  - Strengthened connections
- Spend time researching your presentation, consider your audience and your objectives to determine what information to include. You might want to include responses to some of the following questions 'what was your most memorable moment, what surprised you most about volunteering, what did you find most challenging, how did you overcome this, what did you learn, what relationships did you gain, what are the lasting impacts of your assignment
- Avoid jargon and acronyms
- Consider relevant calls to action eg encouraging the audience to think about volunteering
- Prepare any visual aids (videos/photos) that will support your presentation and help bring your story to life
- **Practice, practice, practice** – Present in front of a trusted person and ask for their feedback. Ideally rehearse your speech at least three times; this will ensure you are confident with the content, timing and flow of your speech. Practice will make the experience less intimidating
- Make sure you feel confident with the content. If there is anything you don't feel confident presenting, leave it out!
- If you can, use cue cards! Write one main idea or heading on each card. Use larger than normal font, write only on one side, number the cards so you know the order, add notes on the cards to indicate when visual aids are to be shown, practice with your cue cards

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Before the day of your presentation find out about:

- The room layout
- Electronic equipment
- The structure of the event, will you be introduced or will you introduce yourself, will there be time for questions, try to anticipate likely questions and prepare your responses
- Anyone else involved: make time to meet prior to your presentation to ensure everyone is clear on their roles

On the day of your presentation

- It's normal to feel nervous, it can be helpful to channel your nerves into positive energy. Think about your nerves as excitement, instead of telling yourself you're nervous, tell yourself you're excited
- Find a quiet space where you can gather your thoughts, look over your cards, take some slow deep breaths

During your presentation

- **Breathe**, slow breaths will help you feel calm and focused
- **Smile**, this will help you connect with the audience
- **Make eye contact** with people in the audience, this can help you feel at ease and helps the audience connect with you
- **Enjoy**, all your practice has paid off, now is time to give a great presentation

After your presentation consider asking any trusted audience members for feedback.

You might wish to ask the following questions

- Was the presentation enjoyable?
- Did the presentation achieve the objectives you set?
- Was relevant and appropriate information delivered in an engaging manner?
- Was anything missing from the presentation?
- Were the quality and relevance of presentation aids and materials sufficient?
- Are there any ways you could improve the presentation or your presentation skills in general?

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# Appendix 4

## Connecting with your Federal MP

- **Identify Your MP:** Find out who your local Member of Parliament (MP) is for your electorate. You can do this by using the [Parliament of Australia website](#) searching by your postcode.
- **Request a Meeting:** Send an email or letter to your MP's electorate office requesting a meeting. Clearly state your reason for wanting to meet and what you want to discuss.
- **Follow Up:** If you don't hear back within a reasonable timeframe (e.g., ten days), follow up with a phone call to the office to confirm your request was received and express your continued interest. MPs are busy so it might take some time to get an appointment - but you have a right to meet with your elected representative so don't get discouraged.
- **Prepare for the Meeting:** Once your meeting is scheduled, prepare your talking points, gather any relevant information or materials you need and anticipate potential questions your MP might ask.
- **During the Meeting:** Be clear, concise, and respectful. You want to leave your MP with a favourable impression of the Program and its impact on you and the country where you worked.
- **After the Meeting:** Follow up with your MP's office to thank them for their time.

