

INDIGENOUS PATHWAYS

Australian Volunteers

Introduction

Indigenous Australians should have every opportunity to engage with the Australian Volunteers Program and share in the mutual success and benefits realised through volunteering. The Australian Volunteers Program recognises, respects and values the unique identity of Indigenous Australians as Australia's First Peoples and as the traditional custodians of our country.

The Australian Volunteers Program is committed to actively promoting international volunteering opportunities among Indigenous Australians. The proportion of Australian volunteers that identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander varies from year to year. In the 2018/19 financial year, a total of 24 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people volunteered, representing 3.9% of total program volunteers. Out of the 24 Indigenous volunteers, 79% participated in an Indigenous targeted stream, as opposed to 21% who participated in the broader volunteering stream.

Classic Wallabies Indigenous Exchange (CWIE)

The Classic Wallabies Indigenous Exchange (CWIE) was developed under the previous volunteer program's Indigenous Engagement Framework with the aim of providing a smaller defined project with specific opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage with volunteering and serve as a 'feeder' into the broader volunteer program.

AVI delivered CWIE in partnership with the Australian Government, Eidos Institute and the Classic Wallabies through to 2018, when CWIE came under the banner of the Australian Volunteers Program. The CWIE supported 56 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (aged 18 to 35 years old) to undertake five to six week overseas group volunteering assignments between 2014 and 2019.

CWIE review methodology

In 2018 a review of the CWIE was conducted. This review involved a desk review and analysis of secondary data and the collection of primary data through interviews with key program stakeholders including AVI staff, DFAT Post, returned volunteers, and Australian and overseas partners. A short survey for returned volunteers was developed and used to obtain information on the experience of volunteers involved in the CWIE program.

CWIE review key findings

The 2018 CWIE review found that the exchange program was valued by stakeholders, increased appreciation of the value of volunteering and supported the personal and professional development of volunteers. Volunteers found CWIE to be a transformative and life-changing personal experience that provided the opportunity to connect with each other and share their experience as First Nations people and learn from the experiences of South African people. Participants in the program gained a positive introduction and exposure to the world of development and international volunteering.

The 2018 CWIE review provided a set of key recommendations to inform future program design:

- Recruit an Indigenous Programs Coordinator.
- Develop a program logic to clarify the program purpose, outcomes and focus.
- Map multiple streams that can engage Indigenous people in volunteering (professional, leadership, vocational, sport or student streams) with access to both short and long-term assignments.
- Expand to Asia and the Pacific and map potential countries (preferably enabling Indigenous-to-Indigenous linkages).
- Create new partnerships, inclusive of Indigenous community organisations.
- Engage the Indigenous community and past volunteers to promote the program and expand its visibility and reach.
- Engage returned volunteers through a strengthened network (that links with the Returned Australian Volunteer Network).
- Outline a phased approach to implement expanded activities.

New program design

Following on from the CWIE review, a new position of Indigenous Programs Coordinator (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identified position) was created and this staff member worked with consultant Tony Kiessler (Arrernte nation), to co-design a new Indigenous program in 2019.

The design of the new Indigenous program built on previous research, reviews and consultations with key stakeholders and returned Indigenous volunteers, about Indigenous participation in volunteering. The design was additionally informed by the Australian Volunteers Program Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and DFAT's Indigenous Peoples Strategy. The new program design report was delivered in October 2019. Recognising the importance of streams and pathways into volunteering (a key recommendation of the 2018 CWIE Review), the new program design was named Indigenous Pathways.

Acknowledgements

The CWIE 2018 Review was carried out by Jessica Gillmor of Whitelum Group. Alice Tamang and Tony Kiessler conducted the redesign of Indigenous targeted activities in 2019. The Australian Volunteers Program would like to thank all who have been involved in the CWIE, including the 56 returned volunteers, and those who participated in the redesign process.

Indigenous Pathways Framework

The Indigenous Pathways Framework will serve as a comprehensive Indigenous engagement strategy for the Australian Volunteers Program. Indigenous Pathways aims to expand previous Indigenous-targeted activities with both targeted initiatives and mainstreaming to diversify offerings, create closer ties to community and actively increase Indigenous participation. Activities will focus on reducing barriers to engagement through inclusive, equitable, flexible and strengths-based approaches and support.

Indigenous Pathways is a component stream within the broader Australian Volunteers Program and integrates into the broader goals and objectives of the program. Indigenous inclusion through equitable, inclusive and strengths-based approaches, aligns directly with the broader program outcomes under the third program goal, through which the program also implicitly benefits from increased diversity and inclusivity.

The Indigenous Pathways Framework offers three pathways into volunteering for Indigenous Australians, increasing the variety of opportunities through which people-to-people links can be forged between volunteers and communities. Expanding the program to provide multiple streams was a key recommendation in the 2018 CWIE Review, noting that a variety of pathways within the program could attract a more diverse range of potential Indigenous volunteers and leverage their specific skills and experience.

Vision: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture are celebrated as an integral part of the Australian Volunteers Program through inclusive, equitable, flexible and strength-based approaches

