

# WHAT'S THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING ON VOLUNTEERS' LIVES? A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEERS

## Introduction

The five plus five-year timeframe of the Australian Volunteers Program offers the opportunity to set up a long-term study of volunteers' experiences and what happens after volunteers complete their assignment.

In 2019 the program commenced working with academic researchers to identify and follow a small group of Australian volunteers, broadly representative of the range of Australians who volunteer through the program, and understand how they are gaining professionally and personally as a result of the program.

The longitudinal study directly relates to the outcome area of the Australian Volunteers Program that: 'Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally'; 'Volunteers (current and returned) promote greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections between partner countries and Australia'; and more broadly and longer-term, that 'Australians are more globally literate and connected.'

Specific objectives of the study are:

- To provide an in-depth, qualitative assessment of the extent to which the program is achieving its intermediate and end-of-program outcomes related to Australian volunteers.
- To assess to what extent the personal and professional benefits of the program experienced by volunteers are sustained over time.
- To gain insights into volunteers' experiences of volunteering to inform the program's volunteer support strategies.
- To provide evidence and case studies for use in the program's public diplomacy messaging and materials.

## Methodology

The first phase of the study is from April to September 2019, and focuses on recruiting a sample of volunteers to take part in the study, understanding who they are and their motivations for volunteering, and getting some initial feedback from them on their experiences of the recruitment and on-boarding process. The second phase of the study will keep tracking the same group of volunteers over time.

The study design was informed by a detailed literature review. The primary data collection method is qualitative, through semi-structured interviews with the volunteers. A feature of the design is the use of interpretive longitudinal qualitative interviews that will encourage participants to reflect on and collaborate with the interviewer in making sense of their experiences.

The first round of interviews were conducted by the researchers prior to, or soon after, the participants' commencement of their assignment.

The study initially aimed to recruit approximately 60 participants. The sampling strategy is not to seek statistical relevance but instead to provide detailed qualitative data. All volunteers who attended Pre-Departure Briefings in Melbourne between April and July 2019 were invited to participate in the study. Volunteers who were interested contacted the researchers directly to take part in the study.

The study is being managed according to strict ethical principles. This means only the researchers will know the identity of the participating volunteers, unless the volunteer gives explicit consent for the researchers to identify them to the program. The project has been approved by the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee.

To ensure participants in the study stay engaged, summary findings from each round of data collection will be shared with them, through a dedicated project website set up by the researchers.

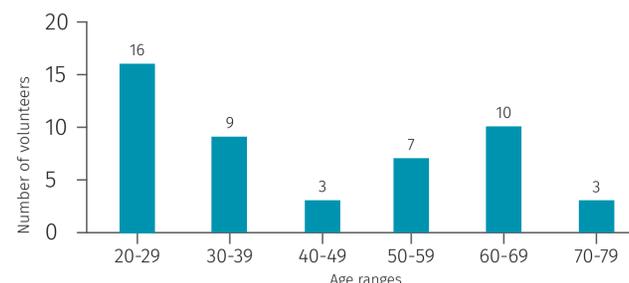
## Key Findings

As the longitudinal study is only just beginning it is too early to present any key findings from the research. However, we can present some details of who the Australian volunteers who are participating in the study and who will be the focus of the research for the coming years.

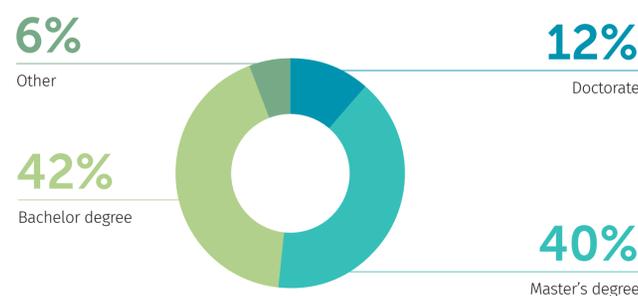
**55 participants: 64% women, 31% men, 2% prefer to self-describe (4% not yet provided)**

Three participants identified as having a disability (5%). Five participants speak a language other than English at home (9%). One participant identified as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (2%).

### Age at pre-departure



### Qualifications

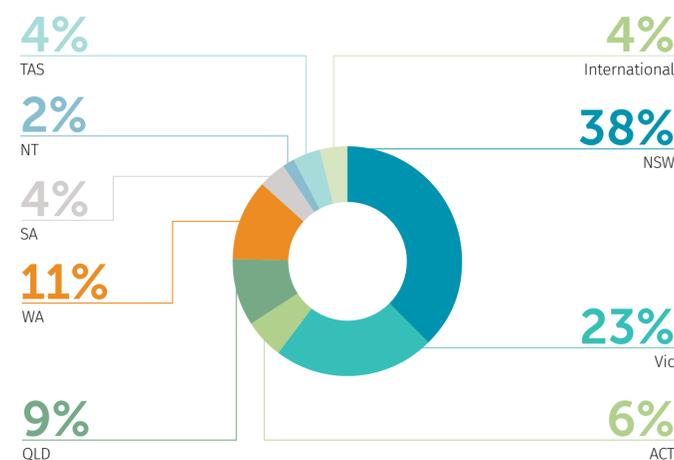


### Past international experience

For 58% this is their first volunteer assignment; 42% are repeat volunteers. 84% have lived overseas previously and 16% have not.



### Volunteers come from across Australia



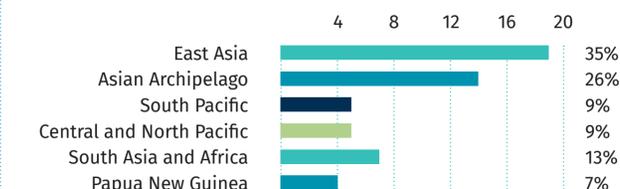
### And from



### And are going on assignments to:



### Number and proportion per region



## What's next?

Findings from the first phase of the study will be available in October 2019.

Participating volunteers will be interviewed again while they are on their assignment, shortly after the end of their assignment, then annually for two years afterwards (plus additional years if the contract with DFAT is extended). Some questions will be repeated each year to provide continuity, but other parts of the data collection will focus on more specific topics. Each year will have a slightly different focus, agreed in advance to provide the most useful material for the program.

An annual Returned Australian Volunteers Network (RAVN) online survey will also be carried out, beginning in FY2019/20 and sampling from the network of 7,000 members. Data collected through the RAVN survey will complement the more in-depth qualitative data collected through the longitudinal study.

## Acknowledgements

The Australian Volunteers Program is funded by the Australian Government. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers is being conducted by an international team of experts managed through the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Business School, led by Dr Anthony Fee (University Technology Sydney) and Dr Peter Devereux (Murdoch University), with Ms Helene Perold (expert adviser, South Africa), Dr Cliff Allum (expert adviser University of Birmingham, UK), and Dr Phoebe Everingham (University of Newcastle).