



# AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEERS PROGRAM ALUMNI STRATEGY

2022-2027

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*In memory of David Bathur*

*We would like to acknowledge the contribution David Bathur made to global volunteering through his own volunteer assignment, and through a range of projects he worked on with the Australian Volunteers Program. David was passionate about communication, skilled volunteering and supporting locally led development.*

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide a strategic framework for the planning and implementation of the Australian Volunteers Program's Alumni. The strategy supports the Australian Volunteers Program to achieve two of its end of program outcomes:

- **Key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries appreciate the value of volunteering**
- **Program participants gain greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries.**

The Australian Volunteers Program recognises the unique identity and shared experiences of past volunteers, and the valuable skills and knowledge they can contribute to the program.

Drawing on a strong legacy of DFAT's people-to-people programs and the success of the Returned Australian Volunteer Network (RAVN), this strategy outlines a refreshed Alumni program providing volunteers with enhanced opportunities for connection and cultural awareness, professional development, and meaningful ways to promote the value of volunteering.

Our approach will empower past volunteers to drive a network that speaks to the needs and ambitions of its members, while supporting them to be strong ambassadors for the Australian Volunteers Program. This approach recognises that volunteers are powerful advocates for the program and global volunteering more broadly.

The purpose of this strategy is to:

- Define the core strategic objectives of the Alumni program
- Define the key stakeholders the Alumni is seeking to engage
- Define the thematic areas of the Alumni program
- Outline priorities for Alumni activities and communications

This document will inform annual planning of Alumni activities. It is a living document that will be reviewed and updated as required to align with the program's Global Program Strategy, Program Logic and Public Diplomacy and Communications Strategy, and ensure it meets the evolving needs of the Alumni's stakeholders.

The Alumni is guided by the Australian Volunteers Program's principles, which ensure that we work in ways that:

- Value volunteering
- Support locally led capacity strengthening
- Build strong relationships and partnerships
- Evolve best practice and embrace innovation
- Enhance diversity and inclusion
- Ensure accountability and value learning

## 2. Alumni objectives

The Alumni seeks to support the Australian Volunteers Program to achieve its end of program outcomes. Specifically, the Alumni's objectives are to:

- Support past volunteers to advocate for the program and increase awareness and appreciation of the **value of volunteering**.
- Provide past volunteers opportunities to increase **cultural awareness** and maintain **connections across countries**.
- Provide **professional and personal development opportunities** to Alumni members.

### 3. Alumni name and brand

More than 17,000 Australians have been supported by the Australian Government to volunteer internationally since the early 1960s. The experience is often life-changing for the volunteers – they form lasting relationships with their colleagues and communities, and value ways to stay connected with fellow volunteers and the volunteer program. Most recently the Australian Volunteers Program has engaged past volunteers through the Returned Australian Volunteer Network (RAVN).

Since the introduction of remote volunteering, there are now members of the Alumni who do not 'return' to Australia following the completion of their assignments. A new and inclusive name, able to **foster a sense of belonging for all members**, was needed for the network. It was important for the name to reflect all volunteering modalities and be clearly identifiable for all stakeholders, now and in the future.

Following extensive consultation, the new name that has been chosen for the network is the **Australian Volunteers Program Alumni** and it will be **commonly referred to as the Alumni**.

Alumni is a globally recognised word. It suggests shared experiences, people who participate or are members of a shared program, and people who have a former association with an organisation or program.

Alumni is inclusive of all volunteering modalities and all participants of the program. At the same time, it provides a sense of being a member of a special group – people who have undertaken global volunteering for development.

### 4. Key stakeholders

Alumni members are any individuals who have participated in an Australian Government funded volunteer program. Since the 1960s, more than 17,000 individuals have been supported to volunteer in more than 50 countries. The Alumni is made up of professionals with a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. Currently, there over 7,500 active Alumni members globally who receive digital communications from the Alumni and the program.

#### **Volunteers with diverse backgrounds**

Consistent with the program's commitment to diversity and inclusion, the Alumni aims to be inclusive of people with disability; people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); people from diverse socio-economic, religious and cultural backgrounds; and people of all ages. Alumni activities will be designed to be accessible to all members and a range of strategies will be developed to support increased accessibility.

#### **Indigenous Volunteers**

The Alumni is committed to engaging past Indigenous volunteers, and supporting the outcomes set out in the Indigenous Pathways Framework. The Alumni strives to achieve strong engagement with past Indigenous volunteers and support increased participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in international volunteer assignments.

Past Indigenous volunteers are best placed to understand the challenges and benefits experienced by Indigenous volunteers and can offer valuable support and advice. The Alumni has a National Indigenous Alumni Representative role within the Alumni representative team to help create engaging, culturally safe and accessible activities and opportunities for Indigenous volunteers and the broader Alumni community.

#### **Alumni Representatives**

Alumni Representatives are central to the success of the Alumni's volunteer led approach. Alumni Representatives voluntarily lead networking events across Australia, support program advocacy and help to engage past volunteers in Alumni and program activities.

Alumni representatives will continue to lead the work of the Alumni to ensure it is volunteer led. This approach is key to the success of delivering an engaging and relevant program and helping to achieve the Alumni objectives.

## Other stakeholders

Stakeholders	Description
Partner organisations (POs)	Past volunteers often maintain strong connections with their partner organisations. The Alumni seeks to support these ongoing connections and recognises the value these connections can offer partner organisations.
Australian organisations (AOs)	Past volunteers are encouraged to promote global volunteering within their professional networks. The Alumni will pursue opportunities to engage the program's partner AOs in its activities.
Australian Government	Relevant Ministers, Members of Parliament and Senators
DFAT	DFAT (including State and Territory offices) DFAT people-to-people programs (Australia Awards, New Colombo Plan)
Potential volunteers	Word of mouth and hearing from past volunteers continues to play an important role in engaging potential volunteers with the program.
International development and global volunteering sectors	Australian and international development organisations, NGOs, INGOs, academic and development policy institutions. Global network of international volunteering organisations and the broader international development community.
Australian Volunteers Program staff	The Australian Volunteers Program staff support the work of the Alumni and help to facilitate connections between volunteers and other key program stakeholders.

## 5. Thematic areas

The Alumni's core thematic areas have been determined through consultations with past volunteers, program staff, Indigenous Advisory Panel members, international volunteer sending agencies, and other DFAT people-to-people programs (New Colombo Plan and Australia Awards). Data collected through RAVN surveys has also informed the strategy.

The Alumni's three thematic areas are:

- Valuing volunteering
- Connections and cultural awareness
- Personal and professional development

By focusing on these thematic areas, the Alumni will achieve its objectives and contribute to the program delivering its end of program outcomes. They are interconnected and many Alumni activities respond to more than one of the thematic areas.

### 5.1 Valuing volunteering

Valuing volunteering is a guiding principle of the Australian Volunteers Program and a key focus for the Alumni. Alumni members share a commitment to volunteering. Ninety-six per cent of volunteers highly value the role of volunteering in development<sup>1</sup>. The Alumni will continue to provide a range of activities that enable past volunteers to support and advocate for global volunteering.

Past volunteers will be supported to share their volunteer experience with their personal and professional networks to build awareness and participation in the program by a diverse cohort of Australians and more Australian organisations. Alumni members have expressed interest in accessing opportunities in the following areas:

- local Australian volunteering
- attracting and supporting new volunteers
- sharing experiences and knowledge with the program
- providing ongoing support and continuing to engage with partner organisations.

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<sup>1</sup> Returned Australian Volunteer Network Survey, 2021

### **Local Australian volunteering**

The Alumni strategy will foster a culture of volunteering that celebrates individuals' civic participation, both locally and globally. Local and global volunteering contributes to the realisation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which is the overarching goal of the program. The Alumni will facilitate opportunities for members to connect with Australian volunteer organisations to continue their volunteer journey locally and contribute towards local social justice outcomes. By supporting locally led change in Australia, the Alumni reflects the program's guiding principle of supporting locally led development.

### **Support and mentor new volunteers**

Alumni members are uniquely positioned to promote the program within their networks by sharing their volunteering experience, and to support the recruitment of new volunteers. Past volunteers will be supported to promote the program to their personal and professional networks through activities such as conference participation and meeting potential volunteers. The Alumni will facilitate opportunities for past volunteers to support new volunteers across a range of activities, such as communities of practice and mentoring.

### **Share experiences and knowledge with the program**

The Alumni is volunteer led and will continue to seek input and feedback from volunteers to help determine relevant activities that will meet their needs and contribute to achieving the Alumni objectives. Members of the Alumni will have opportunities to share their experiences and knowledge with the program through research projects, volunteer surveys, consultations, as well as speaking and media engagements.

### **Provide support and engage with partner organisations**

Many past volunteers continue to support and engage with their partner organisations following the completion of their volunteer assignments. This ongoing support is often organic and thrives due to the strong, mutually beneficial relationships that have been established during an assignment. This support often does not require a formalised agreement and works best as an informal arrangement. The Alumni recognises these informal mentoring relationships and will celebrate and acknowledge these by sharing stories on Alumni social media channels and in other communications.

## **5.2 Connections and cultural awareness**

This thematic area reflects one of the Australian Volunteers Program's key end of program outcomes; *Program participants gain greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries*<sup>2</sup>. The Alumni's focus on connections is underpinned by the program's guiding principle that highlights the importance of building strong relationships and partnerships.

Connections are essential to the success of the Australian Volunteers Program and the Alumni, and mutually beneficial people-to-people relationships are highly valued by Alumni members. Ninety-three per cent of past volunteers express a stronger sense of connection to the people and the country where they volunteered<sup>3</sup>.

Strong collaborative relationships are core to the success of the Alumni. Research conducted by the program through a longitudinal study of volunteers<sup>4</sup> found that connections between volunteers are often the strongest connections formed, both during and after an assignment. Strong bonds between volunteers are formed through shared experiences with people who often hold shared values and beliefs. The Alumni recognises the importance of relationships between volunteers and the benefits of maintaining a strong identity and sense of pride among Alumni members. The Alumni is well positioned to support ongoing connections as well as facilitate new connections between members of the alumni and key program stakeholders across program countries.

By participating in the program, volunteers gain connections with communities and organisations in different countries; they connect with Australia's aid program and a network of likeminded people who share the value of volunteering. The Alumni is committed to supporting these connections to continue beyond the completion of a volunteer assignment. This will be achieved through a range of activities designed to bring people together across countries and locations to share their experiences and knowledge and build further relationships.

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2 Australian Volunteers Program Refreshed Program Logic, November 2021

3 Returned Australian Volunteer Network Survey, 2021

4 Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers, 2019-21

The Alumni will support connections between past volunteers, prospective volunteers, partner organisations, Australian organisations, international agencies, local volunteering agencies and Australian Awardees and New Colombo Plan alumni.

A Members of Parliament engagement program will connect past volunteers with their federal member or senator to create opportunities for public diplomacy activities, while raising the profile of the program with parliamentarians. The program will also offer MPs the opportunity to recognise volunteers' contributions to the Australian aid program (for example, by meeting with volunteers after their assignment or issuing a Certificate of Service).

Connections across countries will be celebrated by the Alumni by the sharing of stories. Past volunteers and partner organisations will be encouraged to share stories about successful collaborations as one means of effective program advocacy. This will support the program's Public Diplomacy and Communications storytelling approach to empower volunteers to become credible and commanding advocates of the program and Australian aid more broadly.

When possible, partner organisation staff and past volunteers will be invited to attend Alumni events as guests and speakers, to strengthen cross-cultural connections and increase opportunities for a mutual knowledge exchange. Program in-country staff will play a key role in helping to inform the design of these events, due to their strong relationships with partner organisations and volunteers.

Regional, remote and internationally based alumni members will have opportunities to connect with the program, key stakeholders and other alumni through online events, activities and program communications.

Communication is key to facilitate connections with volunteers and stakeholders, and a strong communication schedule will help to ensure information is accessible to a global audience and will also help to foster more connections between past volunteers, irrespective of their location.

Online engagement will continue through email newsletters, Facebook and LinkedIn accounts. Audiences will have access to information relating to events and activities taking place across all locations.

The Alumni will support established connections and new connections through a range of specifically designed activities, such as the program's Global Webinar Series, communities of practice, mentoring, program events and participation in Impact Fund projects.

### 5.3 Personal and professional development

The Australian Volunteers Program is guided by principles that support locally led capacity strengthening and ensure accountability and value learning. These principles are reflected in the Alumni's thematic area of personal and professional development which will foster a culture of learning and reflection through a range of professional development activities.

Personal and professional development are important to the success of volunteer experiences, and 92% of past volunteers reported that they developed skills through volunteering<sup>5</sup>. The Alumni is committed to ensuring that this learning and growth continues after the completion of a volunteer assignment.

Professional development opportunities will be offered across a wide range of sectors, with a core focus on international development. Members of the Alumni are committed to international development, with 91% of past volunteers expressing an interest in international aid and development<sup>6</sup>. Providing professional development opportunities focussed on international development will enhance the skill set and knowledge of volunteers who are well placed to make ongoing contributions to the program and Alumni.

The Alumni supports the ongoing mutual exchange of knowledge between past volunteers and partner organisations. Collaborative professional development opportunities will be facilitated by the Alumni and help to strengthen a mutual exchange of knowledge. The Alumni will also pursue opportunities to collaborate with value-based humanitarian organisations to promote humanitarian events, education, and training opportunities.

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<sup>5</sup> Returned Australian Volunteer Network Survey, 2021

<sup>6</sup> Returned Australian Volunteer Network Survey, 2021



The Alumni aims to support members to be responsible global citizens: to continually strengthen their cross-cultural awareness and connections, to contribute towards the Sustainable Development Goals and support the locally driven work of partner organisations.

Alumni members will have access to a range of personal and professional development activities. These may include online training, contributions and attendance at Alumni events, contributions to Alumni stories, sharing experiences with new volunteers at pre-departure briefings, access to information about local Australian volunteering opportunities, advocating for the program with personal networks and attending conferences. Conference participation is a mutually beneficial professional development activity. Past volunteers attending a conference in their professional field and sharing their volunteer experiences benefits their professional development and helps to promote the program to a broader audience.

## 6. Monitoring and evaluation

The program's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, including measuring progress to achieving the program's end of program outcomes, applies to the Alumni's activities.

The Alumni will also monitor progress against its key objectives to determine its effectiveness and identify opportunities for continual improvement. Alumni members will be consulted to ensure the monitoring approaches are accessible and relevant.

To effectively measure the success of the Alumni, indicators will be developed and identifying questions will be asked to help measure Alumni engagement with diverse populations, including Indigenous volunteers, volunteers with disability and/or diverse SOGIESC.

The monitoring and evaluation priorities are to:

- develop measures for alumni activities
- continue bi-annual alumni surveys to gather insights on alumni engagement and outcomes
- evaluate outcomes against the Alumni's objectives.

## 7. Implementation

The successful implementation of this strategy will be achieved through a collaborative approach between program staff and past volunteers, in particular the Alumni Representatives. The Alumni team consists of an Alumni Manager and an Alumni Coordinator who sit within the Public Diplomacy team.

Alumni Representatives are central to the success of this strategy. The Alumni Representative team is made up of past volunteers located in cities and towns across Australia. They will be closely supported by the Alumni Manager and Alumni Coordinator to lead a range of activities and events.

The National Indigenous Alumni Representative role will help to support the successful delivery of the Alumni outcomes identified in the Indigenous Pathways Framework. This role will be closely supported by both the Alumni team and the program's Inclusion team. When appropriate, advice from the Indigenous Advisory Panel will be sought to help ensure the alumni achieves its objectives set out within the Indigenous Pathways Framework.

Program in-country teams will be key to the successful implementation of this strategy - in particular the Alumni objective to provide past volunteers opportunities to increase **cultural awareness** and maintain **connections across countries**.

Over the course of this strategy, the Alumni team will work to strengthen collaborations with in-country teams, including sharing of regular communications and updates on Alumni activities. These collaborations will be responsive and flexible to ensure they are mutually beneficial for partner organisations and past volunteers.

This strategy has been designed to provide clear strategic direction while also allowing flexibility for the Alumni to evolve overtime, in response to changes taking place across the program.