

Australian
Volunteers

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Australian Volunteers Program
Annual Report

July 2024 – June 2025



Cover: Papua New Guinea – Goli Gabi (left) Corporate Receptionist, with Australian volunteer Business Development Mentor Lydia Jovero at the National St John Ambulance Council in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

Inside cover: Kiribati – Traditional houses in Kiribati.



Contents

1	Executive summary	4
2	About the program	12
3	About this report	14
4	Operating context	15
5	Lessons learnt	16
6	Management actions and forward priorities	19
	Case Study: Strengthening communities through sport in Tonga	21
7	Progress towards outcomes	22
7.1	Supporting the development outcomes of partner organisations	23
	Focus Area 1: Grow strong relationships and partnerships	31
	Case Study: Empowering business and tourism in Sri Lanka	34
7.2	Promoting the value of volunteering	35
	Focus Area 2: Enhance diversity and inclusion	41
	Case Study: Empowering communities through tourism in the Philippines	44
7.3	Supporting program participants to gain greater cultural awareness	45
	Focus Area 3: Ensure accountability and value learning	56
	Case Study: Building resilience in Fiji	58
7.4	Program foundations	59

1 | Executive summary

The Australian Volunteers Program contributes significantly to the Australian Government's efforts to facilitate and nurture people-to-people connections and collaboration within our region and beyond. By providing skilled volunteers to support partner organisations overseas, the program enables a diverse range of Australians to contribute to positive change that is locally-owned and led.

In 2024-25 the program was strongly focused on growing the number of assignments delivered in-country across the full range of 26 program countries, with an emphasis on the Pacific region. Following several years in which the pandemic and then a combination of budget constraints and rising costs impacted the program's capacity to implement at scale, the challenge in this year was to quickly build up a pipeline of quality assignments to be delivered largely in-country.

A total of 508 assignments were supported during the year, including 404 that were either fully in-country or hybrid (combining in-country with a remote component) – 34% more in-country and hybrid assignments than the previous year. With corresponding increases in partner and volunteer satisfaction, and sound evidence that assignments contributed to progress against partner objectives, this was an excellent result.

It was, however, challenging to shift the program to once again implement at scale in-country. At a practical level, the timeframes to onboard new partner organisations and conduct due diligence, combined with the time required to recruit, onboard and mobilise volunteers meant that deployments were heavily weighted to the second half of the financial year. Some countries and regions, particularly in the Pacific, required longer timeframes so the mobilisation of volunteers was slower than expected.

Concurrently, following the launch of the refreshed Global Program Strategy 2024-27 in late 2024, the

program aimed to continually improve the quality and impact of assignments through engaging Australian organisations and networks, including First Nations people and organisations. This not only ensures assignments are well targeted to draw on the knowledge and skills that Australia can offer, it also facilitates enduring relationships between organisations. This year, the program proudly commenced a project that will see the first reciprocal exchange of volunteers between organisations in the Torres Strait and Solomon Islands.

The Independent Evaluation of the program conducted during the year found strong evidence of progress towards end of program outcomes and a consistent focus on delivering effective partnerships and volunteer assignments. It also recommended actions to further strengthen the program's support for the Australian Government's strategic priorities at country level. Recognising that the program is just one component of the government's support in each country, teams engaged with Posts to seek greater alignment with the Australian Government's Development Partnership Plans and to provide opportunities for Posts to celebrate the joint achievements of volunteers and partner organisations at country level.

The value of volunteering continued to be promoted across social media and through a variety of in-person and online events. In Australia, events brought together program alumni and Australia Awards scholars to share their experiences living and working across different cultures. International Volunteer Day was again used



Left. Cambodia – Partner organisation SHE Investments is a social enterprise that designed and delivered the first and only gender-focused and culturally tailored business incubator and accelerator programs for women in Cambodia. **Right. Laos** – Australian volunteer Lorise Clark (left) works as an English Proficiency Trainer and Curriculum Development Mentor at the Faculty of Economics and Tourism, Souphanouvong University in Luang Prabang, Laos.

to celebrate the impact of program volunteers, with a strong social media campaign and a wide range of events in Australia and in-country.

Program Highlights

Throughout 2024-25, the Australian Volunteers Program aimed to steadily increase the number of in-country and hybrid volunteer assignments across all program countries in line with the approach articulated in the Global Program Strategy. Evidence collected and analysed demonstrates positive outcomes for partner organisations and program participants – during the year, and over the longer term. Program highlights include:

- Supporting **297 partner organisations** in 25 countries through **508 volunteer assignments**, including 229 in-country, 175 hybrid and 104 remote assignments. Ninety per cent of partner organisations reported good or excellent progress in achieving the objectives of the assignment.
- Supporting **442 volunteers** and 29 approved accompanying dependents, including 335 volunteers who started their assignment in 2024-25. Eighty-seven per cent of volunteers were satisfied or very satisfied with the program overall.
- Undertaking an **in-depth analysis of hybrid assignments** to understand how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of this modality.
- Awarding **five small grants** of up to \$10,000 to partner organisations with a primary focus on gender equality and women's rights who worked with an Australian volunteer to design and/or implement the project.
- Working with **26 Australian organisations** to support almost 20% of all assignments, including 16 Australian organisations in a range of sectors from academia to urban planning who referred candidates to fill 13% of all assignments.
- Conducting a review of contributions to partner organisations working on **SDG 4: Quality Education**. Over the course of the program, almost one-quarter of all assignments and partner organisations have had an education focus.
- Providing **seven global webinar events attended by 262 participants**, including partner organisations, volunteers and program staff, on topics including the Sustainable Development Goals in action, disability inclusion, climate change, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion.
- Supporting **two online learning and knowledge sharing initiatives** for multiple partners across the Central and North Pacific region in the areas of grant writing and fundraising, and Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion.
- Delivering another successful **International Volunteer Day**, with the theme 'Hope in Action' across 20 countries including Australia.
- Facilitating relationships and connections to design and commence the program's first reciprocal volunteer assignments for knowledge exchange under the **Indigenous Pathways** program.
- Supporting around **140 partner organisations** to prepare and adopt policies for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Abuse and Harassment that meet DFAT's standards.
- Implementing **two research activities** to provide evidence and insights into the program's longer-term impact on volunteers and on the capacity of partner organisations.
- Adjusting volunteer recruitment processes and systems through the lenses of disability, gender diversity, Indigenous Australians and people from non-English speaking backgrounds to **increase accessibility and reduce barriers to participation**.

July 2024 to June 2025 at a glance

297

partner organisations
supported by

442

volunteers delivering

508

assignments

229 in-country assignments

175 hybrid assignments

104 remote assignments

Total budget

\$26.8M

About volunteer assignments

353

assignments started
this year

155

assignments continued
from previous years

276

assignments completed
during the year



79%

of volunteers reported good or excellent
progress against assignment objectives



91%

of volunteers were satisfied or very
satisfied with the program

About volunteers

61.1%

women

38.7%

men

0.2%

self-describe

20-80 years old

volunteers were aged from 20 years old to 80 years old

2.0%

volunteers identify as having a disability

1.1%

volunteers identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

29

approved accompanying dependents

About partner organisations

Location of partners



46%

Pacific and Timor-Leste

45%

Asia

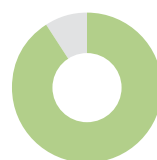
9%

Africa



90%

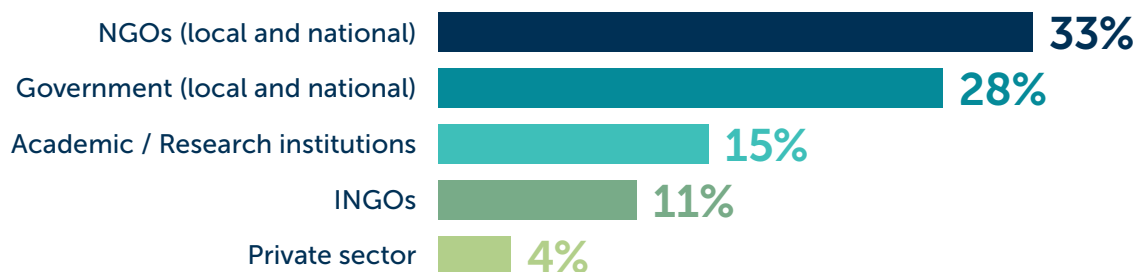
of partner organisations reported good or excellent progress against assignment objectives



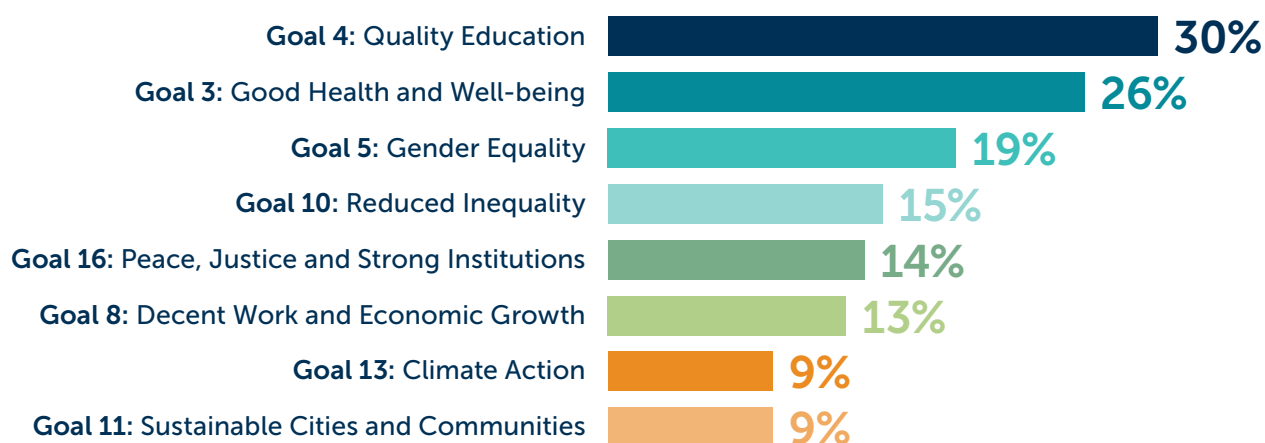
91%

of partner organisations were satisfied or very satisfied with the volunteer assignment

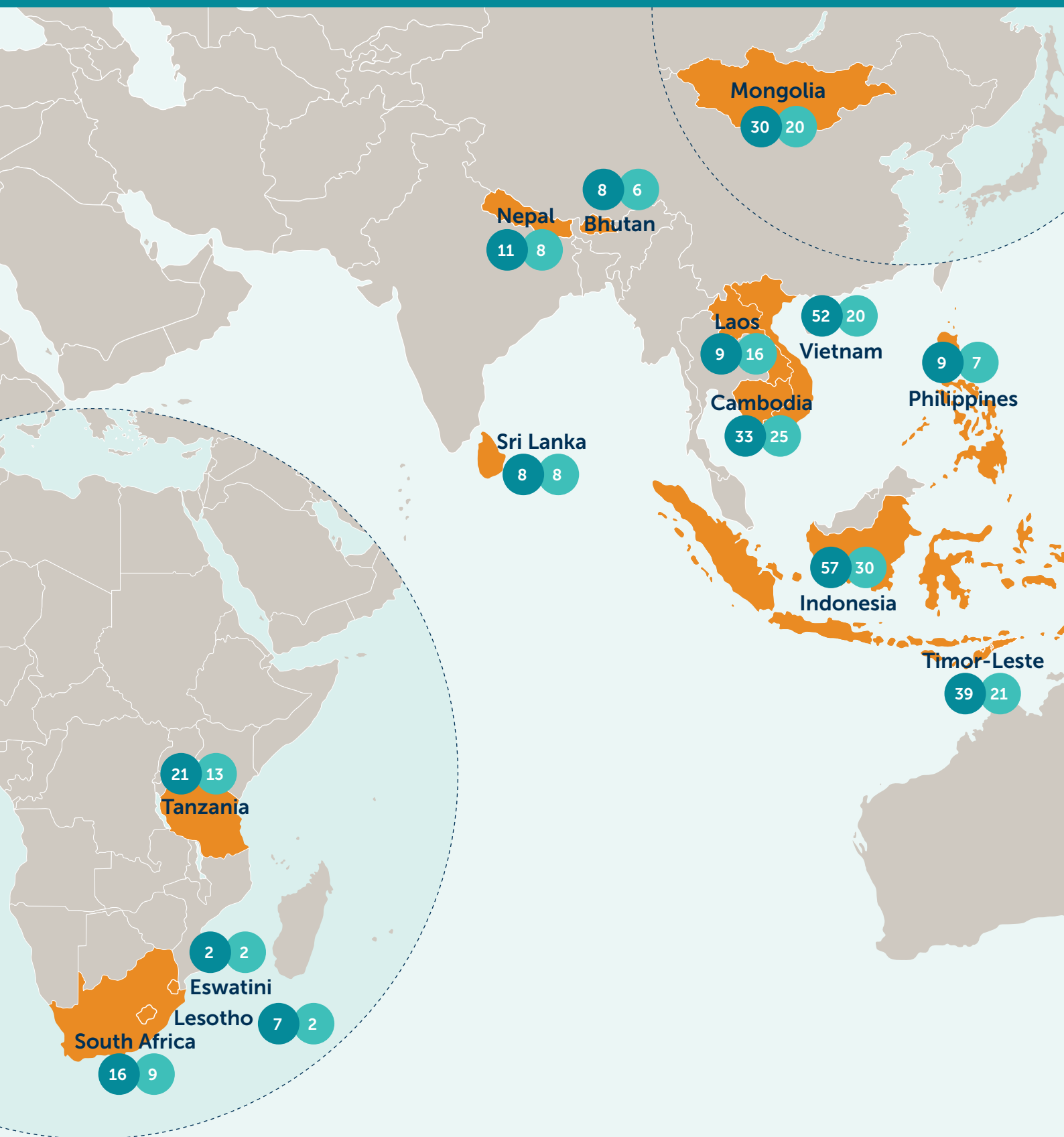
Partner organisations

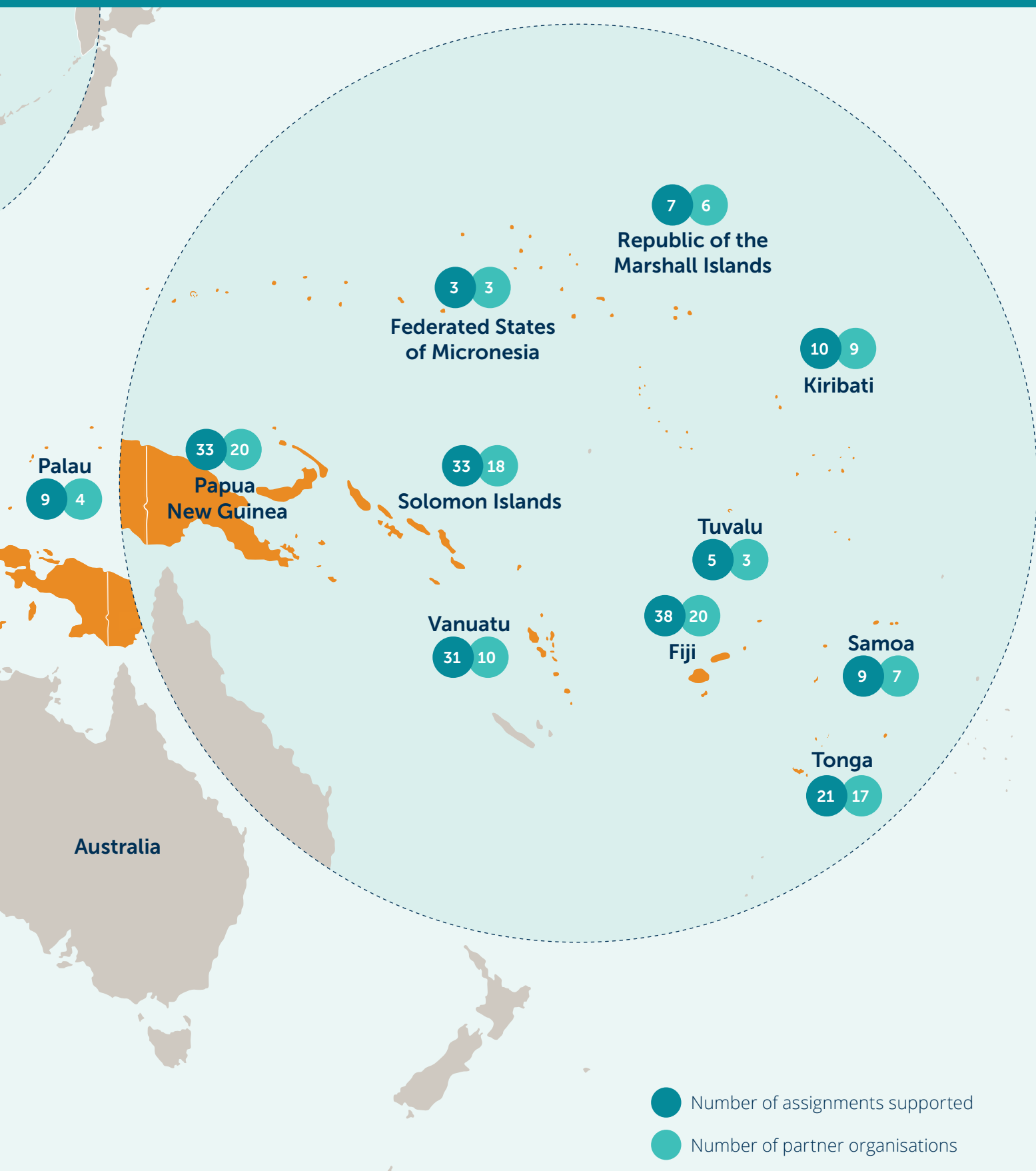


Most common SDGs that partners contribute to



Where we operate (2024-2025)





Eight years at a glance (2018-2025)

1202

partner organisations supported with assignments

2234

volunteers

3279

assignments

- 2137 in-country assignments
- 214 hybrid assignments
- 928 remote assignments

About volunteers

63%

women

36.7%

men

0.4%

self-describe

1.9%

volunteers identify as having a disability

2.0%

volunteers identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

232

approved accompanying dependents



74%
of volunteers reported good or excellent progress against assignment objectives



85%
of volunteers were satisfied or very satisfied with the program

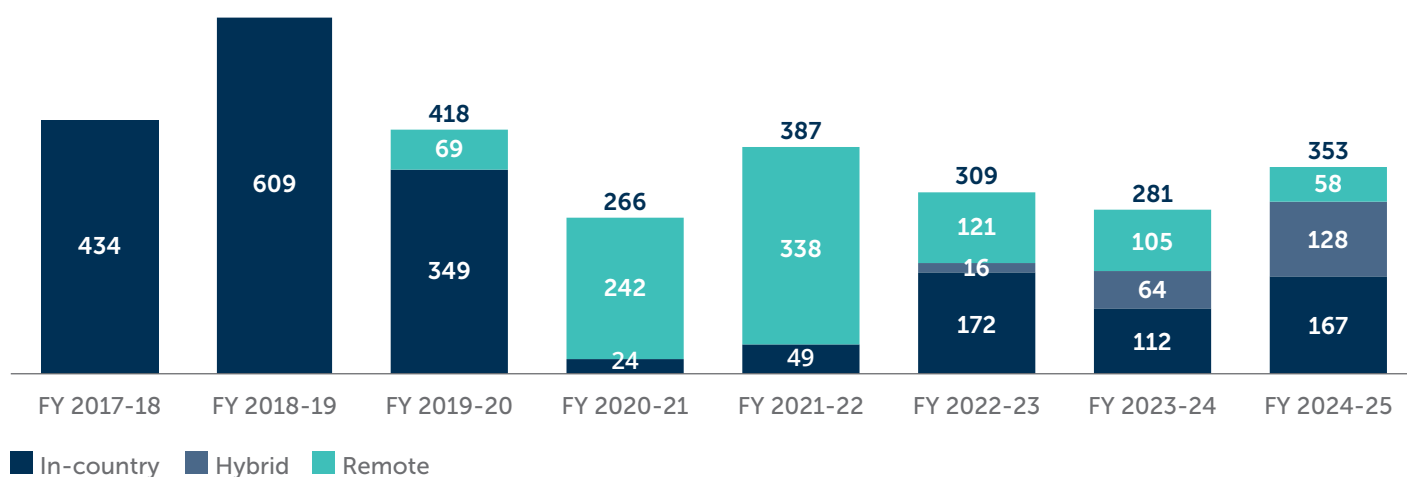


82%
of partner organisations reported good or excellent progress against assignment objectives



87%
of partner organisations were satisfied or very satisfied with the volunteer assignment

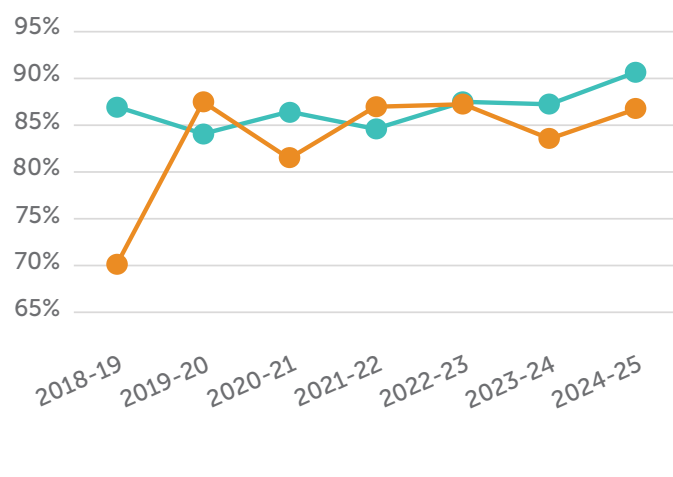
Number of new assignments started each year



Proportion of partners and volunteers reporting good or excellent progress against assignment objectives



Proportion of partners and volunteers satisfied with the program and assignments



Proportion of all partner organisations 2018-25 that align with SDGs

The size of each SDG logo is a visual representation of the proportion of partner organisations contributing to that goal.



2 | About the program

The Australian Volunteers Program develops long-term, mutually respectful partnerships with organisations across the Pacific, Asia and Africa to contribute to locally led change and the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Australian volunteers have supported overseas partner organisations to achieve their development goals for almost 75 years. The Australian Government's Australian Volunteers Program continues this rich history.

The program matches skilled Australians with organisations in developing countries to help those organisations deliver their own development objectives. The program uses international volunteering as a people-centred approach to capacity strengthening. It is part of the Australian Government's people-to-people program portfolio, connecting Australians to Australia's development program and the region.

The Australian Volunteers Program aims to deliver the following outcomes by the end of the program:

1. Partner organisations are supported to progress their development objectives
2. Key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries appreciate the value of volunteering
3. Program participants gain greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries

By successfully achieving these outcomes, the Australian Government aims to strengthen mutual relationships with people and communities across the Pacific, Asia and Africa that contribute to achieving equitable development outcomes.

The program highly values First Nations perspectives and knowledge and seeks to increase Indigenous participation in international volunteering. The program is also committed to human rights, gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI), and works to increase the diversity of volunteers and organisations it partners with.

The Australian Volunteers Program began in 2018 and is managed by AVI, in consortium with DT Global and Alinea International. In July 2022 the program started its second five-year term to 2027, with a refreshed program logic and a total five-year budget of up to AUD \$130 million.

Program logic



3 | About this report

This is the eighth annual report from the Australian Volunteers Program, covering the period from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025.

The report provides a comprehensive update on progress against the program's three end-of-program outcomes and the principles that guide its work. After summarising program achievements and the operating context for the year, the report examines lessons learnt over the past twelve months and identifies key management actions to take forward. The report then presents evidence of progress toward each end-of-program and intermediate outcome.

In special focus area sections, this year's report highlights three of the program's guiding principles: growing strong relationships and partnerships; enhancing diversity and inclusion; and ensuring accountability and learning. Throughout the report, case studies illustrate how the program supports its partners' work in practice.

Kiribati – Australian volunteer Accounting and Procurement Mentor Tina Loader (left) and Administration Officer Karibwebwea Teemaia (right) working together to transform the Kiribati Green Energy Solution building into a literally green presence in Betio, the industrial hub of South Tarawa.



4 | Operating context

The global context for program implementation during 2024-25 was characterised by slowing economic growth, persistent inflation, and elevated geopolitical risks in many areas.

International tensions within political landscapes continued to create varying levels of uncertainty. This resulted in ongoing increases to costs of living in many program countries. Significant fluctuations of foreign exchange rates in relation to the US dollar required adjustments to volunteer allowances in several locations to allow ongoing payment of leases and to support consistent standards of living, and made financial forecasting and budgeting more challenging.

Although some partner organisations noted financial or operational impacts resulting from USAID cuts, there were no noticeable impacts on engagement with the program by partner organisations or partner engagement with the program.

External risks to the program continued to arise from natural hazards, including high levels of pollution in multiple locations, which were managed in line with the program's Air Pollution Plan.

A magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck Port Vila on 17 December 2024. With the resulting disruptions to government services in Vanuatu, including immigration services, some new volunteer mobilisations initially planned for February 2025 were deferred. Subsequently, the in-country team worked with Post to identify where volunteer assignments could support recovery efforts in Vanuatu.

Staff and volunteers were also provided with guidance and support before, during and after Typhoon Kristine in the Philippines.

In this context, the finalisation of the program's Global Program Strategy in December 2024 was an important milestone. The strategy was framed by Australia's International Development Policy (2023) and the Australian Government's goal to advance an Indo-Pacific that is peaceful, stable, and prosperous. In line with the policy, the strategy formalised the program's increased emphasis on gender, disability and climate change, and providing culturally appropriate opportunities for First Nations perspectives to be embedded, particularly through the participation of First Nations people in international volunteering. These priorities were in line with two key strategies launched by Australia in 2024-25, being the [International Gender Equality Strategy](#) and the [Disability Equity and Rights Strategy](#).

Throughout the reporting period, the program continued to work with DFAT Posts to update Country Program Plans to align with the Development Partnership Plans which were being finalised in consultation with partner governments towards the end of the financial year.

5 | Lessons learnt

Ongoing improvement remains central to the program. The program promotes shared learning, analysis and reflective practices to continuously and intentionally enhance the effectiveness of its work.

Through experience and evaluations, the following observations have emerged from the past year:

- **Program effectiveness requires alignment between operational delivery, strategic priorities and stakeholder expectations at multiple levels.**

An external evaluation of the program found that the Australian Volunteers Program demonstrates strong delivery against end-of-program outcomes, contributing effectively to locally-led change. The program has adapted well to significant contextual shifts and utilised various tools to strengthen volunteering quality and outcomes. However, the evaluation suggested a disconnect exists between the current program logic and evolving strategic priorities, particularly at country level. As recognised through the external evaluation, the program delivers important elements of Australia's strategic objectives and has adapted well to evolving development priorities at the global level, however there can be competing priorities or expectations at the country-level. In particular, there are expectations for stronger diplomatic outcomes than are articulated in the agreed program logic. Success requires an integrated strategic approach at global and country levels to articulate clear aims, operations and stakeholder engagement, while ensuring space for local partner influence in country-level strategy development. No one-size-fits-all approach exists given different country contexts and potential.

- **Moving beyond transactional relationships towards equitable partnerships requires systematic change despite operational constraints.**

Growing strong relationships and partnerships is a guiding principle embedded in the Australian Volunteers Program's language and approach. With eight years of delivery deepening the understanding of effective partnership-building, the program recognises and is committed to making reasonable steps to progress further towards more equitable relationships with international partners as documented in the program's newly developed Locally Led Development Framework. However, the complex and diverse operational context restricts the ability to implement significant program-wide changes to current partnership approaches. Currently, partner organisations must meet due diligence requirements and work within predetermined structures, constraining their influence to specific areas like assignment design and volunteer recruitment. The diverse and dispersed nature of program delivery compounds these challenges. The criteria for partner selection needs to be clearly articulated, while more strategic partner engagement approaches are required to promote partner voice and decision-making.



Indonesia – Partner organisation Wildlife Rescue Centre Yogyakarta staff members Risman Hanafi (left), accommodation staff and Cisca Nurfiaini, Operations Manager, monitoring a Malayan Giant Turtle at Gembira Loka Zoo, Indonesia.

- **Implementing non-negotiable compliance requirements requires significant resources while balancing program standards with locally-led principles.**

The Australian Volunteers Program had a strong focus in 2024-25 on ensuring the policy compliance of partner organisations in regard to the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH). Achieving this required considerable resources and effort from both program staff and partner organisations, including facilitated workshops and individualised policy development sessions with risk and strength-based analysis.

While PSEAH represents a non-negotiable program standard that protects fundamental human rights and dignity, the compliance approach can create tension with locally-led development principles, as partners may perceive due diligence requirements as top-down impositions. Clear communication about expectations and scope helped partners understand requirements, and the process provided benefits to partner organisations themselves through strengthened frameworks and good practice development. However, balancing essential safeguarding standards with genuine partnership approaches remains an ongoing challenge requiring careful navigation between program accountability and partner agency.

- **Hybrid volunteering models deliver strong outcomes but require enhanced coordination systems to manage operational complexity.**

Combining remote and in-country phases has realised benefits including greater accessibility for volunteers unable to commit to lengthy deployments, while delivering on assignment outcomes for partner organisations. However, the flexibility that makes hybrid assignments attractive also increases administrative complexity and coordination challenges. Key operational difficulties include visa complications for short-term visits, volunteers seeking extended travel breaks that disrupt continuity, timing uncertainty from flexible scheduling, and inadequate guidance during remote phases. The model's evolution has outpaced compliance systems, creating redundant training requirements, while budget planning becomes more complex due to changing schedules. Success requires streamlined coordination processes, clearer communication protocols, better expectation management about timing and logistics, and enhanced support systems that address the unique complexities of managing multi-phase assignments across different locations.



Laos – Australian volunteer Nicole Byrne (left) works as a Veterinary Support Officer at Free the Bears in Luang Prabang, Laos. In this photo, she and veterinary assistant Bounsy Chongmachaiya (right) check the anaesthetic device at the Free the Bears vet clinic.

- **Organisational capacity strengthening research is most effective when organisations lead participatory approaches with flexible external support.**

The program's research into organisational capacity strengthening demonstrated that participatory methods involving diverse stakeholders generate richer learning than traditional evaluation approaches. The program enabled partner organisations to lead research on their own terms, considering the full range of development factors that may contribute to changes in their organisation capacity, and opening spaces for critical reflection on desired changes for the organisation. While initially challenging for organisations new to research, this approach was more successful in supporting organisations to reflect on their own work using evidence-based decision-making, and learn through the process. The approach requires flexible support with accessible resources and consistent guidance while deliberately transferring decision-making authority to partners over time. It enables organisations to take ownership of research agendas, define their own questions and lead implementation, ultimately strengthening their research capacity.

- **Sustained program improvement requires ongoing systematic investment in staff knowledge and continuous adaptation mechanisms.**

The benefit of a 10-year delivery timeframe under a single contract has enabled sustained investment in systems and processes, allowing continuous program adaptation and improvement through cumulative experience that supports flexible responses to external changes and greater innovation. Cross-program learning and knowledge sharing, as well as deliberate staff engagement in implementing change, is a key aspect of continuous improvement. Building on previous innovation capabilities, the program's newly established Program Effectiveness function, is collaboratively addressing cross-program priorities. This demonstrates that systematic attention to improvement processes is essential for sustained program effectiveness.

6 | Management actions and forward priorities

In 2025-26 the Australian Volunteers Program will consolidate and grow core activities, building on the stronger pipeline of in-country and hybrid assignments to provide even more opportunities for Australian volunteers to connect with and support partner organisations in all program countries.

The Independent Evaluation of the program undertaken in 2024-25 found strong evidence of progress towards end of program outcomes and a consistent focus on delivering effective partnerships and volunteer assignments. It also recommended that the nature and extent of the program's support for Australian Government strategic priorities at country level be clarified and further strengthened, and that operational management of the program be made more visible.

With 2026 designated as the UN International Year of Volunteering for Sustainable Development, there is a timely opportunity for the program to share stories and learning from eight years of implementation, celebrating the combined efforts of volunteers and partner organisations towards equitable and sustainable development at organisation, program and country levels.



Indonesia – Australian volunteer Research Development Mentor Laura Wallace (left) with her colleague Wulan Noviani (right), a lecturer at the School of Nursing at Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

The year ahead

Key management actions and priorities to be taken forward in 2025-26 include:

- **Accelerate progress towards end of program outcomes through effective delivery of the program's core activities.**

In the 2025-26 financial year, the program will support an estimated 570 volunteer assignments across all 26 countries, including approximately 330 new in-country and hybrid assignments. A small number of remote assignments will be included where there is a sound rationale for doing so.

In line with the program's new Locally-led Development Framework, the approach to partner organisation engagement will be updated and shared. Opportunities will be taken to further enhance partner capacity through regional development activities in areas such as gender, safeguarding and governance. The program will continue to aim for an increase in the proportion of partner organisations with a focus on gender, LGBTQIA+, disability and climate change.

The program will facilitate its first reciprocal volunteer exchange between partners in Solomon Islands and the Torres Strait under the Indigenous Pathways program and will continue to nurture new partnerships between First Nations organisations and volunteers, and partners overseas.

- **Clarify and respond to the evolving information and communication needs of key stakeholders, particularly DFAT in Australia and overseas.**

Increased opportunities will be explored for collaboration and information sharing with DFAT Posts, to support stronger coherence with country level priorities. Australian Volunteers Program In-Country Management Teams will put in place agreements with Posts on the level and timing of regular meetings and information sharing so that Posts have increased capacity to engage with, and promote, program activities and outcomes. Opportunities will be taken throughout the year to present consolidated data, learning and knowledge gathered throughout the life of the program and share this with key stakeholders, including to help inform thinking about future program design.

- **Celebrate the impact of the program so far by sharing learning, evidence and stories at country and regional levels in collaboration with partners, volunteers and DFAT.**

The program's Public Diplomacy and Communications Strategy will be updated early in 2025-26. Leveraging the platform provided by IVY 2026, increased and more diverse public diplomacy opportunities will be undertaken at country level as well as in Australia. In-country this will be seen through increased content generation, including stories and case studies shared in a variety of ways, with early priority given to a small number of countries which will have additional communication resources available. In Australia, alumni will be engaged in regular events with other Australian partners and programs.

- **Continue to strengthen, and make more visible, the program's management of finances, compliance and risk.**

At a very practical level, the program will adapt existing systems and processes with a view to continuous improvement and will further refine routine reporting to increase the visibility of ongoing activities related to finance, compliance and risk. Underpinning these other actions, the program will emphasise delivery in line with its guiding principles with particular attention to strengthening locally-led change and inclusion in line with the Global Program Strategy and relevant action plans.



Timor-Leste – Australian volunteer, Bernie McEvoy (left) is a Program Development Mentor with Juventude ba Dezenvolvimentu Násional. Bernie is shown cooking with her colleagues Jescia Nelinha Da Silva Ximenes (centre) and Anzenita Monteiro (right) who volunteer as Nutrition Educators while studying Nutrition at university in Timor-Leste.



Case Study

Strengthening communities through sport in Tonga

Increasing health issues, limited youth programs, and few safe spaces to talk about respectful relationships or violence are serious challenges in Tonga. The National Rugby League's (NRL) community programs tackle these issues by using sport to connect with people, promote healthy living and drive change in a culturally relevant way.

Since 2015, the NRL's Community Outreach Program has reached nearly 90 primary schools through its Mai e 5 health program and supported secondary students through its Voices Against Violence and Sports Participation Program. Together, these initiatives promote wellbeing, respectful relationships, and opportunities through sport.

"The idea was using sport as a vehicle to reach the communities — especially given the high percentage of Polynesian players in the sport," says Game Development Manager Tavake Fangupo.

In late 2024, Felicity George joined NRL Tonga as the first female Australian Volunteers Program Sports Development Officer, to help boost participation among girls and women, which is a key focus for the NRL.

Felicity travels with local staff, explaining rules, safe play, and nutrition. Felicity's approachable style has already contributed to the development of new girls' teams in three districts. "One thing she really does well is communicate with our Pacific Island communities," Tavake says. Off the field, Felicity has led workshops in first aid and sports-trainer skills.

Like volunteers before her, Felicity has strengthened the NRL's long-term impact in Tonga and helped shift how the NRL is seen — from being viewed as just talent scouts to becoming trusted community partners. "In the past, people thought we were just looking for the next rugby star. But with the help of volunteers and our staff, we started telling our story — through stories of change, videos, radio, and talkback shows," says Tavake.

NRL Tonga has also tailored resources to local needs, swapping PowerPoints for flipcharts and building tools that work in context. "We could never afford that kind of expertise. Volunteers help build local knowledge and leave behind reporting systems and templates that continue to benefit us. We've been very lucky — maybe four or five Australian volunteers so far — and they've all supported us in different ways," he adds.

Left. Australian volunteer Sports Development and Administration Officer Felicity George (right) runs a training session for the Houma Tigers women and girls training through NRL Tonga in Nuku'alofa.

Right. Felicity is pictured with some of the U16 Tonga Girls team who had a historic tour to Australia in June 2024. (Left to right – back row: Ofa Tuifua, Palenapa, Felicity George, Meliama Pangai, Veikie Fituafe. Left to right – front row: Norma Kolomalua, Ana Eteaki, Unaloto Mata'u Tiueti Lauhinga).

7 | Progress towards outcomes

This section of the report details progress against the program's three outcomes over the last year.

Three sub-sections reflect on the three end of program outcomes and related intermediate outcomes:

- Partner organisations are supported to progress their development objectives
- Key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries appreciate the value of volunteering
- Program participants gain greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries.

A fourth sub-section covers the systems and activities that support the program overall.

Evidence of progress towards end of program and intermediate outcomes is drawn from a range of sources, including:

- Research and evaluation activities exploring specific elements of the program in depth
- Monitoring data and feedback provided by volunteers and partner organisations on assignment
- The program's management information system.

Fiji – Australian volunteer Communications Mentor Susan Wilson (left) with colleagues at Medical Services Pacific: Anjali Lata, Communications Manager (middle) and Sereima Senibici, Project Manager (right) in Suva, Fiji.



7.1 | Supporting the development outcomes of partner organisations

The Australian Volunteers Program's overarching goal is to support locally led change and the realisation of the SDGs. Program volunteers extend the reach and impact of organisations, strengthening capacities and connections essential for achieving equitable development outcomes.

International volunteering has a long history in Australia, originating in the 1950s as a means of fostering cultural understanding between Australian and Indonesian students. Australian Government support for international volunteering began in 1963. While there have been many Australian Government-funded volunteer programs since then, the government's commitment to volunteering as a powerful approach to organisational capacity strengthening has remained consistent.

End of program outcome: Partner organisations are supported to progress their development objectives

Since the start of the Australian Volunteers Program in 2018, the program has supported over 1,200 partner organisations with volunteer assignments. These organisations represent a powerful diversity of development efforts across 26 countries, with program partners contributing to all 17 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The program has conducted a series of thematic reviews framed by the SDGs to demonstrate program impact. In this reporting period that included a review of contributions to partner organisations working on SDG 4: Quality Education. Over the course of the program, almost one-quarter of all assignments and partner organisations have had an education focus.

The review drew on evidence from 700 volunteer assignments with 269 partner organisations working in the education sector. Through assignment-level outcomes and organisational capacity strengthening, these partner organisations have been supported to achieve their own development objectives.

Examples of inclusive education development outcomes resulting from engagement with the Australian Volunteers Program

- Vanuatu's Ministry of Education and Training received specialised resources for teaching Braille to visually impaired children, with context-specific activities developed for existing assistive devices.
- Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special Needs improved educational quality through teacher training workshops in its deaf and hearing divisions, development of age-appropriate teaching materials, and enhanced staff English communication skills.
- Autism Mongolia enhanced disability inclusion through comprehensive autism spectrum disorder training for schools and hospitals, and established parent support groups that generated independent support networks.

The effectiveness of the Australian Volunteers Program was also highlighted in an external evaluation of the program commissioned by DFAT and carried out in this financial year. The evaluation's key finding is that the program "is delivering effectively on its end of program outcomes, and its goal of contributing to locally led change and the realisation of SDGs. This is a significant achievement given the complexity and scale of the program."¹

¹ Independent Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers Program (February 2025), TetraTech, page 4

The evaluation conducted an anonymous survey of partner organisations to solicit feedback on the program. Three-quarters of responding organisations reported that the program has, to a great extent, supported them to strengthen their capacity to progress development

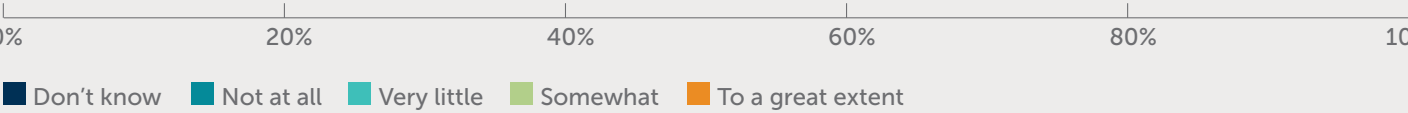
objectives and organisational mission. Just under a quarter said the program had ‘somewhat’ contributed. Only four per cent reported little or no capacity strengthening benefit from the program.

Proportion of respondents reporting positive impact from the program

To what extent has the Australian Volunteers Program supported your organisation to strengthen its capacity to progress its development objectives / organisational mission?



To what extent has the partnership with the Australian Volunteers Program delivered on your organisation's expectations and requirements?



Papua New Guinea – Australian volunteer Project Management Mentor Andrew Bolam (left) with Esther Silas (right), Founder and Director of Touching the Untouchables in Goroka, Papua New Guinea.

Intermediate outcome: Partner organisations have strengthened their capacity and gained from the program

In 2024-25, the program supported 297 partner organisations, with 62% of partners hosting one assignment, 23% hosting two, and 15% hosting three or more. This is similar to the previous year (299 organisations supported), but with a slightly higher proportion of assignments per organisation.

Strengthening organisation capacity, not just delivering outputs, is a key part of ensuring the long-term impact of volunteer assignments. Volunteers and partners are routinely asked if assignments have helped strengthen capacity at the individual, organisational or systemic level. Most volunteers reported contributing to capacity strengthening at more than one level. Ninety per cent reported strengthened capacity at the individual level, 91% at the organisational level, and 69% at the systemic level. The most frequent volunteer-reported capacity strengthening outcomes at these three different levels are shown in the graph below.

These quotes from partner organisations illustrate what capacity strengthening looks like and what it achieves at these three different levels:

Strengthening skills of individuals

For the last two months, [the volunteer] coached Dr. Joeja and Dr. Niel towards their exams, and they have passed their exams. She is coaching another three doctors who are sitting their exam this week. These young doctors are now doing procedures they would not normally do on their own, but with the support from the volunteer they were comfortable and gained confidence in doing these procedures.

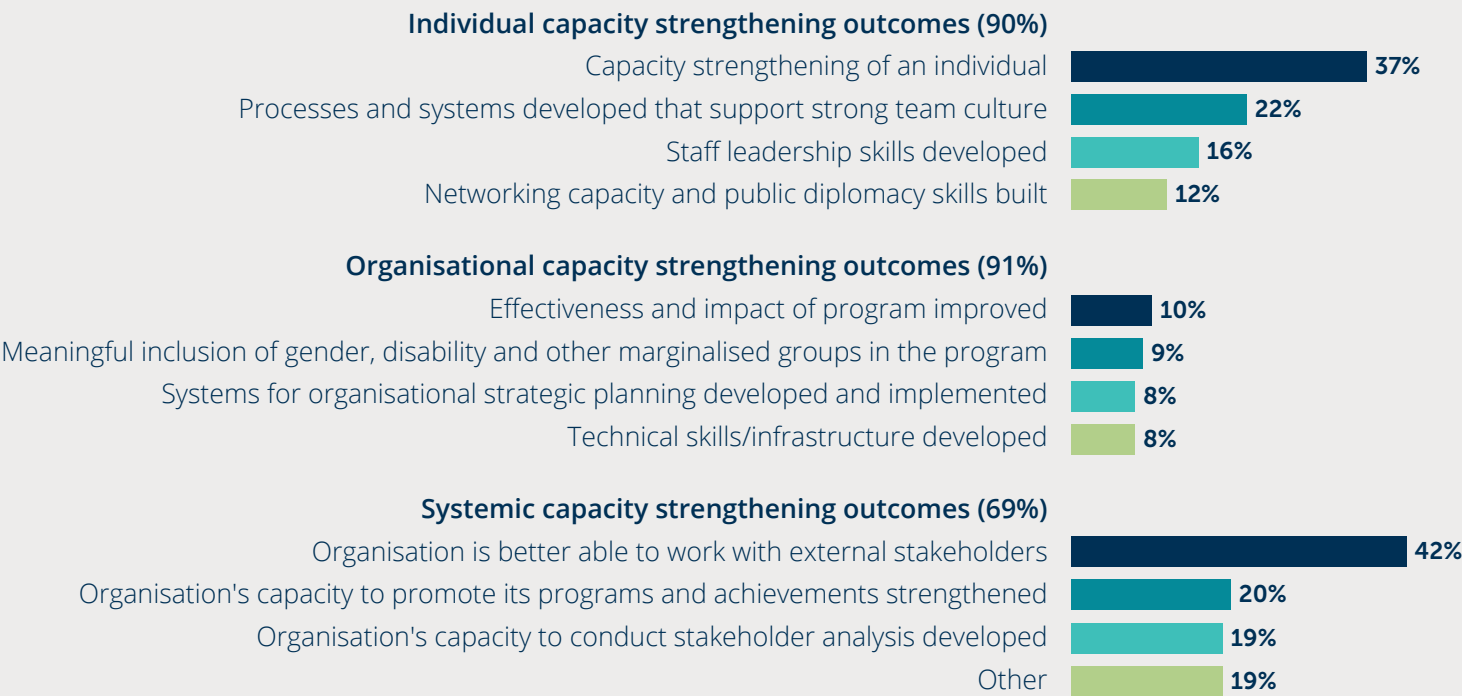
– Vila Central Hospital, Vanuatu

Strengthening organisational capacity

The volunteer significantly enhanced our digital outreach by revamping our website and integrating social media platforms with our communication channels. These improvements facilitated wider dissemination of knowledge and improved engagement with our rural community stakeholders.

– Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji

Volunteers reported on specific outcomes that they feel their assignment achieved across the three broad areas:



Strengthening systems and networks

Library Services is an integral part of the responsibility of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville Department of Education. It was the Board of Unity vision to merge Unity with Education Department Library Services for sustainability. Joanna [the volunteer] spent a considerable amount of effort collaborating with the Department. This resulted in a formal undertaking of the arrangements which will take place in 2025.

– Unity Library of Buka Association, Autonomous Region of Bougainville

Asked what measures the organisation has taken to sustain improved systems and capacity, the most common response from partner organisations was in relation to skills transfer to local staff, followed by formalisation of changes through plans, policies and strategies and the development of tools and guidelines to support systems and processes within the organisation. Many partner organisations also mentioned formalised linkages with other organisations as ways of ensuring sustainability. Seventy-three per cent of volunteers felt that their partner organisation would be able to sustain the initiatives they had supported after the assignment, with 14% unsure and 13% thinking that it was unlikely.

To help further quantify the capacity building impact of the program, 14 organisations in Fiji, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam are partnering with the Australian Volunteers Program in participatory research, running from 2024 to 2026, on organisational capacity strengthening and volunteer contributions.

Year one finding in 2024-25 revealed capacity changes across five areas:

- individual skills development in leadership, financial management, IT and fundraising
- organisational processes and systems change in eight of the 14 organisations, particularly COVID-19 accelerated digital transformation
- partnerships and networks expansion in 10 organisations
- organisational culture shifts toward inclusivity in four organisations
- unexpected external disruptions from government delays, COVID-19, and donor requirements.

The program contributed by building networks and collaboration (nine organisations reported volunteer-facilitated connections), training and mentoring across diverse fields (seven organisations), and strengthening organisational systems through policy updates and digitalisation.

Organisations hosting multiple volunteers noted cumulative impacts, with one Indonesian disability service provider benefiting from seven years of support across occupational therapy, speech therapy, and family programs, enabling knowledge-sharing across Indonesia's disability sector.

Other data showed the program delivering similarly strong capacity strengthening results. From 217 assignment evaluations completed by partner organisations, 90% of partner organisations reported that good or excellent progress had been made in achieving the objectives of the assignment. This compares to 80% the previous year.

Partner organisation satisfaction (n210)

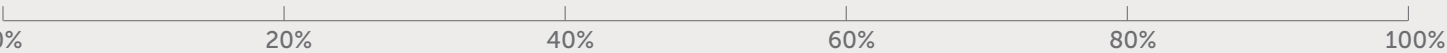
Overall satisfaction with assignment



Satisfaction with volunteer



Satisfaction with program's in-country management



1 - Very dissatisfied 2 - Dissatisfied 3 - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4 - Satisfied 5 - Very satisfied

There was a slight increase this year in the proportion of partners satisfied or very satisfied with assignments overall, at 91% compared with 88% the previous year. The same proportion (91%) were satisfied with their volunteer, and a remarkable 98% were satisfied with the program's in-country management, also up from 93% the previous year. Across all satisfaction scores, remote assignments were slightly lower than hybrid and in-country assignments (88%, 90% and 95% respectively for overall assignment satisfaction).

In their feedback, organisations frequently mentioned the support they received from the Australian Volunteers Program and recognised the professionalism and expertise of their volunteer as reasons for their satisfaction with the program. Satisfaction was also due to assignments achieving their objectives and strengthened organisational capacity. The value of the relationships formed and the commitment of volunteers going above and beyond were also frequently given as sources of high satisfaction.

Negative feedback, from a considerably smaller number of responses, was most often in relation to time constraints and the assignment being too short to achieve its objectives, challenges with remote assignments, poor or inconsistent communication, or a volunteer not meeting the organisation's expectations.

Ninety-nine per cent of organisations would like to host another volunteer in the future, with one per cent unsure. Ninety-eight per cent would recommend the Australian Volunteers Program to other, similar organisations, while one per cent were unsure and one per cent would not.

Intermediate outcome: Partner organisations have a strategic rationale for participation in the program, provide safe and productive working environments, and contribute to quality assignments

In an anonymous survey of partner organisations, 98% strongly agreed or agreed that the program responds to the needs of their organisation and their objectives and goals.² This is an increase from the previous year's survey (91%). These perceived benefits to partner organisations are an indication of their rationale for participation. The benefits are also reflected in feedback from volunteers, 90% of whom reported that their assignment fit the priorities of their partner organisation.

A similar proportion, 89% of those volunteering in-country (including on hybrid assignments), reported that their partner organisation provided a safe work environment. Eighty-three per cent of all volunteers reported that their partner organisation contributed to an effective assignment.

Feedback shows greater ambivalence in response to the question of whether organisations have the resources to effectively benefit or follow-up on volunteer contributions (72%). The same proportion of volunteers reported that their organisation provided adequate supervision of their assignment. Seventy-one per cent of volunteers reported that the assignment length and partner organisation expectations were a good fit.

While these scores are an improvement on the previous year, they point to the ongoing challenge of balancing partner organisation needs with their ability to utilise volunteer assignments to the fullest extent, and of balancing different stakeholders' expectations and budget limitations on assignment length.

Intermediate outcome: relevant and diverse partnerships with partner organisations are established, maintained and supported by DFAT, the program and Australian organisations

The diversity of partnerships and connections across the globe continues to be one of the great strengths of the Australian Volunteers Program.

Partner organisations

The program strives to find a balance between long-term partner relationships and supporting new partner organisations. While capacity strengthening is not a singular, one-off activity and organisations benefit from sustained support, the program also seeks to identify and build relationships with emerging organisations and respond to changes in policy direction and sectoral support needs. In 2024-25, almost one-third of supported organisations (31%) had never had an assignment before under the program.

Developing new partnerships takes considerable time, as the program must build the relationship and ensure potential partners meet due diligence requirements. One of the program's top priorities during the 2024-25 financial year was to support all active, in-scope partners, including any new partner organisations,

² Independent Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers Program (February 2025), TetraTech, page 29

to develop and implement their own DFAT-compliant policy on preventing sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (PSEAH). By the end of the year, 100% of high-risk organisations and 89% of the additional 191 partner organisations in scope had an approved, DFAT compliant PSEAH policy as a result of this process. More detail on this process can be found in section 7.4.

Developing a position description with a partner organisation usually takes several months. The time for recruiting a volunteer varies; when roles are highly specialised or require professionals in high demand in Australia, the recruitment process can be lengthy.

Of all partner organisations supported by the program during the year, most were local or national NGOs (33%) or government entities (28%). A further 15% were academic or research institutions, and 11% were international NGOs.

To examine diversity of thematic focus, the program codes organisations to the SDGs their work most closely aligns with. As in previous years, health and education are the most prominent sectors partners work in (Goal 4: Quality Education – 30% and Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being – 26%). Gender Equality (Goal 5 – 19%), Reduced Inequality (Goal 10 – 15%) and Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8 – 13%) also form significant parts of the thematic spread.

The program's Global Program Strategy identifies three impact areas that act as thematic lenses, to focus attention amongst the wide range of areas supported. Human rights is the largest impact area, by proportion of aligned partners, at 46%, followed by inclusive economic growth (37%) and climate change, disaster resilience and food security (20%).

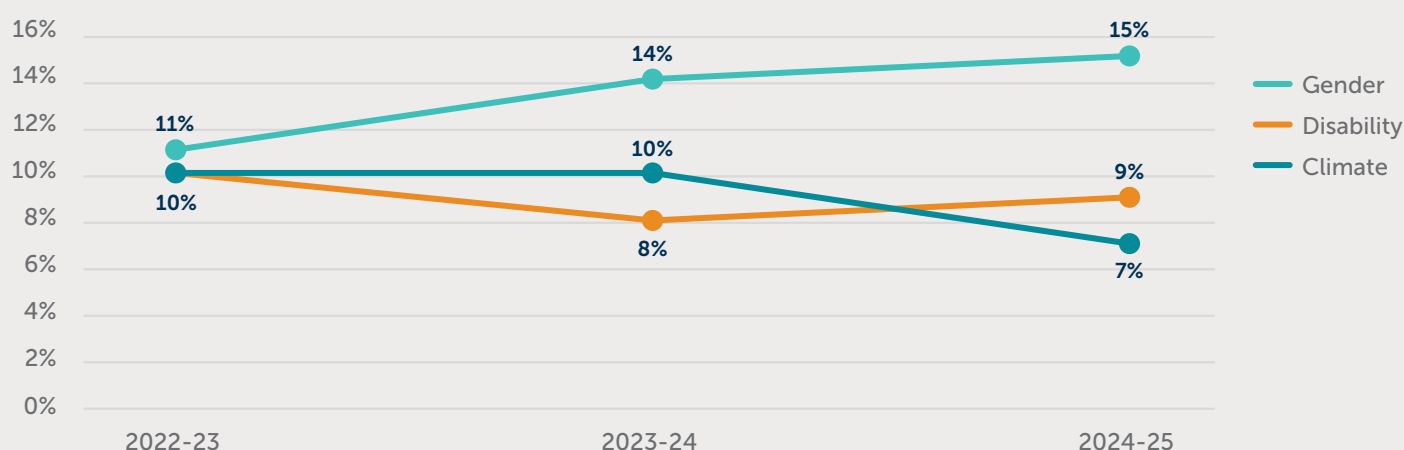
As of 2022, the program also has three focus areas – gender equality, disability inclusion and climate action – where it provides more targeted support. The program aims to increase the proportion of organisations supported with their work in these focus areas over the course of the strategy to 2027.

Fifteen per cent of partners with a new assignment starting during the financial year had a significant or principle focus on gender equality (a more targeted definition than alignment to SDG 5: Gender Equality, and changed from 14% last year), nine per cent had a focus on disability inclusion (no change from last year) and seven per cent on climate action (down from 12% of new assignments last year). Approximately one-third of all partners have a focus on gender equality, disability inclusion or climate action.

While the program is committed to increasing the proportion of partners and volunteer assignments in these areas, there are persistent challenges. Many organisations working in gender, disability and climate action operate with limited resources, face additional barriers and struggle to meet the compliance standards required to participate in the program. These organisations may be small and fragile, which makes working in partnership through volunteering more complex and resource intensive for program staff.

To address these challenges, the program is prioritising support for organisational and policy strengthening where possible. Disability inclusion and gender equality focused organisational strengthening and professional development opportunities have been well received by a range of partners, tapping into local expertise and both in-person and online learning options. The

Proportion of partner organisations in each 'focus area' supported with assignments



program also looks for opportunities to support gender, disability and climate work undertaken by mainstream partner organisations through focused volunteer assignments. This mainstreaming approach can be effective, building on partners' strengths and working through established relationships.

In line with the program's MEL Framework, a spot check of strategic alignment in four countries was conducted during the year. This explored the strategic alignment between active partner organisations (those with a recent assignment) and the program's Country Program Plans, and alignment between Country Program Plans and DFAT's Development Partnership Plans. Across the four countries in four different regions checked, all partner organisations strongly or moderately aligned with Country Program Plan priorities, and all Country Program Plan priorities strongly aligned with DFAT's plans. The exercise supported program staff to reflect on partner organisation selection and potential updates to Country Program Plans to be discussed with DFAT.

Australian organisations

The program works with Australian organisations to enhance program delivery in multiple ways. During 2024-25, almost 20% of assignments were supported

by 26 different Australian organisations through a mix of activities, including sharing resources, assisting with assignment development and market advice, and sourcing candidates. Mentoring relationships between Australian organisation staff, volunteers, and partner organisations also enabled technical skills and experience to be shared directly with partner organisations.

Thirteen per cent of assignments commenced in 2024-25 were sourced through referrals from 16 Australian organisations from sectors such as academia, allied health, medicine, government, engineering and urban planning, sport, media and finance.

In 2024-25, collaborative partnerships with Australian organisations and partner organisations continued to support a steady and trusted pipeline of assignments: seven clinical speech therapy assignments in Vietnam were supported by Trinh Foundation Australia; 15 assignments in Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea were supported by the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine; nine assignments in Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu were supported by Engineers Without Borders Australia; and six assignments with university partners in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka and Mongolia were supported by Australian Academic Volunteers Abroad.

Papua New Guinea – Expecting mothers and clients of partner organisation Waniati Maternal Waiting Home, Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. Left to right: Dian Erupe, Michelle Johnathan and Sima Steven.



Australian organisations also supported the development and delivery of innovative opportunities, such as the mobilisation of 13 research volunteers with universities in Vietnam via two clustered hybrid assignments, which was enabled by the long-running partnership with Researchers in Agriculture for International Development.

The program extended its reach into sectors such as health and climate change, building new partnerships with the Australian Primary Care Nurses Association, the Australian Council of Critical Care Nurses, Pro Bono Planners Australia and the Australasian Women in Emergency Network. To strengthen engagement with existing partners, the program hosted a connection event in Melbourne, which was attended by over 40 Australian organisation representatives, as well as program staff and alumni representatives.

In line with this year's Annual Plan, the program reviewed its portfolio of Australian organisations, assessing relevance to and engagement with the program, to prioritise partners from key sectors and with demonstrated alignment to program values. The result was a reduction from 124 to 91 active Australian organisation partners, which better reflects the program's current capacity and focus for the remaining two years of the program.

Knowledge exchange

The Flexible Learning Exchange (FLEX) continued to create and support opportunities for shared learning and knowledge exchange across the program. Activities in the financial year included:

The global webinar series

Seven global webinar events were held for partner organisations, volunteers and program staff on topics including the Sustainable Development Goals in action, disability inclusion, climate change, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Attendance totalled 262 across the series with 100% of survey respondents stating they found the events interesting.

[The best thing about the webinar was] the opportunity to hear directly from partner organisations about how climate change is impacting local communities. It was also fascinating to learn more about the partner organisations' approaches and processes for achieving positive change in their communities.

– Global webinar series attendee

Communities of practice

Two new communities of practice have been developed and will soon invite members who work in grant writing and fundraising, and volunteering for development in the Philippines. In addition, a new Southern Africa GEDSI community was established, facilitated by the South Africa program team. This community of practice has connected program partners in areas of GEDSI and Gender Based Violence and has seen high engagement in regular meetings, connection activities and forums supported through an online platform.

Regional training series initiatives

FLEX continued to support regional initiatives for learning and knowledge sharing across the Central and North Pacific. This included:

- A five-part online Grant Writing and Fundraising Training Series that resulted in subsequent in-country volunteer assignments in Tonga and Samoa
- A 10-part online GEDSI training series, delivered by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement to multiple partner organisations, supported through FLEX by the inclusion team.



Vanuatu – Youth helpers Marieth Johnson (middle) and Samuel Saul (left) with Australian volunteer Jessica Seymour (right) picking fresh produce in the garden of the Nutrition Centre at Wan Smol Bag, Vanuatu.



Focus Area 1

Grow strong relationships and partnerships

The program's focus on establishing and nurturing long-term and respectful relationships with partners has been critical to the enduring success of the Australian Volunteers Program. Since 2018, the program's commitment to good partnership has underpinned all its operations, from the way it supports international partner organisations to its work with Australian organisations and its engagement with other people-to-people programs.

Partner organisations

The program aims to be a partner of choice for international partner organisations. It focuses on nurturing long-term, equitable, flexible and diverse partnerships that are best placed to deliver meaningful impact over time.

Most of the program's international partnerships are long-running and have resulted in multiple volunteer assignments. The program develops trusted relationships that allow for the open exchange of ideas and future-focused discussions. This means the program can tailor partnership offerings through targeted volunteer assignments to assist partner organisations make progress towards their strategic objectives.

The program proudly takes a locally led approach to partnerships. Partner organisations lead the design of volunteer assignments and the recruitment of volunteers and provide feedback that informs the

Office of Public Legal Service (OPLS), Kiribati

The partnership with OPLS commenced in 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a series of short-term mediation and policy mentor assignments. With international travel restricted, volunteers worked alongside OPLS remotely to develop internal policies and strengthen organisational capacity. This focus continued through the first in-country assignment in 2023 and led to the implementation of new HR, finance and reporting processes. The partnership has resulted in unexpected benefits, with volunteers connecting OPLS to Australian scholarship and funding opportunities that have extended the capabilities of the organisation. In more recent years, OPLS has drawn on the skills of Australian volunteers to provide support in new areas such as website design and community-driven justice initiatives.

program's strategic planning, annual reporting, reflection and planning cycles. In this reporting period, the program developed a Locally Led Development Framework to draw on its learning in this area and identify opportunities for progressing a more locally led approach over the next two years.

2025-2027 Locally Led Development Framework

In 2024-25, the program effectiveness team initiated a project to develop a Locally Led Development Framework. Led by a multi-disciplinary project team, the framework was developed in consultation with program staff and informed by existing research. The document provides a working understanding of what locally led development means within the program, an assessment of the program's current progress along DFAT's Locally Led Development Continuum, and a direction for where achievable outcomes can be delivered before the end of this phase of the program. The framework is supported by an Action Plan 2025-2027, which documents specific actions to be implemented and provides a mechanism for monitoring progress.

The program's partnerships with international organisations extend beyond the mobilisation of volunteers. They respond to the evolving needs of partner organisations by offering flexible and diverse ways of working together that can be tailored to the specific context of each partnership. For example, through the Flexible Learning Exchange, Impact Grants and Participatory Action Research on Organisational Capacity Strengthening initiatives the program has been able to broaden support to include small grants and learning and development opportunities. In some cases, partnerships have evolved to encompass the procurement of professional services, with partner organisations fulfilling the role of technical and subject-area experts, particularly in areas such as disability and gender inclusion.

The program embraces innovative approaches to partnerships. This includes exploring novel ways to mobilise volunteers in support of partner organisation goals consistent with the program's priorities and compliance commitments. For example, in 2024-25, 13 Australian researchers were mobilised in two separate clusters to complete hybrid assignments with researchers at Hai Duong Medical Technical University Faculty of Animal Science and Veterinary Medicine, and Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry. This innovative approach maximised opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing between the Australian and Vietnamese researchers while minimising disruption to other work and study commitments.

The program also tested new ways of working with partners through the Innovation Hub. From 2020 to 2024, it took a co-design approach to working with government and non-government organisations to explore opportunities to strengthen volunteering at a community and national level. While the Hub formally closed in 2024, the program has maintained these relationships and, in some cases, expanded them into new areas. For example, in 2024-25, the program mobilised the first remote volunteer with the Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency, extending the ways the program had supported national volunteering in the Philippines through the work of the Innovation Hub.

Indigenous Pathways

Indigenous Pathways has adopted a tailored approach to nurturing partnerships that is unique and specific to the needs of First Nations organisations, communities and individuals. Indigenous Pathways connects First Nations people and organisations from Australia, with organisations and communities internationally, to collaborate on projects that are mutually beneficial and build meaningful relationships across cultures.

Indigenous Pathways works carefully to ensure that projects are culturally appropriate, both from Australian and Pacific perspectives. Proudly Indigenous led, the partnerships forged by and for Indigenous Pathways are guided by the broader set of Pathways values that are closely upheld by the Indigenous Pathways team, Indigenous Volunteer Support and Advisory Panel, and the broader staff supporting the delivery of the program.

Australian organisations

Australian partner organisations continue to play a crucial role in the program, building on existing relationships, expanding into new partnerships, and fostering connections between organisations based on shared objectives.

Broadly, the program uses a three-tiered approach to categorising different levels of engagement with each partner: strategic, collaborative and promotional. In practice, each partnership is tailored to take advantage of the unique strengths and priorities of the Australian organisation, as well as overlapping areas of interest and values alignment.

Australian partner organisation categories



Most current partners sit within the collaborative category. These partnerships are initiated in response to a strategic need from a partner organisation whereby the program brokers a relationship with an existing Australian organisation or seeks a new partnership in support of the development goals of the partner. Each partnership is unique and involves considered coordination, sometimes between multiple Australian and international organisations, to deliver the best possible results for the partner organisations.

Typically running over multiple years and multiple assignments, it's common for collaborative partnerships to evolve. They may start with Australian organisations supporting assignment promotion and recruitment to the establishment of deep, trusted and complex connections across multiple touchpoints within the program, Australian organisations and partner organisations. The program actively encourages this evolution, allowing the nature and direction of the partnership to shift and grow with the changing priorities of each partner. However, it also closely monitors the relationship to ensure a steadfast commitment to program principles, specifically the locally led approach.

Other people-to-people programs

The program has forged partnerships with other Australian Government-funded people-to-people programs, specifically the Australia Awards, New Colombo Plan and Women Leading and Influencing. To date, partnerships with fellow people-to-people programs have largely focused on identifying ways to

bring together the respective cohorts of alumni and scholars through networking events. The partnership with Australia Awards Cambodia has been particularly successful, resulting in seven networking events in Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney since 2023.

Engineers Without Borders (EWB) Australia

EWB Australia has been a steadfast collaborative partner with the program for the last seven years. Over that time, the partnership has evolved from recruiting engineers to support water and sanitation projects to volunteering assignments across a broader range of organisations. Initially focused on supporting closely affiliated partner organisations in Cambodia and Timor-Leste, the partnership has expanded to also support the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Ministry of Rural Development in Cambodia and the Ministry of Health and Department of Water Resources in Vanuatu. EWB Australia works hand in glove with the program to align recruitment, pre-departure briefings and monitoring and evaluation. In 2024-25, this partnership supported four assignments in Cambodia, three assignments in Timor-Leste and two assignments in Vanuatu.



Case Study

Empowering business and tourism in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is recovering from the 2022 economic crisis but household budgets remain tight due to price increases and job and income losses. Supporting local businesses and encouraging tourism after the COVID-19 border closures are vital to rebuilding the economy.

With support from the Australian Volunteers Program, the Matara District Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MDCCI) has strengthened its ability to support local business growth and inclusive economic development in the Matara district.

MDCCI has long served as the leading business development partner in the region, supporting members across the tourism, manufacturing, finance and IT sectors. To expand its reach and strengthen member services, the Chamber recently hosted David Havig, an Australian volunteer who brought expertise in digital marketing and business development.

David supported MDCCI to develop digital marketing strategies to improve the visibility of local businesses. He introduced a membership sticker system, which allowed businesses to showcase their association with the Chamber, boosting both their reputation

and community awareness. David also helped build valuable partnerships and gain government recognition, positioning MDCCI as an influential player in regional development planning.

In addition, David supported the Chamber to become more inclusive by identifying and supporting local entrepreneurs living with a disability. He connected the entrepreneurs with funding opportunities and ensured they were included in MDCCI's support network.

These changes have significantly strengthened MDCCI's ability to meet its objectives; its brand profile grew, tourism promotion gained momentum, and membership increased, with 10 new businesses joining and 20 more in the process of signing on.

This success was made possible by MDCCI's adaptable leadership, supportive staff, and openness to trying new ideas. Its willingness to expand David's volunteer assignment beyond the original focus also enabled significant and lasting impacts.

Left. David Havig (right), Australian volunteer Digital Marketing Mentor for Tourism at Matara District Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sri Lanka. In this photo he is with Thadini Thilakawardana (left), owner of Street Foods Boutique Mathota Ambula, Polhena Beach, Matara.

Right. Sudesh Kumara (left), Chief Executive Officer of partner organisation Matara District Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sri Lanka. David Havig (right). In this photo David was holding a drone, Patna Waterfall, Deniyaya, Sri Lanka.

7.2 | Promoting the value of volunteering

Increasing awareness and appreciation of the contribution that global volunteering makes to locally led change is critical to the success of program. The program's public diplomacy activities help deliver this outcome by ensuring the value of volunteering is recognised and promoted by key stakeholders. These stakeholders include partners overseas and in Australia; current, potential and past volunteers; DFAT (Australia and overseas); participants of other DFAT people-to-people programs; the wider development sector; and other international volunteering agencies.

End of program outcome: Key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries appreciate the value of volunteering

The program delivers a range of activities to increase the appreciation of the value of volunteering among key stakeholders in Australia and the countries where the program operates.

This year the program delivered successful International Volunteer Day and International Women's Day campaigns while the impact of global volunteering was also promoted through content shared across digital channels, conference participation, events and in targeted newsletters. Volunteers and partners were supported to share their stories through rich storytelling and videos including communication materials that demonstrated the program's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Many of these activities also contributed to the program's recruitment marketing objectives, which include increasing the diversity of volunteers and promoting the uptake of assignments to new audiences.

Section 7.3 provides further information about how the program supported alumni to remain connected and promote global volunteering.

Intermediate outcome: The benefit of volunteering is recognised and promoted by partner organisations, Australian organisations, volunteers and DFAT

The program works with partners, volunteers and DFAT to share stories that demonstrate the value of volunteering, including illustrating how volunteers support partners to achieve their development goals, form strong, mutually respectful relationships and participate in knowledge exchange.

Throughout the year, the program produced materials, including more than 100 pieces of social media content, as part of DFAT's public diplomacy in the countries where the program operates.

Social media content was used on DFAT Canberra channels to acknowledge International Volunteer Day, NAIDOC Week, International Women's Day, International Day of Persons with Disabilities and International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction. Content showing the impact of climate change and the ongoing mitigation efforts of partner organisations and volunteers was also produced as part of DFAT's preparations for COP29.

International Volunteer Day

International Volunteer Day (IVD), marked annually on 5 December, provides an opportunity for the program to celebrate the value of volunteering with stakeholders in Australia and overseas.

The program's theme for IVD 2024 was Hope in Action. This theme embodied the spirit of international volunteering; Australian volunteers do not just hope for a better world, they actively contribute to creating one by working alongside partners across the Pacific, Asia, and Africa who are improving their communities.

The theme was promoted through the program's [IVD video](#), which featured eight volunteers and their partner organisations describing how they put hope in action through their assignments.

In addition to the hero video, seven reels profiling individual volunteers were also shared on the program's social media channels as part of a week-long social media campaign. The campaign concluded with social content featuring images of IVD events around the world that the program hosted or participated in.

The program's IVD videos were viewed 156,978 times. This equates to a total watch time of more than 10 days and represents a 24% increase in views from the campaign videos published to mark IVD 2023.



Vanuatu – Australian volunteer Dr Sarah Bannerman (left), Visiting Emergency Medicine Registrar with Medical Intern Terrence Tom (right) at Vila Central Hospital Emergency Department Vanuatu.

For IVD 2024, each DFAT Post and DFAT Canberra received a social media content pack containing country-specific content, videos and social tiles. As a result, 20 Posts shared program content relating to IVD.

In Australia, the program hosted an in-person IVD event at AVI's office with program alumni Ayman Mahli and Beth Eggleston speaking on the Hope in Action theme. More than 80 guests attended the event, including current remote volunteers, alumni, Australian partner organisations and program staff. In addition to the Melbourne event, Alumni Representatives delivered events in Darwin, Hobart, Brisbane, Sydney and Perth. More than 50 alumni joined these IVD celebrations across Australia.

Internationally, a mix of face-to-face and virtual IVD events were held in 19 program countries. In some countries IVD events were combined with events to mark International Day of People with Disabilities, which falls on 3 December each year. Some events were run by the program in collaboration with Posts or other volunteer sending agencies, usually with partner organisations and volunteers in attendance. Examples of these events are outlined below.

Fifty attendees gathered for the IVD event in Vietnam, including representatives from DFAT, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, partner organisations, and in-country volunteers. The event provided a valuable opportunity to reflect on the program's activities in Vietnam over the past six years, emphasising sustainable development,

community initiatives and volunteer engagement. The volunteers shared inspiring stories that highlighted the positive impacts of their assignments, as well as their collaborative experiences with partner organisations.

In Fiji, volunteer Jessica Evans and representatives from her partner organisation, Empower Pacific, appeared on a national breakfast TV show to speak about the value of volunteering. This was followed by an event attended by Australian volunteers and their partner organisations to celebrate the strengthening of people-to-people ties resulting from international volunteering.

In Timor-Leste, Australian volunteers working at the National Hospital spoke alongside their Timorese counterparts in front of 240 people at an IVD celebration that brought together diplomats, UN representatives, Australian volunteers and other international volunteer sending organisations. Australian volunteer Paul Ashe was also interviewed on national television program Café Dader to share his experience supporting his partner organisation and the community as part of wider IVD coverage in Timor-Leste.

International Women's Day

In March 2025, the program joined people around the world marking International Women's Day (IWD) by celebrating partner organisations and Australian volunteers who are working to advance gender equality. For IWD 2025, the program delivered a digital campaign



Laos – Australian volunteer Lorise Clark (middle) works as an English Proficiency Trainer and Curriculum Development Mentor at the Faculty of Economics and Tourism, Souphanouvong University in Luang Prabang, Laos. She is pictured with her students in the classroom: Front row (left to right): Chanhom Panivanhyong, Daophone Inthalucksa, Linthong Phommamy, Naphaphone Souksavath. Back row (left to right): Mounthida, Kham Khong Va, Lina Philasouk, Alisa Chamthaumma, Touna Puongoudon.

and events exploring the UN theme of For ALL Women and Girls: Rights, Equality, Empowerment.

The program's digital campaign harnessed videos and quote tiles from volunteers, who are working with partner organisations to support gender equality through assignments aimed at improving access to clean water, toilet facilities, women's sport and academic participation. The campaign, which ran across all program channels, also highlighted upcoming volunteering opportunities for Australians wanting to contribute to gender equitable change.

In late March, the program held an in-person International Women's Day event in Brisbane bringing together current participants and alumni of several DFAT people-to-people programs including the Australian Volunteers Program, Australia Awards Women Leading and Influencing, and the New Colombo Plan for a night of discussion and networking. Tracie Starkey, an Assistant Director in DFAT's Office of the Pacific spoke of the importance of coming together as women and allies to advance a shared vision of gender equality.

The program also supported a range of in-country IWD activities including an event with partner organisation Educo in the Philippines, and an exhibition created by female prison inmates in Indonesia, delivered by partner organisation PKBI NTT.

Partner organisations

Aligned with this intermediate program outcome, partner organisations were surveyed as part of the independent external evaluation of the program in 2024 and asked to reflect on the value of volunteering to their country and its ties to Australia. The survey found that 92% of partner organisations agreed or strongly agreed that volunteers have an important role in supporting socio-economic development in their countries, while 83% agreed or strongly agreed that the program had strengthened their organisation's relationship with Australia.

Australian organisations

Australian organisations shared the value of volunteering with their networks throughout the year, increasing the reach of recruitment activities and demonstrating the impact of the program. For example, Engineers without Borders profiled Australian volunteers and their partner organisations in Cambodia and Timor-Leste on their website, as did Researchers in Agriculture for International Development.

Intermediate outcome: Innovation, learning and program achievements are promoted and shared

The program engaged with audiences through a range of in-person and online activities to share knowledge and program achievements throughout the reporting period.

Conferences

The program attended the Occupational Therapy Australia conference and the Midsumma festival to promote awareness of international volunteering among target networks. It also supported a past volunteer to promote the program at the Australian Association for Pacific Studies Conference.

Media and content

The program continued to identify, develop and share impact stories through a range of media channels and platforms.

Academic journal *Development in Practice* published the research article '[Integrating climate action into the Australian Volunteers Program](#)' written by program staff and researchers from the UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures. The article describes how a development program without a core focus on climate change has taken initial but important steps towards climate resilient development.

Newly released findings from the program's ongoing Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (2019-2026) were also covered in *Devpolicy* in an article republished in the [Samoa Observer](#).

Articles highlighting the impact of Australia volunteers and their partner organisations were published in local news outlets in many of the countries where the program operates, including [FBC News](#) and *TV One* (Fiji), [RTTL](#) (Timor-Leste), the [Randburg Sun](#) (South Africa), and the [Marshall Islands Journal](#) (the Marshall Islands).

An [ABC online](#) article highlighted the importance of Australian volunteer-delivered English language training for journalists at Timor-Leste's RTTL, particularly as the nation joins ASEAN. The Australian Ambassador to Mongolia also reflected on the importance of the program in strengthening people-to-people links in [the Diplomat](#).

The program continued to profile GEDSI assignments and activities throughout the reporting period. In one example, volunteer and member of the program's Disability Working Group Ben Clare shared his experience of volunteering in the Pacific as someone who is blind in a [story](#) for the program website. Partner organisation Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired Timor-Leste Executive Director Gabriel de Sousa also wrote [an article](#) about how his organisation, which promotes and protects the rights of people with disabilities, has used a grant from the program to further their work.

Indigenous Pathways activities were shared across the program's digital platforms, on DFAT channels and in international media. For example, the [Island Sun Newspaper](#) in the Solomon Islands profiled the ongoing knowledge exchange and increasingly robust partnership between members of the Solomon Islands Rangers Association and Torres Strait Regional Authority, facilitated by Indigenous Pathways.

The program's commitment to LGBTQIA+ inclusion was highlighted through content created for International Pride Month and participation in Midsumma, where staff promoted the program's Pride Guides and the support available for LGBTQIA+ volunteers.

Volunteer and partner stories shared across the program's social media channels consistently achieved high engagement levels. Program social media audiences grew by an average of 24% across Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. The program has 22,500 followers on Facebook, 12,900 on LinkedIn and 5,800 on Instagram at the end of the reporting period.

Australian Volunteers Program website

The program's website remains its key digital communication and recruitment tool. The 2024-25 financial year saw a 27% increase in website visitation compared to the previous year.

In the reporting period, 14 sector pages were developed to support digital advertising and provide more focused landing pages for new visitors to the website. With the cessation of the Innovation Hub, the 40 innovation pages were removed, with relevant content incorporated across the broader site.

Intermediate outcome: Innovative approaches to, and alternative models of volunteering are designed and tested to expand the program's reach and adaptive capability

The program remains committed to evaluating its activities and sharing stories of innovation.

The hybrid volunteering modality, developed in 2022 as part of ongoing adaption to the COVID pandemic, built upon the program's prior experience with remote volunteering. Hybrid assignments offer a more flexible approach to volunteering with most (84%) beginning with a short remote phase, followed by a longer six to ten month in-country phase. The modality is best suited for assignments that benefit from in-country engagement but which also have desk-based components.

Internal research conducted in this financial year reviewed different stakeholders' experiences of hybrid assignments. During the 18-month period studied, hybrid assignments accounted for 28% of all assignments globally.

According to research participants, the benefits of hybrid volunteering include:

- Stronger preparation and relationship building before arrival through remote phase engagement
- More efficient and impactful in-country work as volunteers can "hit the ground running" with prior planning and reduced deployment costs
- Ongoing support after return allowing continued remote collaboration and properly recognised post-assignment support from the volunteer
- Greater flexibility for volunteers and partner organisations accommodating limited in-country availability and enabling efficiencies in some pre-assignment preparation
- Enhanced accessibility and inclusion expanding the volunteer pool for those not able to commit to lengthy in-country assignments.

Tonga – Managing Director of partner organisation Nishi Trading Co, Minoru Nishi (left) and Australian volunteer Hans Porada (right) in Utulau, Tonga. They are inspecting the latest crop of pumpkins which has been planted using new pest and water sensors.



The study identified several specific challenges with the hybrid model and shared suggestions from stakeholders for improvements that could be made. The model's flexibility and accessibility benefits are substantial, but success requires enhanced communication protocols, streamlined coordination processes, and better expectation management to address the unique complexities of managing assignments across multiple phases and locations.

In 2024-25 the program closed out its Innovation Hub activities while continuing to monitor outcomes of previous innovation initiatives. This included:

- Continued management of the two-year action plan with the Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency
- Publication of an IndoRelawan research study examining volunteerism practices across Indonesia from volunteer and organisational perspectives
- Delivery of a report on the Volunteering for Development innovation workstream and a presentation to the Program Management Group on the lessons learned from future-focused initiatives
- Ongoing monitoring and tracking of outcomes from innovation partnerships in the Philippines, Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Mongolia.

While the program is no longer supporting a separate innovation workstream, and is placing greater emphasis on program effectiveness instead, volunteers continue to introduce new ways of thinking. Based on volunteer feedback, several innovative practices and technologies were introduced across various sectors:

- **Digital Tools and Technology:** Volunteers introduced numerous digital solutions including Google Apps Script for database automation, SharePoint for document management, Power Apps for complex data systems, and cloud-based platforms. Many implemented AI tools like ChatGPT for writing assistance, Canva for visual content creation, and various survey platforms for data collection.
- **Educational Innovation:** Teaching methods were modernised through interactive platforms like Kahoot for quizzes, Padlet for collaborative learning, and “flipped classroom” models. Volunteers also introduced video-based learning, online collaboration tools, and AI-enhanced educational content development.

- **Healthcare Advancements:** Medical innovations included point-of-care ultrasound technology, electronic medical records systems, patient tracking databases, and specialised equipment like PAT slides for patient transfers. Emergency medicine protocols and code blue systems were established in resource-limited settings.
- **Communication and Marketing:** Social media strategies, digital marketing campaigns, visual storytelling techniques, and professional communication templates were implemented. Volunteers also created media databases, pitch templates, and brand management systems.
- **Environmental and Technical Solutions:** Sustainable practices included ecological monitoring systems, water extraction technologies, solar power design tools, and waste reduction initiatives. Technical innovations featured GPS/GNSS measurement systems, mobile app development, and renewable energy solutions.
- **Organisational Development:** Management innovations included evidence-based practice frameworks, strategic planning processes, financial management systems, and stakeholder engagement methodologies using tools like IAP2.

Many volunteers introduced practices that involved adapting existing technologies to local contexts rather than creating entirely new solutions and demonstrating practical innovation in resource-constrained environments.



Timor-Leste – Francisca Soares (left) and Celeste da Costa (right), are both designers and handcrafters of partner organisation Boneca de Atauro – a women's cooperative producing unique embroidery design handicrafts in Vila Maumeta, a village on the east coast of Atauro Island, Timor-Leste. 'Boneca' is the Tetum word for 'doll'.



Focus Area 2

Enhance diversity and inclusion

Enhancing diversity and inclusion is one of the program's guiding principles. The Global Program Strategy elevates gender equality, disability inclusion and climate action as particular priorities.

As part of the program's efforts to mainstream inclusion, all assignments have the common objective of promoting strategies that support gender equality, disability and social inclusion in addition to their unique assignment-specific objectives.

Examples abound of volunteers working with partner organisations to ensure no one is left behind. A landscaping company in Bhutan commented that their volunteer "brought the concept of accessibility in the recreational parks and in any landscape development project they worked on, to ensure there were disability friendly facilities. We think the introduction of the concept itself is crucial." A technical training centre in Fiji noted that their "volunteer actively promoted inclusion by incorporating accessibility features into the digital platforms and ensuring training materials were adapted to cater to individuals with diverse needs." Volunteers were also reported as successfully promoting women and girls' participation in surfing in Solomon Islands and mentoring young female paramedics in Vanuatu.

The program is working hard to achieve a true representation of Australia through the volunteers participating in the program, with a particular focus on engaging with Indigenous Australians, people with a disability and supporting gender equality.

Gender equality

This financial year, the program created a Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan in response to the release of DFAT's International Gender Equality Strategy. This provides the program with a new roadmap and targeted objectives.

Aligned with this strategy, the program supported five partner organisations to advance gender equality and inclusion across Cambodia, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tanzania through the Impact Fund. Projects focused on organisation strengthening, maternal and child health, advancing CEDAW recommendations, supporting sustainable livelihoods, and menstrual health. Activities included strategic planning, community education, training, and service delivery. Each initiative is locally led and contributes to more sustainable and resilient communities.

Tonga – Left to right: Youth mentor and Australian volunteer Sosefina Fineanganofa, Principal Maletina Hiliatē, and Helen Sitani, at the Ahopanilolo Technical Institute, Maufanag, Tonga.

Southern Africa Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) Forum Attendance

The program supported six partners to attend the SVRI Forum, a global event for research and action on Ending Violence Against Women. The partnership with SVRI has now expanded into a global collaboration, with the Southern Africa program and SVRI jointly hosting a webinar series focused on gender based violence response and prevention.

Disability inclusion

Disability equity and rights remain a priority and area of strength for the program. The Disability Inclusion Working Group, drawn from across teams and volunteer alumni with lived experience, continues to guide the program's approach. The Working Group also provides valuable input in promoting assignments, linking with Australian organisations and addressing accessibility challenges.

The program is committed to attracting a diverse range of Australians to participate in the program, however for people with a disability, there have been barriers at the recruitment stage. To address this, the program delivered a disability inclusion awareness raising workshop for the entire Recruitment team. This deepened their understanding of how disability is experienced in different countries and how staff can work together to remove barriers for volunteers and partners.

With the assistance of an alumni with lived experience, the program also worked to ensure its systems and processes are accessible, resulting in significant accessibility improvements to the volunteer portal and online learning environment.

To better engage with the Deaf community and organisations in Australia, the program produced short videos in Auslan to share information about international volunteering. This builds on a recommendation from the Disability Inclusion Working Group around the importance of targeted communication and outreach to diverse communities.

The program has made progress connecting with Deaf organisations and communities in several countries. In Mongolia, NGO Deaf Education hosted a Deaf volunteer, accompanied by an interpreter, as an Early Intervention Mentor for early childhood education programs. This was complemented by a parallel volunteer assignment focused on sign language development at umbrella organization Mongolia Association of Sign Language Interpreters.

LGBTQIA+ inclusion remains a priority, and the program is conscious that in many places the rights and safety of LGBTQIA+ people continued to be reduced or challenged. The program stands in solidarity with partners working in this space. This solidarity takes several forms. For example, in this reporting period the program supported two Global Webinar Series events highlighting partners and volunteers working with organisations supporting LGBTQIA+ human rights, commissioned four consultants across program countries to review and research LGBTQIA+ rights and inclusion in each country context to enable an update of the Volunteer Pride Guides, and took part in the Midsumma Festival in Melbourne to show the program's support for diversity and inclusion and to promote partnering and volunteer opportunities with the LGBTQIA+ community.



Papua New Guinea – Priscilla Pokon (left), Clinician at the Callan Services National Unit (CSNU) Gerehu Inclusive Education Resource Centre in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, with Vera Weimate (centre), Community-Based Rehabilitation Support Staff at CSNU and Australian volunteer Audiology Mentor Rainbow Apostol.

Indigenous Pathways

Indigenous Pathways grew and strengthened over the past year, deepening relationships, expanding visibility, and building meaningful pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage in international volunteering. Strong and trusting partnerships for mutual engagement and ensuring cultural safety remain priorities.

The Indigenous Conservation Knowledge Exchange brought together First Nations rangers from Australia and Solomon Islands to share traditional knowledge, conservation approaches, and on-country practices. Three staff from the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) spent a month in Solomon Islands working alongside the Solomon Islands Rangers Association (SIRA), supporting ranger training and visiting four partner communities.

This exchange was the result of long-term partnership work, building on earlier visits and relationship-strengthening activities in 2024, including engagement with TSRA, Vanuatu's High Commissioner to Australia, and South Sea Islander Australian community leaders.

A reciprocal phase of the exchange commenced in June 2025, with four SIRA staff members beginning a three-month hybrid project co-designed with TSRA. This

ongoing initiative is a powerful example of First Nations direct engagement and knowledge sharing across the region and provides a strong foundation from which to expand.

A number of Indigenous volunteers undertook assignments in Bhutan, Solomon Islands, Nepal, and Papua New Guinea through the mainstream volunteer program. These included roles such as Child Protection Policy Mentor, Landscape Architect and Ecotourism Project Manager. There was also an increase in Indigenous applications for mainstream volunteer positions. These assignments reflect the diverse skills First Nations volunteers bring to international development and the program's commitment to creating safe and supported pathways.

Throughout the year, the Pathways team undertook internal advocacy and partnership-building work. This included collaboration with in-country colleagues to explore and design new opportunities for First Nations engagement, helping to embed Indigenous perspectives in a meaningful and sustainable way. The program's three Indigenous staff also maintain active involvement with the Association of First Nations Australians in Development, working to build the network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders involved in international development.



Solomon Islands – Group photo from the Indigenous Conservation Knowledge Exchange to Solomon Islands in February 2025. Left to right: Loretta Glanville (TSRA volunteer), Clare Onahangari'i, Keran Kramme (Indigenous Programs Coordinator), Crystal Kwaisi, Eddie Haikau Huitarau (SIRA), Charles Afu, Dominic Surioa, Maddy Kereta'i, Joycelin Kaiahuna, Aruka Hutaikera, Ethel Anau (TSRA volunteer), Margaret Alisi and Eve Aihunu (Program Manager, Solomon Islands).



Case Study

Empowering communities through tourism in the Philippines

Local tourism development in the Philippines strengthens the economy, creates jobs, and protects cultural heritage. The City Government of Victorias Tourism Office promotes community-led, sustainable tourism, focusing strongly on agricultural and ecotourism initiatives.

Over the past year, Clare MacNish has made tourism efforts more organised, inclusive, and sustainable through her role as a volunteer Sustainable Ecotourism Officer at the organisation. She has supported the team to develop better systems, mentored staff, and strengthened community engagement. Her success stemmed from listening deeply, understanding the local context, and learning the dialect to build strong community connections.

Clare's main impact has been through her work with the Pasil Fisherfolks Association, which includes local fishers, farmers, and women's groups. They had already started the Baybay Mangrove Ecotrail, a community-led project raising income and environmental awareness. Clare helped enhance the experience by working with the group to develop new programs, coordinate events, conduct visitor surveys, and promote community engagement.

Notably, Clare collaborated with colleagues and community members to organise Paddle with a Purpose, a kayak tour and clean-up initiative

that offered income opportunities and hands-on experience for local youth, training them as kayak guides while promoting environmental conservation. Clare also helped secure funding to expand activities, including from the Forest Foundation Philippines to support the growth of the sustainable tourism program in Gawahon.

Clare's impact was praised by Marian Rica, supervisor at the Tourism Office: "She is very dedicated to helping the community here in Victorias. She's eager to connect with other NGOs, other organisations outside of Victorias, to help us implement our projects. She was able to get funding from other NGOs that can help the local community."

Clare also supported awareness-raising efforts, assisting the City Government of Victorias in organising Mangrove Awareness Day, which engaged students in eco-friendly activities, including climate change discussions and environmental education.

Her work focused on building a community-led, sustainable tourism model that supports the city's goal of turning the Pasil mangrove area into a balanced tourism destination. Through training, environmental education, and supporting local enterprises, Clare has significantly contributed to economic inclusion and community resilience.

Left. Social media training with local Pasil Fisherfolk youth at the Victorias City Tourism Office. Left to right: Australian volunteer Clare, Annie, Alkee, Rhea and Sharm.

Right. Clare with her colleagues Sharm, Stephen, Jori, Maricel, Monica, and Wendy, after running a brainstorming session on local sustainable tourism possibilities at Gawahon Eco Park.

7.3 | Supporting program participants to gain greater cultural awareness

Over the past eight years, more than 2,400 individuals have been involved with the Australian Volunteers Program: 2,234 as volunteers and 232 as accompanying dependents. Additionally, in the past year one Auslan interpreter accompanied a volunteer on their assignment, and four Solomon Islanders Rangers were involved in the Indigenous Pathways Exchange program.

End of program outcome: Program participants gain greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections across countries

Evidence shows that a high proportion of those involved in the program will gain greater cultural awareness, build strong global connections and develop personally and professionally.

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers started in 2019. It is following a cohort of 50 Australian volunteers and accompanying dependents over time, from before their assignments to several years afterwards. The latest in a series of reports covers the study's fourth round of interviews, focusing on the period 2021-2023.

Most study participants continue to reflect favorably on their earlier volunteer experiences, and all are benefiting in some way from personal and/or professional impacts of their assignments.

Since their assignments, the volunteers' civic participation has become more impactful and internationally oriented. The proportion of participants involved in voluntary service has increased.

Although ongoing contact with partner organisations has slightly decreased, it remains widespread. Participants maintain a strong interest in and understanding of international development complexities, and their appreciation for the unique contributions of development volunteering has grown.

I don't think I had much knowledge or understanding of what the aid program was before. Definitely, having been a part of it I now think about how aid works...

– Volunteer and anonymous longitudinal study participant

Volunteers retain positive feelings towards and connections with their host country, although these may fade over time. Their in-country experiences and program support have significantly contributed to making them more globally oriented and informed. These changes in outlook, friendships, interests, and cross-cultural skills continue to benefit them in their work and civic activities.

I've got eyes on a bigger world and my eyes have been moulded by more than what's under my nose... I know that a lot of the world's not like that. That's really valuable to me, it's my world view, it's the change in my world view.

– Volunteer and anonymous longitudinal study participant

The study shows that program provided numerous professional benefits, helping volunteers build confidence, expand their knowledge and skills, and explore new career paths. Young volunteers with career-related motivations have seen the most significant gains.

[The biggest impact of my assignment] has to be professionally ... it provided me with a focus that allowed me to pursue a field and achieve well at university... that was a catalyst for that confidence to build in myself professionally and now I've landed a really good job that I really love.

– Volunteer and anonymous longitudinal study participant

Maintaining relationships with like-minded volunteers also remains a key part of the volunteer experience for many.

Intermediate outcome: Program participants gain professionally and personally

In-depth findings from the longitudinal study are reflected in the assignment reports of a much larger number of recent volunteers. Of all those finishing an assignment in the year, 83% feel they have grown personally or professionally as a result of their assignment.

The assignment has given me direction in my professional endeavours which highlighted the importance of developing your career direction and life's work towards a cause that you deeply care about.

– Volunteer, Philippines

In their feedback, volunteers consistently emphasised the profound impact of cultural immersion. Many reported developing deeper cultural sensitivity and learning to work effectively across diverse contexts. The experience challenged their assumptions and broadened their global perspectives.

It's been an incredibly enriching experience, I have learnt so much about myself, the organisation, the culture, development and the Pacific.

– Volunteer, Tonga



Tonga – Australian volunteer Leadership and Management Mentor Marijke Frantzen (left), with her colleague Vika Unga at the Tonga Fire and Emergency Services based in Tofoa, Tonga.

Many volunteers described transformative personal development, increased confidence, and greater self-awareness. Several noted discovering new strengths and resilience they didn't know they possessed. Volunteers reported enhanced technical skills, improved mentoring and facilitation abilities, better project management, and strengthened communication skills. Many valued the opportunity to apply their expertise in new contexts.

The importance of forming strong working relationships was repeatedly emphasised, with volunteers learning to navigate different communication styles and build trust across cultures. A recurring theme was learning to be more patient, flexible, and adaptive when working in different environments with varying timeframes and approaches.

It has been great learning how to work with other organisations, their values and ways of working. It has been good to learn other systems for my own work back in Australia.

– Volunteer, Vietnam

Volunteer learning

Pre-assignment online learning and monthly pre-assignment briefing workshops were coordinated and delivered for an increasing number of participants throughout the year. This included 13 three-day pre-departure briefings for in-country and hybrid volunteer assignments and 13 online preparing to volunteer briefings for remote and short term (micro) in-country assignments. The Indigenous Pathways briefing program was refreshed and delivered twice, including a new briefing for incoming participants from Solomon Islands to Australia. Following pre-assignment briefings, volunteers connected with in-country teams and continued their learning and preparation at in-country orientation programs.

In participant surveys, 98% of respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with their pre-departure briefing and 97% of respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with their preparing to volunteer briefing.

In this reporting period, the post-assignment learning program was redesigned to an online format, providing more accessible and timely volunteer learning and transition support at the end of assignments. Five post-assignment workshops, including a pilot version, were delivered by volunteer alumni and staff trained in online facilitation skills by the Learning and Development team. The post-assignment workshops provide an important space for volunteers to reflect and share their experiences with one another and with the program.

An in-depth review of the volunteer learning journey has been initiated with the aim of strengthening volunteer preparation and learning. The review, partly conducted by an external reviewer, involved significant consultation with program stakeholders to understand how effectively the learning program supports volunteers to prepare for and practice locally led development, and to identify opportunities for improvement. Outcome reporting with recommendations, and implementation will commence in early FY 2025-26.

Alumni

The Australian Volunteers Program Alumni play a significant role in promoting the program and increasing awareness of the value of volunteering among their networks and the broader Australian public. Engagement with the alumni also provides ongoing professional networking and development opportunities for former volunteers. Alumni are key to building long-term cross-cultural connections and strengthening ties with other DFAT people-to-people programs.

An alumni survey was conducted in 2025, with 259 responses received from past volunteers living across all Australian states and territories. Highlights included 75% of respondents reporting they had promoted the program and/or program assignments with their networks in past 12 months; 87% reporting they have maintained connections with people they met while on assignment; 79% identifying that alumni events have helped to increase their cultural awareness; and almost half of respondents continuing to support their partner organisation following their assignment.

Every Australian state and territory now has one or more Alumni Representative with 13 new representatives recruited and nine representatives continuing in their roles in the reporting period. Seventeen Alumni Representative-led events were successfully delivered in 2024-25, with five alumni IVD events held for alumni members across Australia.

Sixteen alumni members promoted the program at nine public information sessions for people interested in becoming a volunteer. Additionally, 25 alumni were trained as Alumni Facilitators to support the delivery of post-assignment workshops. The Alumni Facilitators expressed gratitude for the opportunity to support recently joined alumni readjust to Australian life following their assignments.

The program supported alumni attendance at conferences to promote the value of volunteering to target cohorts. For example, a NSW Alumni Representative promoted the program at the Australian Association for Pacific Studies Conference at the University of Sydney Business School, generating interest in the program from academics and students working across a range of Pacific focused disciplines.

The program continued to strengthen connections between past volunteers and other DFAT people-to-people programs. Australia Awards Cambodia and alumni collaborated to deliver four networking events in Sydney and Melbourne, hosting Australia Award Scholars from Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Fiji and Solomon Islands.

Alumni Tuesday Chats were introduced in February 2025. Five online events were then held to create opportunities for new and existing members of the alumni to connect, identify personal and professional development opportunities and strengthen their relationship with the program.

The alumni Facebook and LinkedIn groups continued to grow and experience strong engagement, providing a space for alumni to connect, share stories, promote professional development opportunities, sector events, volunteer and job opportunities and conference information.



Vietnam – Megan Elizabeth Parkes Williams (left) volunteers at Vietnam National University of Agriculture Hanoi, as a Research and Network Development Officer. VNUA has a collaborative program with Australian partner organisation, the Crawford Fund. Megan is pictured with Nguyen Thi Duong Nga, a member of Researchers in Agriculture for International Development, at a watermelon field in Hanoi.

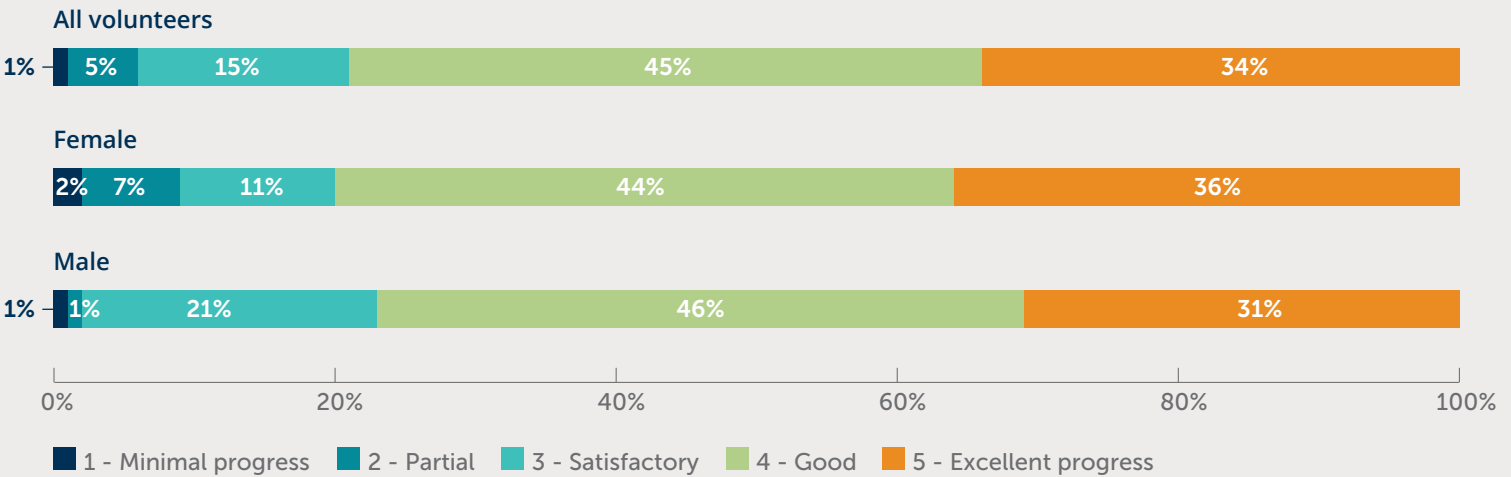
Intermediate outcome: Volunteers complete their assignment well and learn from their partner organisation

At the end of their assignments, volunteers evaluate progress towards their assignment objectives, independently of their partner organisations. Seventy-nine per cent of volunteers reported good or excellent progress against assignment objectives in 2024-25. This is a decrease from 81% the previous year. In-country assignments saw a slightly higher rate (83%) than hybrid (78%) and remote (75%).

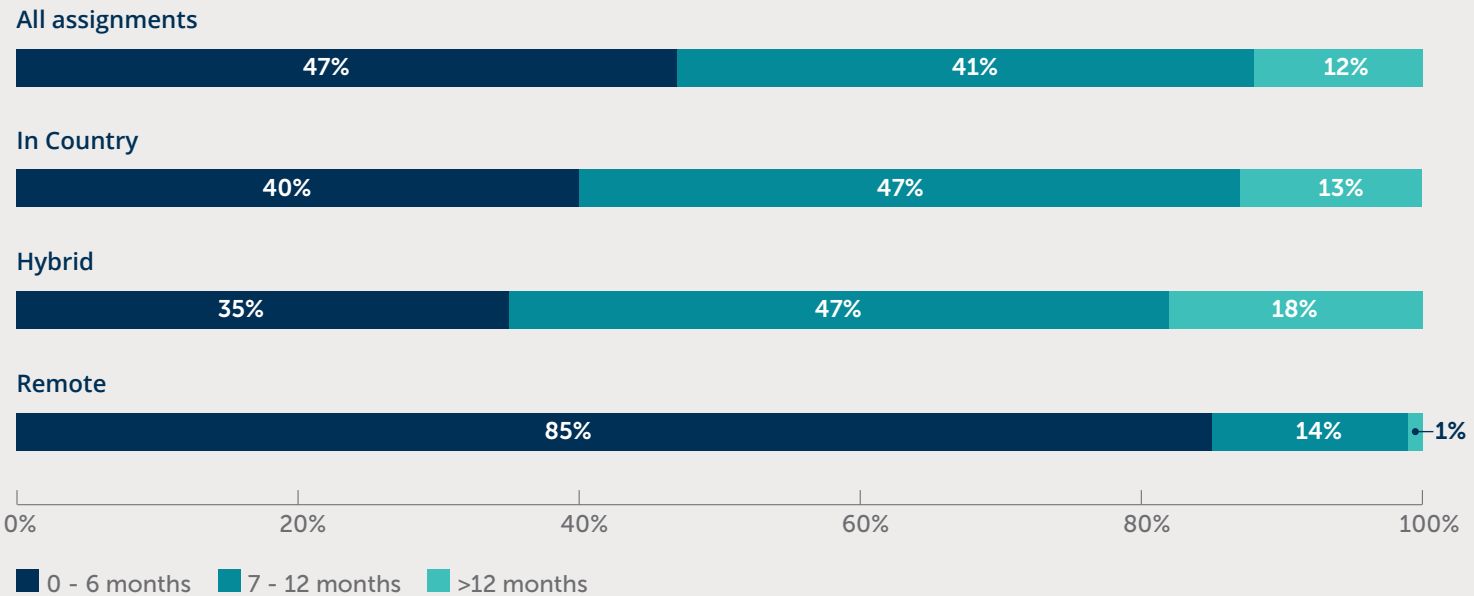
Ratings of progress from female volunteers were slightly higher than for male volunteers. Ratings from volunteers who prefer to self-describe, volunteers with a disability and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander volunteers were all good or excellent, albeit from a very small sample size.

The outcomes reported by volunteers are too diverse in geographic spread, organisational context and technical sector to easily summarise. Australian volunteers delivered comprehensive capacity strengthening across healthcare, education, agriculture, and civil society sectors, achieving significant, measurable outcomes. In healthcare, results included improved clinical training programs, enhanced

Progress on achieving assignment objectives - reported by volunteers (n202)



Duration of assignments



emergency department protocols, upgraded medical equipment usage, and strengthened patient care standards. Educational achievements encompassed curriculum development, enhanced research capabilities, improved English language instruction, and establishment of quality assurance frameworks.

Organisational development outcomes were substantial: strengthened financial management systems, successful grant applications securing significant funding, upgraded technology platforms, and comprehensive policy frameworks covering everything from child protection to operational procedures. Many assignments resulted in published research, improved documentation systems, and enhanced strategic planning capabilities.

Technical capacity strengthening yielded concrete infrastructure improvements such as solar power systems, water supply projects, and agricultural innovations. Digital transformation was evident through new databases, automated reporting systems, and improved communications platforms.

A high proportion of assignments focussed on or integrated gender equality and disability inclusion principles, resulting in increased female participation in leadership roles, enhanced accessibility measures, and targeted support for marginalised communities.

The typical duration of assignments has varied over time due to the impacts of COVID-19 and different assignment modalities. The general trend for in-country assignments, from before to after COVID-19, is for fewer assignments over 12 months and more under six months, but a similar proportion in the seven-to-12-month category.

In this reporting period, just under half of all assignments (47%) were less than six months long,

though this is skewed by remote assignments which are intended to have a shorter duration. For in-country and hybrid assignments, most were between seven to 12 months duration.

Of all those assignments underway during the year, 10% ended earlier than planned (compared to 11% the previous year). Similarly to last year, around half of these cases (48%) were due to volunteer health or other personal issues. One-third (34%) were due to the assignment not going as expected, with dissatisfaction from the volunteer, partner organisation or in three per cent of cases, the program terminating the assignment. The remaining 18% were for other reasons, including assignment objectives being completed early or variations in the structure and dates of hybrid assignments.

Fifteen per cent of assignments had their assignment end date extended by mutual agreement of the partner organisation and volunteer. A higher proportion of hybrid and remote assignments were extended (21% and 16% respectively) than in-country assignments, reflecting the greater flexibility allowed by these modalities.

A key part of the feedback provided by volunteers at the end of their assignments is their satisfaction with different elements of the program. Volunteers' satisfaction with the program overall was 87% satisfied or very satisfied (compared to 84% the previous year). This was 88% for women and 87% for men.

Volunteer satisfaction with their assignment was 88%, with only a small variation by modality (89% for both in-country and hybrid, and 85% for remote assignments). Assignment satisfaction was 89% for women and 86% for men. There were no significant differences in satisfaction ratings by age, disability status or other demographic variables.

Volunteer satisfaction (n217)

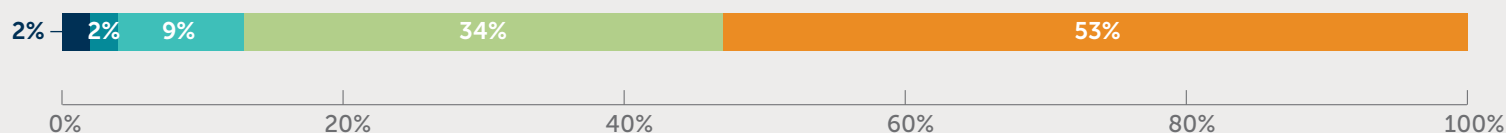
Overall assignment satisfaction



Satisfaction with working relationship with partner organisation

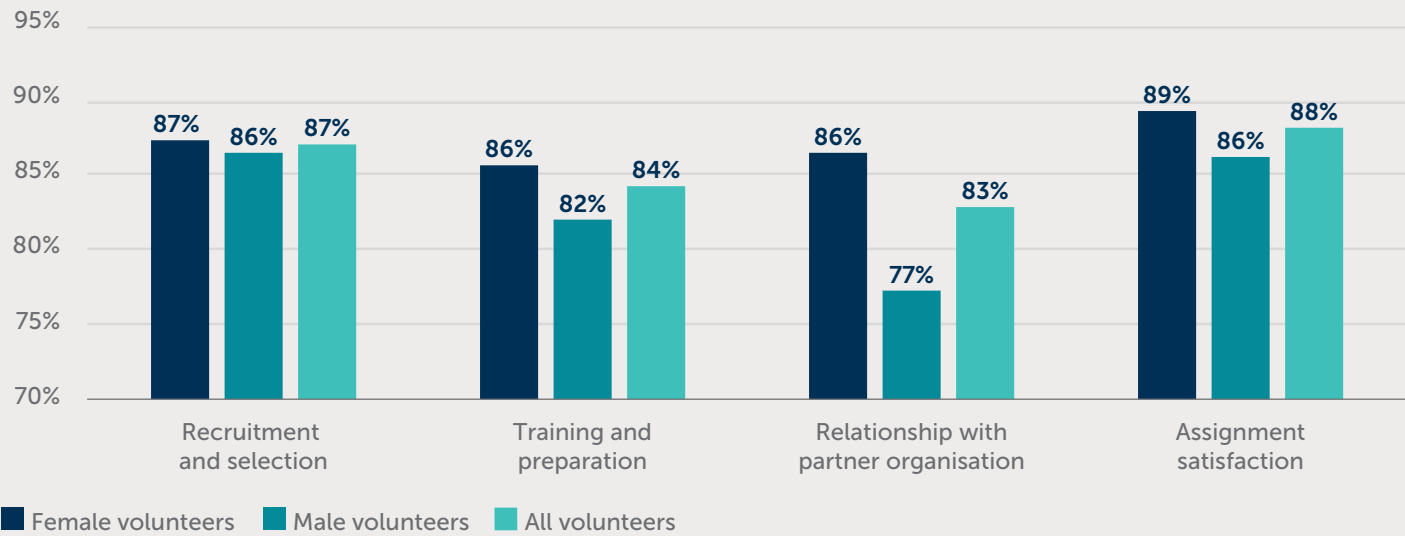


Overall satisfaction with the program



1 - Very dissatisfied 2 - Dissatisfied 3 - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4 - Satisfied 5 - Very satisfied

Proportion of volunteers satisfied with different elements of their experience



Kiribati – Australian volunteer Administration and Policy Mentor Cinzia Mariolini (left) with Uriam Rob'ati, Principal NGO Officer at the Ministry for Women, Youth, Sport and Social Affairs, pictured in South Tarawa, Kiribati.

Most successful or beneficial aspects of assignments reported by volunteers



In their feedback, volunteers reporting on the beneficial aspects of their assignments often reflected on the contributions they made to their partner organisations through training, capacity strengthening and knowledge transfer. Success was often measured by organisational improvements and positive feedback from colleagues. Strong partnerships with local teams were consistently cited as major successes, with volunteers developing deep, lasting friendships and professional relationships that extended beyond their assignments. The trust and mutual respect built with counterparts was crucial to achieving objectives.

Volunteers gained new skills, expanded their global perspectives and enhanced their capacity. Many reported significant personal growth and a renewed sense of purpose.

Colleagues, fellow volunteers and program staff provided essential assistance. The collaborative nature of assignments and shared learning experiences enhanced effectiveness. Volunteers consistently expressed gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to meaningful work while experiencing personal transformation through cross-cultural engagement and professional challenges.

I feel so grateful to have found this assignment and to have worked with Threads of Life, in Ubud, Indonesia with my family for one year. The Balinese people, the culture, environment, food and experience has been life changing. Although slow to start with, I managed to create some positive impact for my organisation and achieve my assignment goals. I have managed to create many friends and hope to stay connected in the future.

– Volunteer, Indonesia

This has been a very fulfilling assignment with important objectives and real impact on the hospital and community possible. The people I have worked with throughout the hospital have been amazing, with an incredible culture of openness, collaboration and learning. This culture exists at all levels of FAME and I will miss it and the daily changes we make for the benefit of others together!

– Volunteer, Tanzania

Not all assignments are successful and, even of those that are, none are without their problems. Over a third of volunteers reported the availability of their partner organisation counterpart as a challenge, creating uncertainty about priorities and limiting opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Delays due to organisational or external factors, issues prevalent within the organisation or the lack of resources were all frequently mentioned.

Communication was a commonly mentioned difficulty, varying from language barriers to poor communication from partner organisations regarding expectations, availability and feedback.

Partner organisation capacity and preparedness varied, with some lacking the resources, staff time, or institutional readiness to effectively support volunteers. High staff turnover, competing priorities, and limited availability of key personnel often meant volunteers worked in isolation or struggled to access the information and collaboration needed for their assignments.

Organisational and cultural dynamics within partner organisations sometimes created difficult work environments, with volunteers in some cases reporting micromanagement, bullying, hierarchical structures that stifled innovation, and workplace cultures that were resistant to change or external input.

The mismatch between assignment descriptions and actual roles created frustration and underutilisation of volunteer skills. This was particularly challenging when volunteers arrived to find partner organisations unprepared for their placement or unclear about how to effectively use volunteer expertise. The timing of assignments occasionally proved problematic, with some volunteers arriving during busy periods, holidays, or when key staff were unavailable due to other commitments.

Accommodation and living conditions presented challenges for some volunteers, particularly in more expensive or remote locations. Professional and personal isolation affected some volunteers. Specific to remote assignments was the difficulty of balancing the assignment with other personal or professional commitments and staying motivated, and time-zone differences leading to delayed communications.

Safety and security concerns raised by a small number of volunteers ranged from theft and robbery to restrictions on movement that limited volunteers' ability to engage with communities or travel for work purposes. Some faced significant health challenges, including illness, injuries, and access to appropriate medical care.

Despite these challenges, many volunteers demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resourcefulness in finding workarounds and alternative approaches to achieve their objectives.

Challenges experienced on assignment



At the end of their assignment, volunteers are asked for their suggestions on how the program could be improved. Feedback was given across several key areas:

- Assignment design and partner organisation preparation: Volunteers suggested more thorough consultation with partner organisations, particularly at the local level where volunteers will be based, to ensure assignments match actual needs rather than theoretical requirements. Clearer assignment objectives and regular revision of outdated position descriptions were frequently mentioned, as was a desire for longer assignments.
- Pre-departure and orientation support: Volunteers recommended connecting incoming volunteers with previous volunteers from the same location for peer support and practical advice. Many felt the pre-departure briefings could be more interactive and country-specific, with less repetition of online modules for returning volunteers. Earlier provision of country-specific information, particularly about accommodation, banking and local conditions, was frequently requested.
- Accommodation and living conditions: Some volunteers felt accommodation allowances were inadequate. Volunteers suggested better accommodation support upon arrival, including extending the period of temporary accommodation and more thorough advance scoping of suitable options by in-country teams.

- Financial support: Some volunteers noted that allowances don't cover actual living costs and fail to account for ongoing Australian financial obligations like HECS debts and superannuation. Remote work allowances were considered by some volunteers to be inadequate given the time and effort assignments required.
- Communication and support systems: Improved check-in processes and clearer communication from program staff were commonly requested. Volunteers wanted single points of contact rather than navigating multiple staff members, and more responsive support for issues arising during assignments. The online portal and IT systems were criticised for not being user-friendly.

This has been one of the best things I've done in my life! Despite the challenges, I have had an amazing time and I am so grateful to my partner organisation and the Australian Volunteers Program.

– Volunteer, Philippines

During the year, the program initiated internal program effectiveness projects to review and improve position description development and communications with volunteers. An allowance review was also conducted, with increases in some locations to come into effect from July 2025. A volunteer learning review was started, and a review of hybrid assignments also completed with recommendations for improvements to the learning journey specific for hybrid assignments.



Vanuatu – Australian volunteer Sadia Abdullah (right) with Meriam Nash, Project Finance Officer (left) at the Department of Water Resources offices in Port Vila.

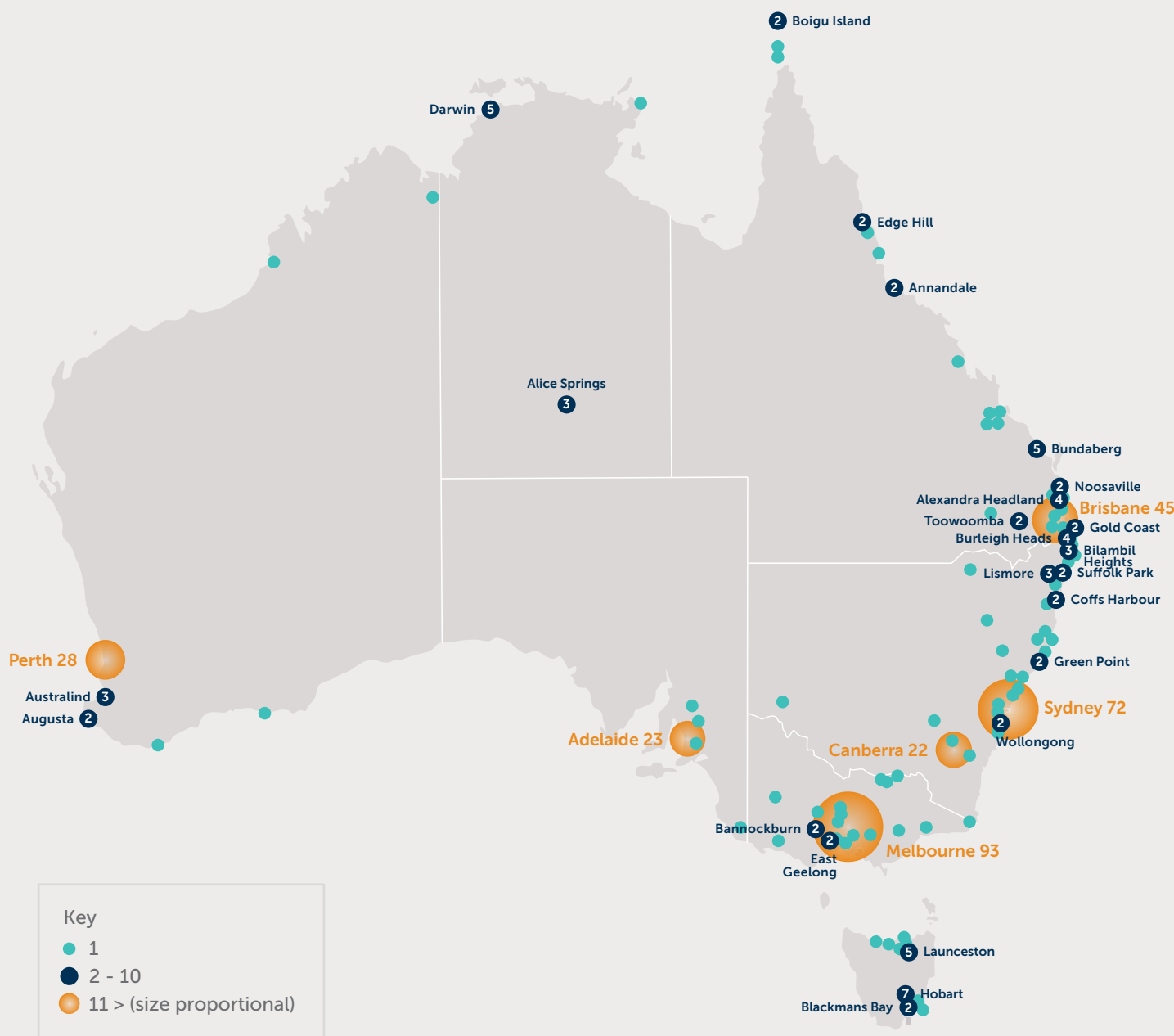
Intermediate outcome: The program is inclusive of and accessible to a diverse range of people

While greatly valuing the skills and experience of those who have completed an assignment before, the program must continue to attract new volunteer applicants. Of the 335 volunteers who started an assignment in 2024-25, 64% had never been on an assignment with the program previously.

Volunteers on assignment during the year ranged in age from 20 to 80 years old. More volunteers were female than male (61.1% to 38.7%) while 0.2% of volunteers preferred to self-describe.

1.8% of volunteers identified as LGBTQIA+, compared to two per cent the previous year. Two per cent of volunteers identified as having a disability, down from 2.7% the previous year. 1.1% of volunteers were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, compared to 1.6% last year.

Volunteers around Australia

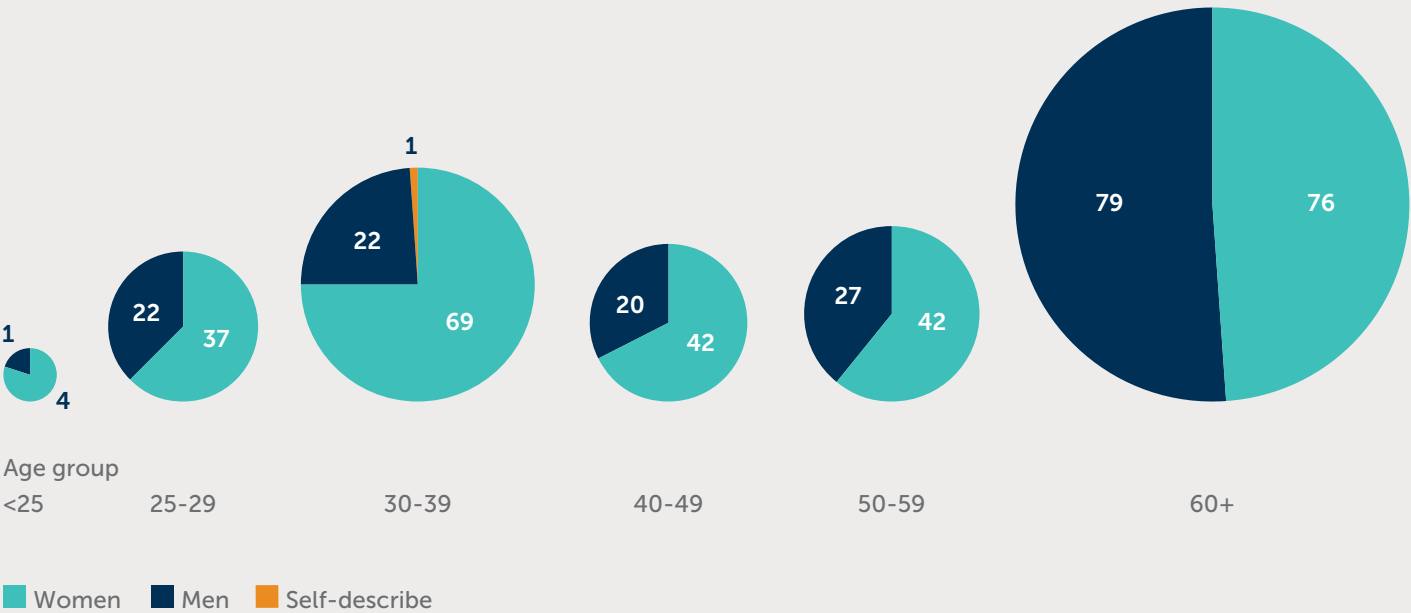


Broadly in line with national demographics and previous years, 26% of volunteers came from New South Wales and 26% from Victoria, with 21% from Queensland. Eight per cent were from Western Australia, six per cent from South Australia, five per cent from Tasmania, five per cent from the Australian Capital Territory, and two per cent from the Northern Territory. Seventeen per cent of volunteers speak a language other than English at home.

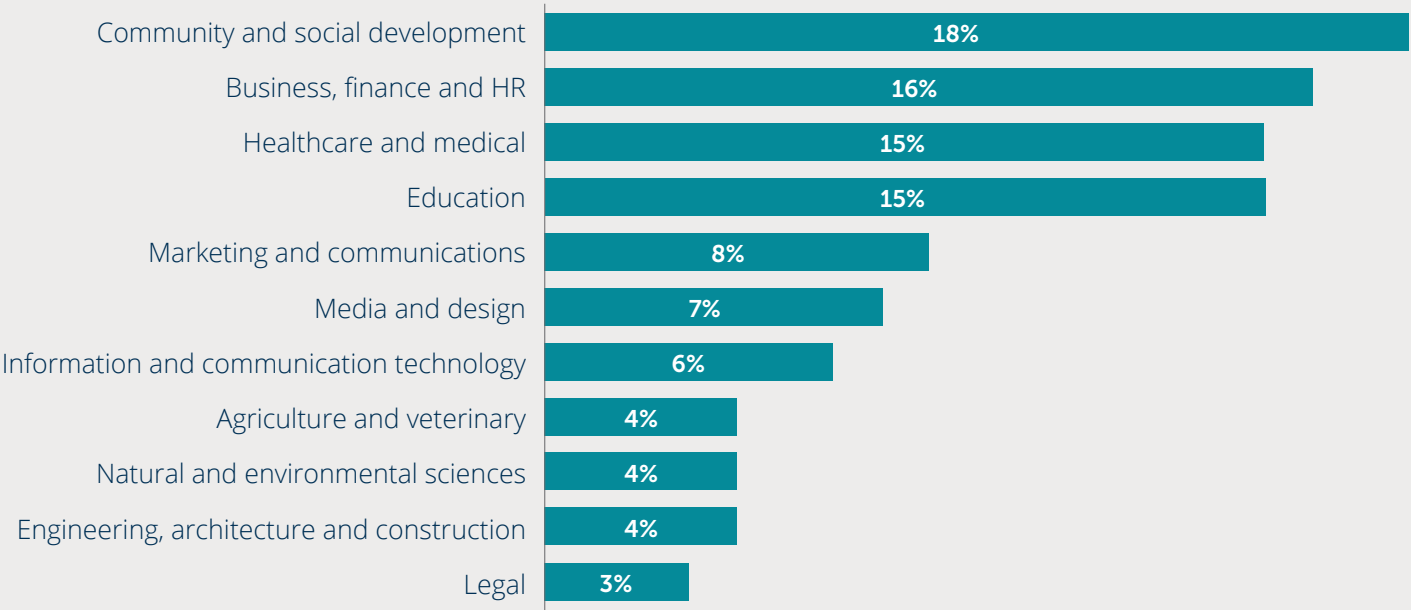
The highest education level achieved by 40% of volunteers was a master’s degree, 28% a bachelor’s degree, 13% had a diploma and 11% had a PhD, with the remaining eight per cent having a certificate or other qualification.

The professional background of volunteers varies, as does the sectoral focus of their assignment. Community and social development, healthcare, education and business, finance and HR together account for almost two-thirds of assignments.

Gender and age of volunteers



Professional sector of assignment





Focus Area 3

Ensure accountability and value learning

As a guiding principle, the program is committed to operational and programmatic excellence through continuous improvement in its ability to document, analyse and measure results. The program, its partners and participants are mutually accountable. The program promotes learning, reflection and knowledge exchange across and between all partners to ensure that it delivers on outcomes and support improved practices.

Research and evaluation agenda

The program's ongoing research and evaluation agenda provides evidence of what works well and what requires improvement. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers represents a long-term commitment to rigorous research on volunteer outcomes. The program also conducts participatory research with partners on organisational capacity strengthening. This promotes learning and knowledge exchange between partners, benefiting their own development as well as aiding the program's effectiveness. Internal reviews, such as the recent examination of hybrid assignments, continue efforts to improve operations based on stakeholder feedback.

The program makes summaries of all program studies available on its website and actively shares experiences and insights with the broader sector through documenting results and presentations at relevant conferences. Regular knowledge exchange with partners ensures learning reaches those who can benefit most from it.

Flexible Learning Exchange

The Flexible Learning Exchange served as a vital hub for collaborative learning and knowledge sharing throughout the financial year. The initiative connected partners, volunteers and staff through multiple channels of meaningful educational exchange.

The Global Webinar Series demonstrated the program's reach by addressing critical development themes including the Sustainable Development Goals, disability inclusion, climate change and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. The program maintained online communities of practice whilst strengthening regional capacity, particularly in the Central and North Pacific regions. The program delivered targeted training series on grant writing,

fundraising and GEDSI, and introduced a new sector-focused webinar series designed to strengthen partnerships with Australian organisations and improve assignment outcomes.

Partnership accountability

Respectful partnerships form a cornerstone of the program, with mutual accountability as a key component. An anonymous survey of partner organisations in 2024 revealed strong confidence in this approach: 89% strongly agreed or agreed that if challenges or conflicts arose with the program or volunteers, it would manage them fairly and effectively. Additionally, 92% strongly agreed or agreed that clear processes exist for providing feedback and raising issues or concerns about volunteers or the program.

Communication with partners and all stakeholders requires constant attention and care. The program has prioritised improving communications as a Program Effectiveness initiative.

Innovation Hub transition

The Innovation Hub concluded its formal activities during 2024-25, transitioning from active innovation initiatives to monitoring and evaluation of previously established programs. This strategic shift saw the program wrap up the dedicated innovation workstream whilst maintaining oversight of ongoing projects across multiple countries.

The program consolidated learning through research and reporting activities, notably publishing an IndoRelawan study examining volunteerism practices across Indonesia from both volunteer and organisational perspectives. The program also delivered a comprehensive report on the Volunteering for Development innovation workstream to program leadership and DFAT, capturing valuable lessons from future-focused initiatives.

Throughout this transition, the program maintained its commitment to monitoring outcomes from innovation partnerships, ensuring previous investments continued delivering value.

Program Effectiveness function

Building on capabilities and learnings from previous innovation investment, the program established a new Program Effectiveness function in 2024-25 to support continuous improvement across the program and equip it to respond strategically to changes in the operating context.

Program Effectiveness projects address program delivery gaps and challenges identified through Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning activities. In early 2025, the Program Effectiveness team ran an identification, scoping and prioritisation process drawing on staff reflections and the previous annual report, culminating in three new projects for delivery in 2025-26.

Commitment to accountability and learning

The program strives for transparency with all stakeholders about what works well, what challenges the program experiences, operational constraints and clear areas for improvement. Beyond the data presented here, annual data analysis and reporting processes, led by the MEL team as part of the annual learning cycle, provide key opportunities to examine stakeholder feedback, learn from external evaluations and identify data trends.

This feeds into program reflection processes where staff consider what can be learnt from the data, examine broader trends, share insights and identify opportunities for program improvement. Over the past year, the program has continued adapting its implementation approach, responding to changing contexts, staff insights and stakeholder feedback. For example, following an allowance review, the program responded to cost of living increases in many countries by changing volunteer allowances. The program also improved the online portal to enhance the volunteer user experience and refined the position description form to make it more suitable for partner organisations.



Case Study

Building resilience in Fiji

Fiji's many remote islands make it hard for people to access healthcare, including mental health support. With limited services and economic challenges, many can't access or afford the help they need. In 2021 Satib Nisha Khan and six other women founded BIRTH Fiji, a grassroots non-profit that provides culturally grounded, recovery-oriented mental health services.

Nisha was inspired by her nursing and teaching background, and her experience with the Fiji Red Cross Society, Empower Pacific, and the Women's Crisis Centre. She was also motivated by the strength of women in her community and the challenges they face. Nisha and BIRTH Fiji aim to empower communities to take ownership of overcoming their challenges. Nisha believes resilience is built by acknowledging local strengths and building on skills and confidence.

BIRTH Fiji began with a \$40,000 grant from the Fiji Women's Fund. With this grant, and additional support from partners like the Australian Volunteers Program, the organisation was able to establish structures and improve access to further funding. By 2023, BIRTH Fiji managed seven small grants, gaining experience and demonstrating impact.

Navigating the administrative burden of multiple funding requirements has highlighted the need for

larger, longer-term grants to ensure sustainability. A key challenge has been bridging funding gaps, especially after transitioning from a volunteer-based model to employing full-time, qualified staff, many of whom have moved onto new opportunities after being upskilled. This ongoing turnover and the need for constant retraining has been challenging.

Since 2022, five Australian Volunteers Program assignments have helped BIRTH Fiji's growth and sustainability, with volunteers working alongside the team with a culturally sensitive and respectful approach to strengthen initiatives.

Recent Australian volunteer IT Specialist and Trainer Ayman Mahli found his assignment with BIRTH Fiji mutually supportive and inspiring saying, "on a personal level I really felt that I was welcome from the get-go. I was the first male volunteer joining BIRTH Fiji but within the first day it felt like I was a team member. The team was always inviting me to all their celebrations – Diwali, Iftar in Ramadan – they made sure that I felt at home. I was overwhelmed by their kindness. The experience reignited the passion I have for helping people; and it reinforced my plans to proceed with my Diploma of Counselling."

BIRTH Fiji is committed to maintaining sustainable, locally led mental health services that uplift and empower communities.

Left. Partner organisation BIRTH Fiji staff attending a 'tech hour' with Australian volunteer IT Specialist and Trainer Ayman Mahli (back). Left to right: Ashlyn, Joey, Ayman, Irene, Karuna.

Right. Australian volunteer IT Specialist and Trainer Ayman Mahli (back, right) with BIRTH Fiji staff members at a farewell gathering for a team member.

7.4 | Program foundations

Program governance

Governance and oversight

The program operates within a well-established and effective governance framework. The Program Management Group (PMG) provides strategic oversight and serves as the principal forum for coordination, discussion, and recommendations on operational matters. In 2024-25, the PMG met twice – November 2024 and March 2025. Senior staff also participated in quarterly Contract Management Group meetings and Risk Management Group meetings, aligned with the submission of quarterly financial and risk management reports.

Regular progress meetings between DFAT Canberra staff and the Program Director and Deputy Program Director supported a constructive and collaborative working relationship. The Consortium Group maintained its advisory role, drawing on the expertise of its three partners: AVI, DT Global, and Alinea International. DFAT attended and participated in the June 2025 Consortium Group meeting, which was welcomed by Consortium Group members.

Assurance and compliance

The assurance program continued in 2024–25, supporting effective program management and compliance with AVI's contractual obligations. In FY 2024-25, five in-country internal audits were conducted. The program also completed spot checks in four additional countries to check fundamental practices and procedures.

A series of reviews were conducted, covering aspects of contract management, key policies, procedures and compliance requirements. These included a systems review of delegation levels; approvals of reimbursable requests from volunteers; procurement processes; leases; and insurances. Internal reviews were also undertaken on volunteer security, staff compliance with mandatory training, procurement processes, and downstream partner compliance. Findings from all audits and spot checks were recorded, monitored, and actioned through to closure.

During the 2024-25 year, the program sourced goods and services from 13 Indigenous suppliers, at a total value of \$73,654.

Annual planning and ongoing implementation

The annual plan is a key operational document, setting out the program's strategic approach, planned activities across all program areas, and staffing arrangements, underpinned by a fully costed budget. Developed by the program's leadership team, the 2025-26 planning process involved extensive consultation across the program and with DFAT Canberra and Posts.

As part of the annual planning process, the program held an in-person Program Leadership Team meeting in April 2025, which was utilised to set and agree on strategic priorities and areas of focus for the coming year. Specific areas of discussion included opportunities arising from the independent review, resourcing needs for the final two years of the current program, and the upcoming International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development. The draft Annual Plan was submitted to DFAT on 30 May 2025 for consideration and approval.

Volunteer services

Throughout 2024-25, the Volunteer Services team supported the recruitment, briefing and mobilisation of volunteers to undertake 508 supported volunteer assignments, along with 29 approved accompanying dependants.

Post-assignment workshops transitioned to online this year. Four workshops were held in the second half of the year and attendee numbers varied across each session. Those that chose to attend, enjoyed the opportunity to reflect and debrief with other recently returned volunteers and Alumni Facilitators.

The Position Request Form was revised following consistent feedback from partner organisations and recruiters about the difficulty of completing the existing version. Through a human-centred design process, the project team engaged key stakeholders to identify the main challenges of the existing form to design a more user-friendly solution. The outcome was a streamlined Word version with built-in prompts and dropdown menus, ultimately improving usability and the overall quality of the final product.

Risk

The program's risk management approach is grounded in a global framework and supported by well-established systems, policies, and processes. These tools enable the program to understand, manage, and clearly communicate risk levels, as well as to develop appropriate and informed responses. Strong governance, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms allow the program to adapt quickly to both immediate and anticipated changes in the risk environment.

A particular strength is the emphasis on in-country risk awareness, with regular environmental scanning carried out in partnership with local teams to identify both current and emerging risks.

Managing risks to the health, safety, and security of volunteers remains a central focus. Ongoing hazards such as natural disasters presented challenges and disruptions in multiple program countries throughout the reporting period. Additionally, rising cases of mosquito-borne illnesses across several regions required close coordination between internal teams and external providers to minimise their likelihood and reduce their impact on program participants.

The Global Risk Management Plan was reviewed and revised during the period to ensure alignment with DFAT's Development Risk Management Policy and Practice Notes. Changes resulting from DFAT's advice to the program on residential care facilities were also incorporated.

Safeguarding

The program continued to demonstrate its commitment to a 'do no harm' approach. By assessing safeguarding risks and managing responses accordingly, the program applies safeguarding principles to improve the quality of activities. The assurance program detailed above further demonstrates the program's commitment to fraud and corruption control. Other activities included face-to-face fraud and corruption awareness training for country office staff during in-country audits and updates to the Fraud and Corruption Control Strategy, templates for the fraud investigation plan and fraud investigation report.

AVI maintains a vigilant watch on cyber security, with regular security updates and monitoring. The latest module in a compulsory, organisation-wide cyber security training program was rolled out to staff in

this reporting period. AVI also changed the sign on requirements for a number of applications used by the program by introducing a new identity management platform to improve cyber security practices and reduce fraud risk.

All staff, program participants, suppliers and partner organisations are regularly screened against terrorism and donor sanctions lists using CSI WatchDog. Background, probity and clearance checks are completed for all staff during recruitment and updated every five years as required.

Coordination and management of safeguarding incidents continues in line with reporting obligations. In FY 2024-25 there were nine child protection, four PSEAH and four fraud or corruption allegations notified to the program.

Child and vulnerable adult safeguarding

In this financial year, the program continued to develop and embed safeguarding practices and processes across its activities. From July 2024, the Operations Support team was restructured to create a combined Safeguarding team encompassing both child safeguarding and PSEAH. The program also increased resources in-country to strengthen its safeguarding efforts, particularly in ensuring PSEAH obligations with downstream partners. Three Global Safeguarding Coordinators, based in Indonesia, Fiji and Sri Lanka commenced during FY 2024-25. While recruitment was underway, additional technical support was contracted in to ensure no lag in reviewing safeguarding policies.

PSEAH policy compliance for in-scope downstream partners was supported through training and collaboration with partner organisations, collateral development and procedure revision. The development of animated videos explaining the minimum requirements for PSEAH also commenced.

In line with the four-year PSEAH strategy, the program continued to work towards ensuring that all active, in-scope partner organisations had a DFAT-compliant PSEAH policy, including any new partner organisations. In addition, it was reinforced that all new partner organisations must have a DFAT-compliant PSEAH policy in place before they can host a volunteer.

As AVI works towards achieving compliance to DFAT's PSEAH policy for downstream partners, the target set by the program under the FY 2024-25 Annual Plan was to achieve predominantly 100% compliance of in-scope partner organisations, including all high-risk partner

organisations. Targets for two regions however, (Central and North Pacific and South-East Asia and Africa) were set to achieve 100% compliance of their high-risk partner organisations and 50% of all in-scope partners.

To achieve this, the program facilitated 20 PSEAH partner workshops supporting 395 participants and 235 partner organisations from 15 countries. The workshops were supplemented with individualised one-on-one partner PSEAH policy development sessions. These sessions supported partners to apply a risk and strength-based approach to the development of PSEAH policies which reflect their business and associated risks. Many partner organisations expressed appreciation for the relevance of the content and highlighted the individualised policy development support as particularly valuable, allowing concepts to be applied in real time.

As a direct result of the program partner PSEAH policy workshops and individualised partner PSEAH policy development sessions, four regions achieved 100% compliance of all in-scope partner organisations, including all high-risk partner organisations. Overall compliance at the end of the financial year is 89%.

Environmental safeguarding

In accordance with DFAT's Environment and Social Safeguarding Policy, the program is committed to being environmentally proactive through responsible programming and the sustainable use of natural resources. The program works with communities to adapt to the damaging impacts of climate change including considering the potential impacts of program activities and feasible methods to reduce any adverse effects on the environment of vulnerable people.

While the program is not often involved in projects that cause major environmental disturbance, such as major infrastructure developments, the risk to the environment is assessed and managed where impact could be reasonably expected or the possible impacts are high.

In line with its commitments, the program has offset the inevitable emissions associated with moving people internationally. In 2024-25, program staff and volunteers flew 3.8 million kms and emitted 475 tonnes of CO₂e. Carbon credits were purchased from a hydroelectric project in Indonesia, costing AUD\$4,754.75.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

MEL Coordinators conducted field visits to eight countries as well as providing support to country teams in their regional locations of Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Fiji and Indonesia. In-person and remote support for country teams has focussed on data analysis and reporting for country management, DFAT Post information requests, and data for host government registrations.

The MEL team also supported program collaborations, including the volunteer learning journey review, development of new post-assignment workshop content, and program effectiveness projects. An internal review of hybrid volunteering was conducted, reviewing data and feedback from stakeholders in relation to the new assignment modality. Spot-checks of program alignment, from partner organisation selection to DFAT's Development Partnership Plans, were undertaken in five countries.

An action research project examining progress towards the program objective that 'Partner organisations are supported to achieve their own development objectives' completed year one data collection, analysis and reporting.

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers delivered its phase three interim report in July 2024, and the final round of data collection occurred in 2025, with final reporting due next financial year.

The MEL team supported the DFAT-commissioned external program evaluation through document provision, interview coordination with staff and partner organisations, and partner organisation survey facilitation.

The team analysed feedback from hundreds of volunteers and partner organisations to inform the annual reflection cycle and reporting process. This encompassed annual reporting processes and mid-year data analysis and internal reflections. Regional reflections enabled teams to review stakeholder feedback and identify insights, feeding into a Global Program Meeting in November 2024 that prioritised ongoing actions that informed program leadership discussions and Program Effectiveness team initiatives.

Program effectiveness

In 2024-25, a new Program Effectiveness function was established to build on the capabilities and learnings gained through previous investment in innovation, to support continuous improvement across the program, and to equip the program to respond strategically to changes in the operating context.

The focus for this reporting period was to design the Program Effectiveness change management approach and supplementary tools and processes, wrap-up previous Innovation Hub activities, and launch two new projects: Locally Led Development Framework and Assignment Descriptions.

Program Effectiveness projects are designed to address program delivery gaps and challenges as identified through the program's MEL activities. In early 2025, the Program Effectiveness team ran an identification, scoping and prioritisation process that drew on learnings from staff reflections and monitoring data to select new projects to be delivered in 2025-26.



Cambodia – Hun Sreynak, Program Manager of partner organisation People's Action for Inclusive Development, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Finance

The program's original budget for the financial year was AUD\$25 million, which was decreased to AUD\$24,772,056.89 in discussion with DFAT, with the remainder held by DFAT for program-related activities.

Managing expenditure within the annual allocation remained a critical priority for the program during the period, with multiple reforecasts undertaken throughout the year to ensure targets would be reached. Where appropriate, necessary expenditure for FY 2025-26 was brought forward to alleviate pressure on the coming year and to maximise volunteer numbers.

Human resources

At 30 June 2025, the program was supported by 110 staff – 69 based overseas and 41 based in Australia. The overseas cohort includes four expatriates. Five Regional Directors continued to lead the in-country teams from their regional bases in South Africa, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Indonesia and Vietnam.

There were 11 resignations during the period – four overseas staff and seven in Australia. Of significance, two members of the Program Leadership Team – the Deputy Program Director and the Public Diplomacy Manager – resigned, with new staff recruited into those roles.

AVI continued to provide learning and development opportunities for staff throughout the year, as identified through the performance planning and management process. Tailored training to provide an introduction to mental health awareness was also provided for all in-country staff to enable enhanced support for volunteers.

List of abbreviations

DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
IVD	International Volunteer Day
IWD	International Women's Day
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender, intersex, queer and other sexually diverse or body diverse characteristics
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
PMG	Program Management Group
POs	Partner organisations
PSEAH	Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment
SDGs	The UN Sustainable Development Goals

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