

2025 – 2027 Locally Led Development Framework

1. Overview

Locally led development is a way of delivering capacity sharing programs by transferring leadership of the design and delivery of the program to the governments, communities and individuals intended to be positively impacted by it. Locally led development can and should look different in each context in which it is applied.

This Framework provides an overarching guideline for the application of locally led development principles within the Australian Volunteers Program.¹ It is a high-level approach to guide the remaining duration of the program and is supplemented by additional operational guidance where further detail is needed.

The objective of this Framework is to provide:

- A clear definition and working understanding of what locally led development means within the program.
- An assessment of the program's current progress along the locally led development continuum developed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).
- A direction for where achievable outcomes can be delivered before the end of this phase of the program.

This Framework seeks to identify where we are already applying principles of locally led development and where there are opportunities to do more by providing agency to our partner organisations, forging more equitable partnerships, and enabling partners to participate further in program delivery and decision-making.

This document was developed in consultation with relevant data and recommendations from existing Australian Volunteers International (AVI) staff surveys and program research reports. A draft version of this Framework was circulated within the program and changes made following staff feedback. Additional clarification was provided by DFAT where needed.

1.1. Scope

This Framework does inform:

- Delivery of operational activities conducted by the program in line with current contractual requirements.
- Remaining period of this phase of the program, i.e. from 2025 to 2027.
- Changes to operational activities where advised and achievable within existing budget, time and contractual constraints.

This Framework does not inform:

- Organisational management of staff or staffing structures within AVI.
- Possible future directions for locally led development for the program beyond 2027.

This Framework provides an overview of current and future actions taken to increase locally led development for the remaining duration of the program. The Framework is supported by the Locally Led Development Action Plan 2025-2027, which provides more detail on each action and monitors their progress towards completion.

The Australian Volunteers Program is managed by AVI in a consortium with DT Global and Alinea International. This document is not intended to represent the locally led development definitions or principles adopted by any of the consortium members.

¹ 'Support locally led change' is one of the guiding principles of the Australian Volunteers Program. The [Global Program Strategy](#) articulates this principle as follows: "The program supports our partners to progress their own locally determined objectives. We start from a position of respecting their deep contextual and cultural knowledge and expertise. We work together to jointly identify how best the program can support them to further strengthen their organisation. We recognise that capacity strengthening is a long-term, complex process that must be locally owned."

1.2. Challenges, limitations and mitigations

The Australian Volunteers Program operates within a context and with conditions that limit our capacity to fully adopt the principles and practices associated with locally led development.

- International volunteering: the program's operating model is one of international volunteering, with skilled Australians mobilised to support international partner organisations. This model has some limitations in regard to local leadership of program design, implementation and delivery. The program has trialed, and will continue to explore, alternative volunteering models and ways of supporting volunteerism, including support for local in-country volunteers or third-party country volunteers. Innovative ideas from lessons learned and feedback from stakeholders will be considered in the design for the next phase of the program (scheduled to commence in July 2027).
- Donor requirements: the program is managed by a consortium on behalf of DFAT and is subject to contractual requirements that guide delivery and implementation and limit the flexibility of the program to respond to some partner organisations' needs.
- Operating system: the program's operational structure is underpinned by a complex system of technological infrastructure, financial and budgeting systems, and planning and reporting practices; and we partner with hundreds of organisations with different needs and objectives. The diversity of our partners, in addition to our time, budget, resource and contractual constraints, limit the feasibility of adapting program systems to partner needs.
- Program lifecycle: at this stage of the program, we need to approach any significant change to delivery or implementation with caution and mitigate against raising partner organisations expectations for greater autonomy where these expectations may not be met in future iterations.
- Budget: the program operates within a budget envelope and is obligated to maximise the use of our resources on the deployment of volunteers. Any costs associated with moving towards more locally led development must be balanced against the program's other priorities.

Despite these constraints, there remains opportunity within the Australian Volunteers Program to reimagine and redesign ways of working that are more locally led. This Framework mitigates the above challenges by identifying reasonable actions that can be taken within these limitations, within the resources available, and within the duration of the current version of the program.

1.3. DFAT Guidance Note: Locally Led Development

As a DFAT-funded program, the program adopts the definitions, advice and approach set out in 'DFAT Guidance Note: Locally Led Development'.

[DFAT's Locally Led Development Guidance Note](#) covers the 'why, what, when and how' of locally led development, with a focus on providing practical guidance on the 'how' – sharing flexible and innovative approaches that support DFAT to meet its commitments on locally led development. The Guidance Note is primarily intended for DFAT staff; other partners involved in delivering international development assistance are a secondary audience. It adopts the OECD Development Assistance Committee's interim definition for 'locally led development cooperation'² and inclusive definition of 'local actors'.³

² 'Locally led Development Cooperation' as sustainable and effective development cooperation that supports locally led development by respecting and enabling the agency, leadership and decision making of diverse local actors in framing, design, delivery, resourcing and accountability, in given local and operating contexts.'

³ DFAT's Locally Led Development Guidance Note provides the following definition of 'local actors': 'Local actors include partner governments (at national, subnational and local government levels), regional organisations and regional architecture, the private sector including business, small and medium enterprises, chambers of commerce, local firms, technical assistance and consultancies, and civil society. Local civil society actors may include local non-government organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), women's organisations, faith-based organisations, local federations and societies, academia, local thinktanks, educational institutions, local media organisations, organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs), LGBTQIA+ organisations, trade unions, refugee-led, human rights and youth-led organisations.'

Annex A of the Guidance Note sets out The Locally Led Development Continuum, which establishes nine dimensions of a program and three stages for assessing each dimension along a continuum of locally led development. In the ‘Emerging’ stage of locally led development, local actors are consulted. In the ‘Partial’ stage, local actors are co-responsible. In the ‘Advanced’ stage, local actors are primarily responsible. The program is assessed against this continuum in Sections 2 and 3 of this Framework⁴.

Dimensions of Local Agency	Emerging Local actors consulted	Partial Local actors co-responsible	Advanced Local actors primarily responsible
Ideation, planning, concept and design	Consultation with partner government and diverse local stakeholders at DPP, strategy and design stages	DPPs and intermediary-led designs codesigned with local partners; local reference groups and quality assurance processes; local members on design teams.	Partner-led strategies and designs, including local partners determining outcomes, priorities, logics, governance, MEL, resourcing; alignment with local plans, budgets and systems
Implementation and delivery approach	Local organisations used for logistics and program administration	Local stakeholders have significant roles in program governance, with partial adoption of local systems	Local partners lead in key areas, including priority setting, work planning, governance, management, MEL, reporting
Decision-making and responsibility	Decision making mostly resides with donors and implementing agents; limited consultation with partner government and local stakeholders	Local actors have increased autonomy over selected components	Local actors have a high degree of responsibility for programs, including determining priorities, managing resources, and making decisions
Resource distribution	Local stakeholders, partner governments, or regional bodies receive donor funds with a narrow scope and limited timeframe; parallel systems	Local stakeholders, partner governments, or regional bodies receive funds with greater flexibility in scope and multi-year timeframe; partial use of local systems	Resources provided as directly as possible to local stakeholders, partner governments, or regional bodies, aligned with own plans and budgets; partners have autonomy in expensing funds in line with program objectives; use of partner systems
Partnership approach	Limited partnership with government and local suppliers; local stakeholders involved are often members of an elite or have well-established relationships with donors	Partnership through specific instruments, including joint steering committees, subsidiary arrangements; some partnerships with local suppliers; diverse local stakeholders involved	Equitable partnership with respectful policy dialogue, resource allocation, program co-design, co-evaluation and shared risk management, using local governance mechanisms; diverse local stakeholders empowered to drive change
Staff profile & procurement	Limited national personnel in senior positions where appropriate skills and experience can be found; limited use of local suppliers	National personnel hired by implementing partners in management roles, staffing strategies support local leadership; mix of local and international suppliers	Mostly local program team including in senior positions; junior staff mentored and supported; international staff managed by local teams; enabling HR and procurement policies; majority use of local suppliers
Technical advisers	International technical advisers/firms are substituting local capacity or international firms are delivering an end-to-end technical package	International technical advisers/firms are substituting some capacity but also playing a capability development role	If present, internationally sourced technical advisers/firms play a supporting or complementary role; majority local advisers.
MEL approach and Accountability for results	MEL system mostly designed for donor accountability and reporting, parallel indicators and data collection, with limited tailoring to local data sets	Local knowledge and expertise used to adapt and tailor systems for the local context; MEL system designed to balance a mixture of local learning with accountability; some supplementation of local systems with additional data sets.	Locally tailored MEL systems developed, aligned with local plans, using longitudinal local data sets, drawing on local expertise; donors adopt local MEL systems and harmonised reporting for shared accountability purposes; can influence international best practice.
Role of intermediaries	International project management services with limited tailoring, both capacity supplementation and substitution	Capacity and capability development; hybrid systems for planning, budgets, governance, decision making	Support and facilitation role; ongoing capacity assessment and handover, majority use of local systems for planning, budgeting, governance, decision making

⁴ This table has been reproduced from [DFAT’s Locally Led Development Guidance Note](#)

1.4. Locally Led Development at the Australian Volunteers Program

Locally led development within the Australian Volunteer Program means actively listening to, respecting and acting on the decisions of our partner organisations and supporting their right to autonomy.

It means actively listening to, respecting and acting on the decisions of the national personnel working to support our partner organisations in the countries in which they are located.⁵

It also means respecting the rights and autonomy of the governments, organisations, communities and individuals that we work with across all countries in which the program is delivered.

Note: the DFAT definition of 'local actors' is broad and can refer to the national personnel of INGOs located in the country of program delivery. However, the payment of funds to program staff is excluded from distribution of resources to 'local actors' (refer to Section 3.4).

⁵ Acknowledging that the program operates within constraints that may limit our capacity to 'act on' the decisions of our partner organisations and national personnel.

2. Assessment against DFAT's Locally Led Development Continuum

This table provides an assessment of the program's progress along DFAT's Locally Led Continuum. The terminology used within this table has been adopted from DFAT's [Guidance Note: Locally Led Development](#).

Program dimensions	Where we are now	Where we want to go
Ideation, planning, concept and design (refer to 3.1)	<u>Emerging</u> : The current design of the program was completed by DFAT following consultation with stakeholders.	<u>Partial</u> : Run small-scale co-design within Indigenous Pathways and draw on learnings from past innovation activities in future design of the program.
Implementation and delivery (refer to 3.2)	<u>Partial</u> : Partner organisations play significant role in some aspects of program delivery.	<u>Partial</u> : Limited opportunity for progression, however, there is work underway to increase volunteers' awareness of principles of locally led development.
Decision-making and responsibility (refer to 3.3)	<u>Partial</u> : Partner governments and organisations have autonomy over selected components of the program.	<u>Advanced</u> : Partner organisations with the interest and capacity to do so will have a higher degree of responsibility for determining priorities and making decisions.
Resource distribution (refer to 3.4)	<u>Emerging</u> : Limited distribution of donor funds. Volunteers as resources mobilised with some flexibility.	<u>Partial</u> : Explore opportunities for greater autonomy over volunteer resources.
Partnership approach (refer to 3.5)	<u>Partial</u> : Partnership with local organisations is central to program design.	<u>Advanced</u> : Explore opportunities for more equitable partnerships with partner organisations.
Staff profile & procurement (refer to 3.6)	<u>Partial</u> : National staff in some senior roles and preference for local suppliers.	<u>Partial</u> : Staff changes are out of scope as require organisational change. Continue preference for local suppliers.
Technical advisors (refer to 3.7)	<u>Advanced</u> : Minimal use of international technical advisers, with local advisers preferred.	<u>Advanced</u> : Continued use of local advisers
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) approach and accountability for results (refer to 3.8)	<u>Emerging</u> : MEL systems mostly designed for program accountability and reporting.	<u>Partial</u> : MEL system balances accountability with learning, evaluation and reporting tools that are adapted to the local context.
Role of intermediaries (refer to 3.9)	<u>Emerging</u> : Global services and systems applied with limited tailoring across the program.	<u>Emerging</u> : System change is out of scope due to contractual, time and cost constraints.

Key

Emerging

Partial

Advanced

3. Roadmap for locally led development

The following section provides more detail on the assessment of the program's current progress along the continuum and the actions that can be reasonably taken over the next two years.

3.1. Ideation, planning, concept and design

Where we are now	Where we want to go
<u>Emerging</u> : The current design of the program was completed by DFAT following consultation with stakeholders.	<u>Partial</u> : Run small-scale Indigenous Pathways co-design activities and draw on lessons from past innovation.

The design of the Australian Volunteers Program was informed by a review of the previous iteration of the program, which included consultation with key stakeholders.

While there are constraints in taking a locally led development approach to designing the global program, the program has or will deliver small-scale co-design activities within specific areas of the program, specifically innovation and Indigenous Pathways. To advance the locally led development approach in this dimension of the program, we will:

- **Run a limited, small-scale return partner engagement within Indigenous Pathways** to test a reciprocal model that would foster equitable partnerships between partner organisations and volunteers.
- **Draw on lessons learned from past innovation activities** when considering the future design of the program.

3.2. Implementation and delivery

Where we are now	Where we want to go
<u>Partial</u> : Partner organisations play significant role in some aspects of program delivery.	<u>Partial</u> : Limited opportunity for progression in timeframe, however, there is work underway to increase volunteers' awareness of principles of locally led development.

Support for locally led change is a guiding principle of the program that is embedded in many aspects of program delivery and implementation. Program staff, volunteers, partners and DFAT staff are aware of the importance of this principle, which is reiterated throughout internal and external communications, systems and processes.

Partner organisations currently play a significant role in key aspects of delivery, including but not limited to:

- Designing volunteer assignments.
- Participate in volunteer recruitment.
- Participate in MEL systems at the assignment level, as well as program-wide research projects.

Partner organisation participation in the design of volunteer assignments and volunteer recruitment is a strength of the program, as is the close working relationship between partner organisations and in-country teams in facilitating a locally led development approach. The feedback provided by partner organisations also informs the strategic planning of the program through our annual reporting, reflection and planning cycles.

At this stage, no specific activities have been identified to advance this dimension due to the time required to scope, design and deliver change across this area of the program. However, program staff are encouraged to actively look for opportunities to increase the role of partner organisations when revising elements of program implementation and delivery.

Volunteers are also expected to support the principle of 'locally led change,' which is incorporated in the recruitment process as well as pre-volunteering briefing. Recent research identified opportunities to strengthen volunteers' awareness of principles of locally led development and their ability to work cross-culturally, which is being addressed in part in a current **review of the volunteer learning journey**.

'Decision-making and responsibility' and 'Partnership approach' are closely linked to this dimension. Refer to Section 3.3 and 3.5 for specific recommendations about these aspects of program implementation and delivery.

3.3. Decision-making and responsibility

Where we are now	Where we want to go
<u>Partial</u> : Partner governments and organisations have autonomy over selected components of the program.	<u>Advanced</u> : Partner organisations with the interest and capacity to do so will have higher degree of responsibility for determining priorities and making decisions.

Currently, both partner governments and partner organisations have some autonomy within the program and the power to make key decisions over selected components. Partner governments can determine the shape of the program in that country, with autonomy over key parameters such as the types of partner organisations and locations of volunteers. As noted under Section 3.2, partner organisations have direct decision-making power over the type of assignment and the selection of the volunteer, and can provide input into the priorities of the program through our MEL feedback mechanisms and participation in research projects.

However, previous research and internal reviews have identified opportunities to go further and for partner organisations to have a higher degree of responsibility over determining program priorities. In a different context, the program would have considered establishing a pilot - partner organisation advisory group to test how we can take a more advanced locally led development approach to this dimension of the program. However, at this stage in the program, it is inappropriate to raise the expectations of partner organisations for additional input into the program while future partnership mechanisms are unknown. Instead, this pilot will be included in a **concept note on partnerships** that will present opportunities for enhancing the program's partnership management approach for consideration in future program design (refer to Section 3.5 for more information).

The diversity of our partner organisations means they have different goals and needs, and may have different levels of interest in, or capacity to, participate in making decisions or taking on greater responsibilities. In our approach to building more equitable partnerships, we will include a listen-first approach that considers the needs and interests of each partner before taking action. This will also be included in a **concept note on partnerships** (refer to Section 3.5 for more information).

3.4. Resource distribution

Where we are now	Where we want to go
<u>Emerging</u> : Limited distribution of donor funds. Volunteers as resources mobilised with some flexibility.	<u>Partial</u> : Explore opportunities for greater autonomy over distribution of volunteer resources.

There are multiple levels at which we can understand resource distribution within the program:

- The distribution of volunteers to partner organisations across the program (as a resource).
- The distribution of the costs associated with mobilising volunteers, e.g. allowances, insurance, etc.
- The direct payment of funds to partner organisations in the form of grants.
- The direct payment of funds to suppliers in the form of payments for services provided.

While partner organisations have full autonomy over their choice to participate in the program, there are limitations at the program level on how volunteers are distributed and to which partner organisations. Local actors, including government organisations, partner organisations, communities and our program staff, have limited input into the program's thematic priorities and compliance requirements. These factors have a significant bearing on which partner organisations are supported by a volunteer, the way they're deployed, and the nature of the volunteering activity. A pilot partner organisation advisory group could explore how partner organisation may have more autonomy over the distribution and use of the volunteer resource, as noted in Section 3.5. This pilot will be included in a **concept note on partnerships** for consideration in future program design.

Most of the program's funds cover the costs associated with mobilising volunteers and the payment of program staff. There is some direct distribution of donor funds to local actors* in the form of grants and to local suppliers in the form of payment for services. As an example, the program has distributed small grants directly to partner organisations, offering autonomy over the design and implementation of projects to strengthen partner capacity.

While any significant change to the distribution of donor funds is limited due to the program's contractual requirements, there is an opportunity to enhance **local leadership of any future impact grant** cycles by including national personnel in the assessment, implementation and monitoring of impact grants to partner organisations in the countries in which they're located. These changes will be considered prior to the delivery of any future grant cycles.

*Payments made to our national personnel located in the countries in which the program is delivered (i.e. program staff salaries, etc) are not regarded as the distribution of funds to local actors.

3.5. Partnership approach

Where we are now	Where we want to go
<u>Partial</u> : Partnership with local organisations is central to program design.	<u>Advanced</u> : Explore opportunities for more equitable partnerships with partners organisations.

The program prides itself on working closely with our partner governments and partner organisations to deliver a quality program that aims to help them achieve their development goals. As noted above, there are various mechanisms by which the program incorporates the autonomy and agency of our partner organisations into the delivery and implementation of the program. We take a partnership approach to develop close and longer-term relationships with local actors, listening to their needs and encouraging a multi-year approach to providing volunteer support that will help them achieve their goals.

There are opportunities within the program to deepen this engagement and build more equitable partnerships drawing on research recommendations and our experience delivering the program over the past six years. To advance this opportunity, we will develop a **concept note on partnerships** that will bring together opportunities for enhancing the program's partnership management approach for consideration in the future program design. The concept note will provide:

- an overview of the program's approach to partnerships
- an understanding of what it means for the Australian Volunteers Program to 'partner' with local actors
- a description of the opportunities* to progress more equitable partnerships and strengthen staff, volunteer and partner organisations capacity to participate in partnerships.

*As noted in Section 3.8 MEL approach and accountability, partner organisations defining their own measures of success is an example of the type of opportunity that could be progressed to facilitate more equitable partnerships.

3.6. Staff profile & procurement

Where we are now	Where we want to go
<u>Partial</u> : National staff in some senior roles and preference for local suppliers.	<u>Partial</u> : Staff changes are out of scope as require organisational change. Continue preference for local suppliers.

While most staff delivering the program are employed in the countries in which our partner organisations are located, our biggest office is in Australia. Our country-based offices are led by a Program Manager who is a national citizen of that country, however, the more senior role of Regional Director is mostly held by a foreign migrant. The engagement of national staff who work closely alongside our partner organisations is a core strength of the current model of program delivery. Any changes to the distribution of staff requires organisational change at AVI and is not within the scope of this Framework.

The program prefers to engage local suppliers where there is a need to do so, and **staff are encouraged to continue to use local suppliers** wherever possible.

3.7. Technical advisors

Where we are now	Where we want to go
<u>Advanced:</u> Minimal use of international technical advisers, with local advisers preferred.	<u>Advanced:</u> Continued use of local advisers

International and local technical advisers* play a limited role within the program, although they are and have been used in circumstances where there is a need to expand the capability of program teams in specific areas. Previously, the program has drawn on international contractors and consultants (as technical advisers), however, in more recent years, there's been an emphasis on engaging local expertise wherever possible and only using international technical advisers when local advisers are unavailable. This practice is well-established, and **staff are encouraged to continue to use local advisers** wherever possible and practical.

*Technical advisers differ from skilled volunteers as they are paid for services provided, generally at a higher cost, and are engaged as an expert in their given field. By comparison, Australian volunteers are provided a modest living allowance and expected to work alongside their counterparts.

3.8. MEL approach & accountability

Where we are now	Where we want to go
<u>Emerging:</u> MEL systems mostly designed for program accountability and reporting.	<u>Partial:</u> MEL system balances accountability with learning, evaluation and reporting tools that are adapted to the local context.

The Australian Volunteers Program Logic, our End of Program Outcomes and the MEL Framework together create an overarching global MEL system that ensures the program consistently meets our accountability and reporting requirements. Delivering this global system limits our capacity to take a more contextual approach, which is more achievable to implement across a smaller number of contexts.

That said, the program remains committed to exploring how we can balance our global program accountability and reporting requirements with delivering learning, evaluation and reporting tools that are adapted to the local context. To progress our commitment to partial locally led development in this dimension, we will:

- Include opportunities for partner organisations to define their own measures of success within the **concept note for partnerships** (refer to Section 3.5).
- Complete a **multi-year participatory research initiative** that explores partner organisations' experiences of capacity strengthening (PAROCs) and use findings to adapt MEL tools and approaches for continuous improvement.
- Conduct regular **anonymous partnership health checks**.
- Explore opportunities for feedback and **reflection mechanisms tailored to local context**.

In line with Section 3.7 Technical advisers, program staff are also encouraged to use local advisers to carry out additional research and evaluation activities not undertaken by program staff.

3.9. Role of intermediaries

Where we are now	Where we want to go
<u>Emerging:</u> Global services and systems applied with limited tailoring across the program.	<u>Emerging:</u> System change is out of scope due to contractual, time and cost constraints.

The program employs a portfolio of global services that ensure staff can deliver the program to the standard required by DFAT. We've taken a global approach to the implementation of these services to ensure the consistent, efficient and cost-effective delivery of our planning, budgeting, risk and governance requirements. Any significant change to this dimension of the program to incorporate local systems will not be pursued at this stage of the program's lifecycle due to the costs and time involved to implement, as well as the risk of significant disruption in program delivery.

4. Appendices

4.1. List of actions

The following actions are included in the Locally Led Development Action Plan 2025-2027. The Plan will monitor the design and delivery of these actions and provide regular updates to Program Leadership Team.

1. Share lessons learned from past innovation activities with DFAT to inform future program design.
2. Small-scale return partner engagement within Indigenous Pathways.
3. Review of the volunteer learning journey.
4. Continue to use local suppliers and advisers wherever possible.
5. Partnerships concept note for DFAT consideration.
6. DFAT recommendation on local leadership of any future impact grant cycles.
7. Participatory Action Research on Organisational Capacity Strengthening (PAROCS) project.
8. Regular anonymous partnership health checks.
9. Explore opportunities for tailored feedback and reflection mechanisms.

4.2. Stakeholder feedback and quarterly review

This Framework and its companion Action Plan are subject to quarterly reviews to assess stakeholder awareness and engagement with the Framework, and track progress of the nominated actions. To assist the continual improvement and implementation of the program's locally led development, [we invite you to complete this short two-minute survey](#), which is designed to be completed after you have read this document.

The survey can be accessed via the following link: <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/8337683/Locally-Led-Development-Framework-engagement-and-feedback-survey>

4.3. Document history and version control

Version no	Issue Date	Plan approver	Amendment
1	5 August 2026	Program Leadership Team	