

Terms of Reference: Researching the value of volunteering

1. Introduction

The Australian Volunteers Program aims to conduct research into the value of volunteering in a sample of countries. The aim of this research is to explore, through a series of country case studies conducted over multiple years, how key stakeholders perceive and understand the value of volunteering within their country: the benefits volunteering brings, its impact (positive and negative), and its contribution, if any, to supporting locally led change for equitable social development. And, within this broad scope, the perceived role of the Australian Volunteers Program in supporting a positive enabling environment for volunteering.

The program is seeking to contract a research team to support this work. There are different stages to this, which will be contracted separately. The first phase and initial contract under this Terms of Reference covers the design of a research approach. The second phase will cover the first country case study. The third phase will cover all subsequent country studies. The program will tender, and contract, for only the first phase initially, but with the expectation that the contract with the selected research partner will be extended, based on satisfactory completion of phase one, to also cover the second phase. This is to allow an informed discussion around timeframes and budget based on the inception phase.

2. About the program

The Australian Volunteers Program is funded by the Australian Government as part of Australia's aid program. The Australian Government has supported thousands of Australians to volunteer overseas for over 60 years, and the Australian Volunteers Program builds on this long and rich history.

The Australian Volunteers Program matches a broad range of skilled Australians with partner organisations overseas, to support these organisations to achieve their own development goals. The program is an important part of the Australian Government's aid program, connecting volunteers to communities throughout the region, and using global volunteering as a people-centred approach to capacity strengthening.

The Australian Volunteers Program aims to achieve the following outcomes:

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

By successfully achieving these end of program outcomes, the Australian Volunteers Program supports Australia to have strong, mutual relationships with people and communities across the Pacific, Asia and Africa that contribute to achieving equitable development outcomes. The program's overarching goal is to support locally led change and the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals through global volunteering.

The program operates in countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific¹, over a period of ten years to 2027. The program is managed by AVI, in a consortium with DT Global and Alinea International.

¹ Bhutan; Cambodia; eSwatini; Federated States of Micronesia; Fiji; Indonesia; Kiribati; Laos; Lesotho; Mongolia; Nepal; Palau; Philippines; PNG; Republic of the Marshall Islands; Samoa; Solomon Islands; South Africa; Sri Lanka; Tanzania; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Tuvalu; Vanuatu; Vietnam

3. Context

The program is currently at the mid-point of its ten-year implementation. It has recently refreshed its program logic and has broadened the ways in which it aims to support partner organisations and continues to innovate and adapt.

This research project is directly connected to the end of program outcome ‘Key stakeholders in Australia and partner countries appreciate the value of volunteering.’ Under this are three intermediate outcomes:

- The benefit of volunteering is recognized and promoted by partner organisations, Australian organisations, volunteers and DFAT to their networks
- Innovations, learning and program achievements are promoted and shared in the international volunteering and development community by the program and key stakeholders
- Innovative approaches to, and alternative models of volunteering are designed and tested to expand the program's reach and adaptive capability

The program's MEL Framework² contains indicators relating to these outcomes³, and it is expected that the research will provide data for some (but not all) of these.

This outcome area is described in the program logic as follows:

The program works to increase the appreciation of volunteering, and the role of volunteering as an effective means of contributing to sustainable development, amongst key stakeholders. These stakeholders include our partners (overseas and Australian), current, past and potential volunteers, DFAT (in Australia and overseas), participants of other DFAT people-to-people programs, the development sector, and other international volunteering agencies.

The program values and seeks to amplify the voices of our partners, volunteers and DFAT in promoting the benefits of volunteering to their networks in Australia and partner countries. This serves both to support higher-order outcomes and other intermediate outcomes, to grow partnerships with a diverse range of partners, and to attract a diverse range of volunteers to the program.

By sharing the program's learning, innovations and impact with key stakeholders, particularly the international volunteering and development community, the program seeks to contribute to peer learning and increase understanding and appreciation of the value of skilled volunteering.

The Australian Volunteers Program's Innovation Hub supports the program to adapt and explore innovative volunteer approaches and models to expand the program's reach and ability to evolve. In doing so, it supports the program's intended outcome of increasing the appreciation of volunteering, recognising volunteering as a unique modality and expanding what the program offers and to whom. It also supports other outcome areas, designing alternative volunteering modalities to support partners in new ways, and providing opportunities to a greater range of potential volunteers.

The program invests in innovation through a dedicated Innovation Hub as a way of shaping the future of global volunteering and to increase the value and impact of the program for our stakeholders. The Innovation Hub identifies opportunities, facilitates the development of new models and innovative approaches to volunteering, develops an evidence-base for potential changes or new modalities and supports the scaling of innovations to create greater impact. Through the Innovation Hub, the program is exploring new approaches and different

2 https://www.australianvolunteers.com/assets/Australian-Volunteers-Program_MEL-Framework-July-2022.pdf

3 For information only, these include: Percentage of key stakeholders who believe there are benefits of international volunteering; Percentage of key stakeholders who agree the Australian government should support international volunteering; Ways in which key stakeholders perceive the value of volunteering and the contribution it makes to equitable development outcomes; Extent to which key stakeholders in a sample of partner countries promote the benefits of volunteering for equitable social development; Nature of the benefits of volunteering that are recognised and promoted by key stakeholders; Percentage of respondents who are aware of the Australian Volunteers Program; Level of engagement with and positive sentiment towards ‘AusVols’ through social media channels (share of voice, brand mentions, reach, traffic, volume, and audience engagement on program media channels)

modalities to support volunteerism in different countries by enhancing national volunteering opportunities and strengthening volunteering institutions.

The program delivers a broad range of public diplomacy and communication activities to engage key stakeholders with the program and the value of volunteering. Stakeholder engagement activities include events, conference participation, newsletters, and campaigns (e.g.: International Volunteer Day, International Women's Day etc). The program supports volunteers and partners to share their stories through conferences, workshops and presentations, on social and traditional media, and with their personal and professional networks. The program also delivers an active and engaging alumni program, offering a range of activities and development opportunities to past volunteers.

As the program starts its second term with refreshed end of program outcomes, the MEL Unit is realigning its strategic evaluation agenda to these outcomes and has revised the program's [MEL Framework](#). In some areas this is a continuation of existing activities, but it also presents an opportunity to strengthen the program's evaluation and learning. In the first term of the program (to 2022) the MEL Unit has conducted three separate 'strategic evaluations' relating to each of the program's three end of program outcomes. During this period, in line with the previous end of program outcome, the program conducted research into perceptions of volunteering amongst the Australian public⁴. With a shift in focus of the relevant program outcome, to focus on key stakeholders in Australia but also in partner countries, the program's research and evaluation agenda also needs to shift. This is summarised in the program's MEL Framework as follows:

The Value of Volunteering: the initial program logic (2017 to 2021) focussed on public perceptions to aid and international volunteering in Australia. This was supported through a series of public opinion surveys with a representative sample of the Australian population. This public opinion survey will be repeated at least once more in the second term of the program, but extended by a more in-depth, qualitative approach in a small sample of countries (including Australia). This will ask how stakeholders see volunteering as contributing to strengthening relationships between the countries in the region and Australia, and if and how volunteering is valued as contributing to locally-led, equitable social development outcomes.

Research into the value of volunteering will be framed by the key evaluation questions set out in the program's MEL Framework, specifically on effectiveness:

1. What have been the outcomes (intended and unintended, positive and negative) of the program for volunteers, partner organisations, development in partner countries, and **raising awareness of the value of volunteering**?
2. To what extent have these outcomes furthered equitable development goals, specifically related to gender equality, disability, and social inclusion?
3. To what extent has the program contributed to these outcomes?

This research is also expected to speak to the program's broader research and learning agenda and questions of:

- In what ways can volunteering best support locally-led change and equitable partnerships?
- In what ways is the program, through skilled volunteering, able to support equitable development outcomes
- **What is the distinctive value of volunteering in comparison to other development modalities?**

4. Research objectives and guiding questions

The program is undertaking this research in order to speak to the end of program outcome and the key evaluation and research questions outlined above.

⁴ Summaries available online: <https://www.australianvolunteers.com/assets/Uploads/ResourceFiles/MEL-files/Perceptions-of-volunteering-baseline-research-summary.pdf> and https://www.australianvolunteers.com/assets/Uploads/ResourceFiles/Research-summary_Public-opinion-2021-1.pdf

The specific objective of the research is to better understand **what value different stakeholders in different countries place on international skilled volunteering, and why**. The program wants to understand how key stakeholders perceive and understand the value of volunteering within their country: the benefits volunteering brings, its impact (positive and negative), and its contribution, if any, to supporting strengthened relationships between countries and supporting locally led change for equitable social development. Within this broad scope, we are interested in the perceived role of the Australian Volunteers Program in supporting a positive enabling environment for volunteering (both international volunteering and, in certain contexts, national volunteering) and learning how the program can improve its support.

Key stakeholders for the program in this context refer to: our partners (overseas and Australian), current, past and potential volunteers, DFAT (in Australia and at Post), participants of other DFAT people-to-people programs, , national governments and relevant volunteer coordination agencies, the development sector (as represented by peak bodies), and other international volunteering agencies.

The program does not have a definition of the ‘value of volunteering’ and understands it to be contingent on country context. It is expected detailed research questions that unpack the ‘value of volunteering’ and that align with the overall MEL approach as set out above will be developed as part of the inception phase of this research. These research questions may include:

1. Do key stakeholders perceive a benefit of volunteering to achieving strong, mutual relationships between countries, and equitable development outcomes?
2. What are the key factors (cultural, economic, political and ‘developmental’) that shape stakeholders' perceptions of volunteering, positive and negative?
3. To what extent and in what ways has the program, through support to partners, innovation initiatives and public diplomacy activities been able to contribute to the perceived benefits of volunteering by key stakeholders?
4. What is the contribution of volunteering in supporting equitable development outcomes, and what is distinctive about this in comparison to other development modalities?
5. What are the commonalities and what the differences in how the ‘value of volunteering’ is understood in different country contexts?
6. In what ways can the program best support an appreciation of, and enabling environment for, volunteering?

5. Approach

The overall approach is expected to be based on in-depth qualitative research in a small sample of countries. This will include Australia (where a slightly different set of research questions may apply) and around five other countries. Countries will be purposefully sampled to cover a range of geographic regions and contexts and based on program activities in different countries, including where the program has additional public diplomacy resources and where relevant innovation activities are underway. Priority countries are to be discussed but may include Indonesia, Philippines, Timor-Leste, PNG, and at least one country from each of the Pacific, Asia and Africa regions.

The inception phase of the research will involve developing an analytical framework and research protocols to guide the research in each country. This will be followed by a series of country studies, with up to five countries sampled over a period of three years. For illustrative purposes only, this might involve the following:

2023 – inception phase and one country study in Vanuatu

2024 – country studies in Fiji and Tanzania

2025 – country studies in Indonesia and Australia

2026 – country study in Mongolia and global synthesis report

It is expected that the selected research partner for the inception phase will also deliver the first country case study. Subsequent country studies may be contracted separately. The program’s preference is to draw on research expertise within each of the sampled countries.

Depending on selection of sampled countries, the program's MEL Unit may also be able to support data collection (the MEL Unit has four experienced Regional MEL Coordinators, based in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Fiji).

The program welcomes proposals that suggest possible approaches that will support the research objectives as above. These may include the following:

- A. Background literature review on international volunteering, conceptions of the 'value of volunteering' and comparisons of different modalities
- B. Development of a working definition of 'the value of volunteering' to be tested in different contexts and a conceptual framework for doing so
- C. Review of relevant documents (government policy / legislation) that relates to the enabling environment for volunteering in sampled countries.
- D. Mapping / analysis of the enabling environment for volunteering
- E. Identification and sampling of key stakeholders within selected countries. These stakeholders to include partner organisation staff; partner government representatives; DFAT Post staffs; representatives of other DFAT people-to-people programs; other international and national volunteering agency representatives; relevant peak bodies; national governments and agencies, other stakeholders with relevant insight as appropriate.
- F. Key informant interviews with stakeholders
- G. Sensemaking workshops with key stakeholders in each country after each round of data collection, to feedback, validate and collaboratively analyse data collected
- H. Sensemaking and presentation of findings after each round of data collection at the global level

The program has an existing, successful approach to social media monitoring in Australia and this may be expanded to some other countries. In which case this data would be made available to the research partner to supplement primary data collection. Public opinion polling is not expected to form a part of the research, although suggestions for conducting highly targeted mini-surveys at low cost would be welcomed. One additional round of public opinion polling will be carried out in Australia towards the end of the program period. This will be contracted for separately, with data made available for the value of volunteering research.

The research will be conducted in three separate phases. The first phase will cover the inception period and preparatory activities prior to data collection. The second phase will cover the first country case study. The third phase will cover all subsequent country studies. The program will tender, and contract, for only the first phase initially, but with the expectation that the contract with the selected research partner will be extended, based on satisfactory completion of phase one, to also cover the second phase. This is to allow an informed discussion around timeframes and budget based on the inception phase. Subsequent country studies under phase three may be contracted separately. The program's preference is to draw on research expertise within each of the sampled countries. Decisions relating to phase three will be informed by the geographical location of the phase one/two research partner.

6. Research outputs

The key deliverable for phase one will be as follows:

- A. An inception report that includes:
 1. Agreed research questions
 2. Overall research approach and analytical framework
 3. Suggested sampling approach to key informants
 4. Outline of data collection tools to be used
 5. Ethical protocols for research activities
 6. Clear, detailed step by step guidance for country-level data collection in phase two
 7. A costed workplan for phase two activities
 8. A draft communications plan for phase two considering how research findings will be disseminated

9. Suggested principles and practices for coordinating phase two with the Australian Volunteers Program (i.e. processes for regular communication, periodic health checks etc.)

Phase two deliverables will be agreed during Phase one but will likely include:

- a. Country report in English for the sampled country, that addresses the key research question. Each country report to also include recommendations for adapting and improving the methodology for the next country study.
- b. At least one communication product per country based on the research, targeted at a national audience, translated as necessary.
- c. Short feedback presentation per country to program staff and key stakeholders after each round of data collection, and a presentation to the global program.

At the end of phase three, a global synthesis report and related communication products will also be produced.

Through this research, the program would welcome and support a research partner to use findings from the research for shared publishing or conference presentations, subject to mutual agreement.

7. Professional guidelines and ethics

It is expected that the research will be undertaken in accordance with international research and evaluation standards, such as the AES Guidelines for Ethical Conduct of Evaluations and the ACFID/RDI guidelines for ethical research in evaluation and development. Products will meet the DFAT standards for monitoring and evaluation.

The research team will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement and will be aware that the produced material is the intellectual property of the Australian Government. All materials must be treated sensitively, and team members must maintain strict confidentiality of all data, information and documentation provided or obtained during the project.

8. Coordination, timing and resourcing

The work will be coordinated by the program's MEL Manager with the support of a research steering group formed of program staff and potentially key stakeholders in sampled countries. Phase one activities and outputs to be completed by the end of June 2023. The indicative budget for phase one is \$50,000 AUD.

Phase two will begin on commencement of phase one (subject to satisfactory completion), in July 2023. The budget for phase two will be negotiated as part of phase one based on daily fees (as per phase one), agreed outputs and activity plans.

9. How to apply

To support this work, we are looking to develop a long-term partnership with a research team with expertise in qualitative research in an international context.

To apply, please submit a proposal that outlines:

- interest and relevance of the work to the research team
- relevant technical skills and practical experience
- a proposed approach to phase one and phase two that engages with the research questions outlined in the ToR and suggests key principles to guide and underpin the research
- an indicative workplan with key dates for phase one only
- a detailed budget for phase one, and daily fee rates for all team members for phase two with an upper and lower estimate for the total number of days input
- short CVs of proposed team members

The RFQ Supplier's Declaration Annex A must also be completed and submitted with the proposal.

Selection criteria

The Australian Volunteers Program seeks to engage a team of consultants who meet the criteria below.

1. Demonstrated experience in conducting qualitative, participatory research, including research of stakeholder perceptions
2. Experience researching/evaluating international development processes, particularly relating to skilled international volunteering, and a clear alignment with the research team's own areas of interest
3. Strong analytical skills with experience in qualitative research methods
4. Experience working collaboratively with research commissioners and successfully project managing research activities
5. Excellent interpersonal skills and ability to adapt verbal and written communication to different audiences
6. Excellent writing skills and ability to produce clear and concise written documentation in English (and ideally an ability to operate in other relevant languages)
7. Understanding of and commitment to research ethics, including issues of power and privilege in research methods and knowledge production
8. Existing research consultants / partners in some of the program's countries of operation would be an advantage
9. A track record of published evaluation and research is an advantage