

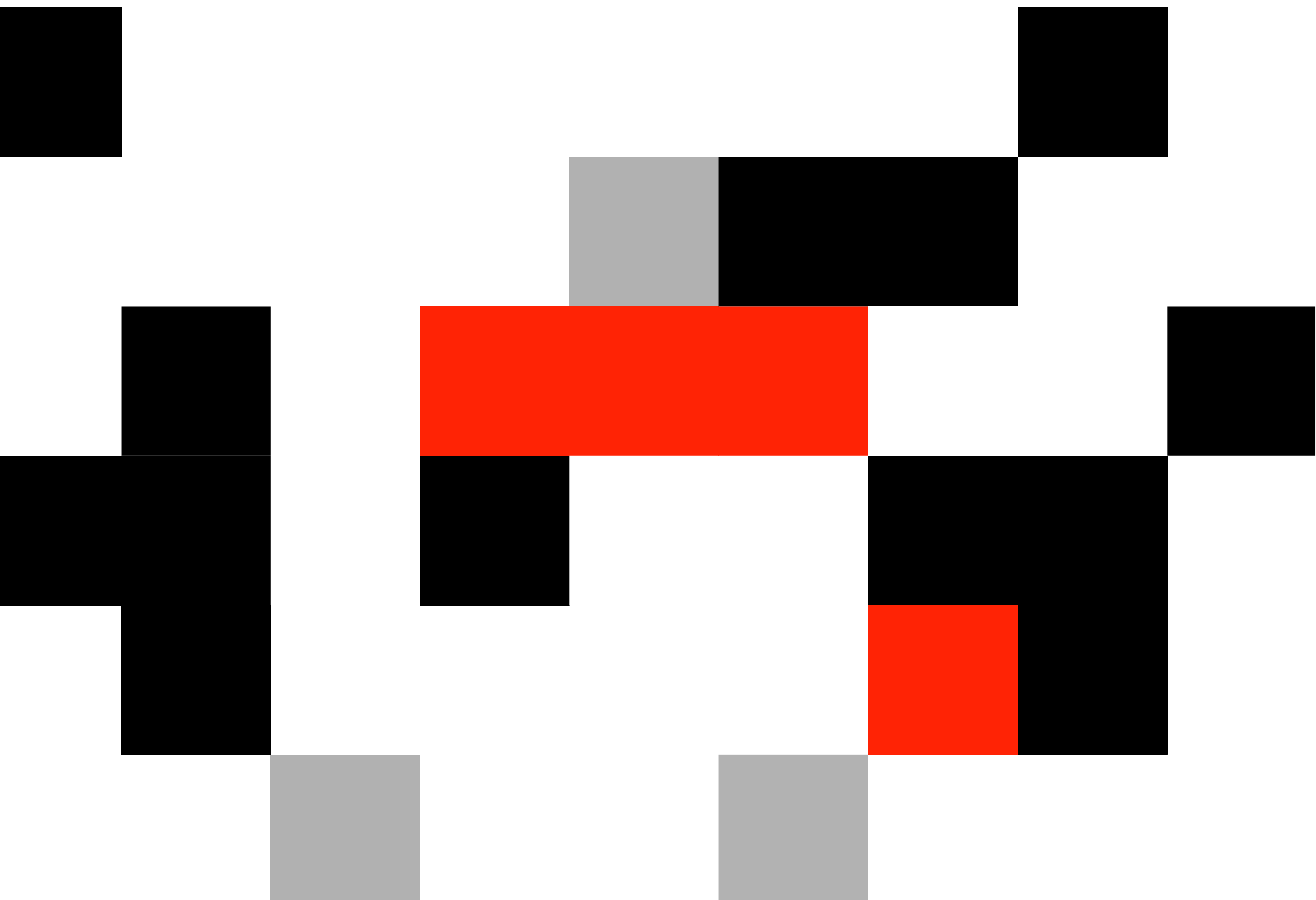


UTS Business School

# Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase 1)

# Final Report

October 2019





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## Report authors

Dr Anthony Fee	University of Technology Sydney, NSW
Dr Peter Devereux	Murdoch University, WA
Dr Phoebe Everingham	University of Newcastle, NSW
Dr Cliff Allum	University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
Ms Helene Perold	Helene Perold & Associates, Republic of South Africa



# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 The Australian Volunteers Program	7
2.2. Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers	7
<b>3. Study Overview</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1 Research Objectives and Questions	8
3.1.1 LSAV	8
3.1.2 Phase One	8
3.2 Phase One Research Methodology	9
3.2.1 Participant Recruitment and Engagement	9
3.2.2 Data Collection	10
3.2.3 Sample Composition	11
3.3 Data Analysis	16
3.3.1 Reliability and Validity Checks	16
3.4 Ensuring the Study's Ethical Standards	17
3.4.1 Ensuring Participant Confidentiality	17
<b>4. Participant Characteristics</b>	<b>18</b>
4.1 Participants' Personal and Professional Characteristics	18
4.1.1 Participants' Motivations	18
4.1.2 Participants' Career Stage and Focus	20
4.1.3 Participant Profiles	24
4.1.4 Participants' Current Behaviours, Capabilities, and Attitudes	27
<b>5. Contact with the Program</b>	<b>30</b>
5.1 Pathways to the Program	30
5.1.1 Finding a Role	30
5.1.2 Making the Decision to Apply	31
5.2 The Journey from Application to Selection	33
5.3 Volunteer Professional Learning Journey	36
5.3.1 Online Learning Modules	37
5.3.2 Pre-departure Briefings	37
5.4. Recommendations	41
<b>6. Phase Two</b>	<b>43</b>
6.1 Project Timeframe	44
6.2 Ongoing Data Analysis and Outreach (Phase One)	45
<b>7. List of Attachments</b>	<b>46</b>

# Tables and Figures

Table 1: Research team (LSAV Phase One)	7
Figure 1: Participant recruitment timeline (Phase One)	10
Table 2: Summarised interview schedule (example)	11
Table 3: Participation in Phase One by PDB	12
Table 4: Participants' residential location (State or Territory)	13
Table 5: Assignment destinations (by organisation type)	14
Figure 2: Assignment distribution by region	15
Table 6: Participants' motivations for volunteering (categories and examples)	19
Figure 3: Participants motivations for volunteering (frequency of reporting)	20
Table 7: Participants' career focus (relationship of the volunteer assignment to career)	21
Table 8: Participants' career stage and motivation (distribution of responses)	23
Table 9: Participant profiles (classifications and characteristics)	24
Table 10: Attitudes, behaviours and capabilities across the sample (summary)	28
Table 11: Proposed activities (Phase Two)	44
Table 12 Overview of project timeframe and main deliverables (Phase Two)	45

# Executive Summary

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers is a three-year (2019-2022) research project that aims to explicate in a credible and persuasive way whether, why and how participating in the Australian Volunteers Program ('the program') influences volunteers personally and professionally in ways that are relevant to the program's objectives. This report summarises Phase One of the study (March to August 2019), during which participants were recruited to the longitudinal study, and baseline data collected in relation to participants' personal and professional characteristics and their pre-departure experiences within the program.

At four 2019 pre-departure briefings, 55 study participants were recruited, representing a response rate of 38%. Participants are undertaking assignments ranging from 9 to 78 week's duration (two thirds being 52 weeks) in all six geographic regions and 16 of the 26 countries in which the program operates. The sample's composition is broadly similar in make up to the program's current cohort of volunteers on markers available for comparison, including gender, age, and residential location.

The research design of the study is primarily inductive. In Phase One, participants completed a short survey and participated in an initial interview before (or soon after) the commencement of their volunteer assignment. Data analysis centred on the coding and thematic analysis of over 50 hours of interview transcripts (445,099 words), and the creation of individual Case Files for each participant.

## Personal and professional profile of study participants

In general, the sample is highly educated and professionally diverse, possessing vast international experiences and being involved in a variety of civic engagement activities domestically and internationally prior to their mobilisation. Nineteen (34%) are repeat volunteers. Most reported multiple and complex motivations for volunteering with the program, which combined external 'doing good' aims with more inward-directed objectives. On the latter, a large number of participants were acutely aware of not just the career implications of their assignment, but also of the potential career benefits it could offer. Analysis of participants' expressed motivations and current career stage distilled three broad volunteer types, to be used in analysis during Phase Two: (i) *Launchers*, who are seeking to use the assignment to embed their values within an ethical career, (ii) *Veterans*, who view their assignment as a way to apply their expertise, gained through various professional pathways, to express an important valued-related goal often at the end of their professional career, and (iii) *Enhancers*, for whom the assignment offers the chance to express their values (explicitly or implicitly) and to either progress or transform their career path.

## Participants' pre-departure contact with the program

Participants' pathway to the program was often instigated by information shared by friends, networks or family. A common pattern was participants then engaging in a lengthy incubation period of reviewing vacancies until an appropriate position was advertised and/or the right personal and professional conditions present (e.g. dissatisfaction in a current job, the accumulation of suitable experience, relationship status).

Participants reported multiple attractions of the program that included the availability of program support via financial, logistic and wellbeing/security assistance, and the program's reputation, legitimacy and credibility. The features of the specific assignment (e.g. the nature of the role, the destination, the role's fit with the volunteers' current or desired future skills) were also prominent considerations.

The bulk of participants found the selection processes to be thorough, rigorous, time-consuming and onerous. A common theme across participants' contact with the program is the generally high level of uncertainty, and sometimes anxiety, that some participants experience relating to their application, their upcoming volunteer position, and their mobilisation. These feelings were exacerbated by technical glitches, difficulties finding people to speak with, conflicting information, long periods of no contact, the relatively 'isolating' nature of the online self-service portal and learning modules, and the relatively limited detail they had available about their role, the partner organisation, and the host country. While these anxieties are offset by systems and activities that the program has in place, many of the report's recommendations address ways to prevent or mitigate this aspect of participants' experiences, including improved systems for keeping respondents updated on progress, and protocols to encourage more productive pre-departure contact between volunteers and partner organisations.

Similarly, while the activities associated with the program's volunteer professional learning journey were seen as professional and valuable, and caused some participants to change their views and expectations about their assignment (especially for those with no prior 'development' experience or training), online learning modules were reported as time-consuming and overly compliance- rather than learning-focused, while the feature most valued at pre-departure briefings was the opportunity to share experiences and information (including country-specific information) with other volunteers.



# 1. Introduction

This report summarises the main methodology and outcomes of Phase One of the research project, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (LSAV).

Phase One (29 March to 28 August 2019) was undertaken by a global research team led by UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney for the Australian Volunteers Program ('the program'). It will be followed by Phase Two, commencing late 2019, which will build on the outcomes and learnings from Phase One.

The report contains the following sections:

1. Introduction
2. Background and Context
3. Study Overview
4. Participant Characteristics
5. Contact with the Program
6. Phase Two
7. List of Attachments

The contents of this report build on the *LSAV (Phase One) Inception Report (April 2019)* that the authors provided to program staff on 30 April 2019, which outlines the framework for Phase One, including its purpose, scope, and proposed research approach, along with a detailed literature review.

The report also draws on and references a variety of policy documents relating to the program, including the *Terms of Reference Request for Quote (RfQ) – Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers*, which can be found at [Attachment 1](#), the program's *Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework (2017-18)*, *AVP Recruitment Strategy*, and the *AVP Global Program Strategy (2018-2022)*. It also draws on content from recent reports made available by the program, including *Australian Volunteer Program Gender Equality Analysis – Phase 1 Report* (March 2019).



## 2. Background and Context

### 2.1 The Australian Volunteers Program

The Australian Government has a long history supporting skilled international volunteering as part of its aid program as a way to promote development, cultural understanding, and public diplomacy.

Since 1 January 2018, the Australian Volunteers Program ('the program') has been a central plank in this support for international volunteering. The program matches skilled Australians with partner organisations in 26 countries via international volunteer assignments that range from 1-24 months. In 2018-19 the program supported over 600 new international volunteer assignments.

The program is managed by a consortium led by AVI and involving Cardno Emerging Markets Pty Ltd, and Whitelum Group. The program aims to support partner organisations to achieve development objectives, increase appreciation by the Australian public of the value of international volunteering, and help Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally.

### 2.2. Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (LSAV) aims to understand how volunteers are influenced as a result of their participation in the program. The '*in-depth, qualitative assessment*'<sup>1</sup> aims to do this by following over time a small group of Australian volunteers, broadly representative of the range of Australians who volunteer through the program. From this, the study seeks to gain insights into the volunteering experiences and the personal and professional impact this has on volunteers. The proposed timeframe for the LSAV is three years (March 2019 to June 2022), with the potential to extend this.

The findings of the LSAV contributes to the following key evaluation questions relating to the effectiveness of the program (MEL Framework): (a) What have been the outcomes/results (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?, and (b) To what extent has the program contributed to these outcomes?

The study's results contribute to the program's objectives that 'Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally' and that 'volunteers (current and returned) promote greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections between partner countries and Australia.' Through this, the study's outcomes aim to support the program in helping to meet the Australian Government objective that Australians be more globally literate and connected. The project commenced with the signing of an Agreement for the Provision of Services for Phase One between University of Technology Sydney and Australian Volunteers International on 29 March 2019.

### 2.3 Research Team

Phase One of the LSAV, which is the focus on this report, was undertaken by a global research team comprising five academic and practitioner experts:

**Table 1: Research team (LSAV Phase One)**

Team member	Affiliation	Project Role
Dr Cliff Allum	University of Birmingham, UK	Expert adviser
Dr Peter Devereux	Murdoch University, WA	Co-chief investigator
Dr Phoebe Everingham	University of Newcastle, NSW	Researcher/Team member
Dr Anthony Fee	University of Technology Sydney, NSW	Team leader/Co-chief investigator
Ms Helene Perold	Helene Perold & Associates, RSA	Expert adviser

<sup>1</sup> Section 3.2 (purpose) in *Terms of Reference Request for Quote (RfQ) – Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers* (Attachment 1)



# 3. Study Overview

## 3.1 Research Objectives and Questions

### 3.1.1 LSAV

**Purpose statement:** To explicate in a credible and persuasive way whether, why and how participating in the program influences volunteers personally and professionally in ways that are relevant to the program's objectives.

**Research questions:** (How and why) does volunteers' participation in the program influence them personally and professionally in ways that are relevant to the program's objectives?

*'Participating in the program'* is defined as all aspects of contact and involvement that volunteers have with the program including pre-departure (e.g. recruitment, selection and preparation), during the assignment, and post-assignment; for instance, contact with Returned Australian Volunteer Network (RAVN), which is managed by the program. It includes all of the volunteers' work and non-work experiences that arise from their involvement in the program (e.g. social networks established by the volunteer during the assignment). It also includes the experiences of approved accompanying dependants (AADs) who participate in formal preparation and support activities as part of the program, and whose lives and careers may be affected by their relocation to another country with a partner volunteer. These effects may include challenges but may also include a sense of teamwork with their partner or informal local volunteering.

*'Personally and professionally'* is defined as all volunteers' work and non-work behaviours, capabilities and attitudes that lead to outcomes relevant to the program.

*'Outcomes relevant to the program'* is defined as outcomes relating or applicable to one or more of the following areas identified in the program's MEL Framework and program objectives: the program and associated activities and projects, volunteers' personal lives, volunteers' professional lives (i.e. careers), and volunteers' civic involvement, including but not confined to foreign aid, global citizenry, volunteering, and development issues.

### 3.1.2 Phase One

#### **Purpose statements:**

- To identify and classify relevant characteristics and experiences of volunteers that will provide a baseline to identify and explain personal and professional continuities or changes that are relevant to the program and which are attributed to volunteers' participating in the program.
- To understand volunteers' experiences of their pre-assignment contact with the program in order to (i) allow analysis of data collected in Phase Two to consider the impact of these on volunteers' personal and professional outcomes arising from their participation in the program, and (ii) identify ways that volunteers' initial contact with the program might be improved.

#### **Research questions:**

1. What are the personal and professional characteristics of volunteers entering the program, including their motivations and expectations?
2. What are volunteers' current (a) behaviours, (b) capabilities, and (c) attitudes that are relevant to the program's objectives?
3. What are volunteers' experiences of their pre-departure contact with the program (recruitment, selection and preparation)?
4. How might volunteers' initial contact with the program be improved to create more favourable experiences and outcomes for volunteers?





## 3.2 Phase One Research Methodology

The research design for the LSAV is primarily inductive. Data collection centres on interpretive longitudinal qualitative interviews with individual participants across multiple waves that encompass pre-, during-, and post-assignment phases.<sup>2</sup> Each interview scheduled across the three-year study period is designed to address both 'time-specific' factors relating to a particular phase of the participants' involvement with the program, as well as 'replicated' questions relating to experiences and outcomes apposite to the program (e.g. levels of civic engagement and career status). Through this, the design provides qualitatively rich descriptions of participants' experiences that allows changes in attitudes, behaviours or capabilities (i.e. 'forks in the road') to be unearthed, and possible explanations for these to be explored through interpretive dialogue with research participants.

### 3.2.1 Participant Recruitment and Engagement

#### Participant recruitment

Detailed participant recruitment and engagement approaches, developed in collaboration with program staff, aimed to address the challenges of recruiting and retaining participants in a longitudinal study like this. Details of the planned strategies and the bases for these are outlined in the *LSAV (Phase One) Inception Report (April 2019)*.

Some adjustments were made to these plans to increase their efficacy and to respond to changes to the scheduling of pre-departure briefings (PDBs). These changes included:

- Inviting participants from four, rather than three, PDBs between 01 May and 05 July;
- Introducing and promoting the project to participants during their attendance at PDBs rather than prior to attending. This was done to reduce demands on participants' attention as they prepared for the briefing. Promotional features used at PDBs included an information session from the program staff, project poster, information sheets and flyers, and opportunities to contact the researchers in real time via phone, text or email;
- Attendance at one PDB (22-24 May) by one of the research team (Dr Everingham) to answer questions from prospective participants about the project; and
- Using follow up emails from program staff to volunteers *after* the PDB to direct prospective participants to the project website and research team contacts (phone/email).

In line with the planned recruitment strategy, the activities identified above were supplemented with:

- The project website at <https://www.uts.edu.au/l.sav>, which went live on 30 April 2019 and which contains information about the project, the researchers' contact details, and a downloadable participant information sheet; and
- A pre-interview online survey allowing participants to indicate a preferred interview time and medium, to consent to their position descriptions being accessed by the research team, and to ask questions of the research team.

Copies of relevant documents, including the participant information sheet, and LSAV flyer made available at the PDB, were provided in the *LSAV (Phase One) Inception Report (April 2019)* and were used without modification. A photograph of the poster in use at a PDB is at [Attachment 2](#).

Effort was made in all stages of recruitment to use inclusive communication to encourage participation by under-represented groups. This included providing clear explanations of the study's purpose, its confidentiality provisions, the independence of the research team, and the commitments placed on participants. Multiple means of communication and interview mediums were made available. Prospective participants were also given the opportunity to contact researchers with specific questions prior to interviews via telephone, email, the project website, and/or during the scheduling and confirmation of interviews, overseen by the research team.

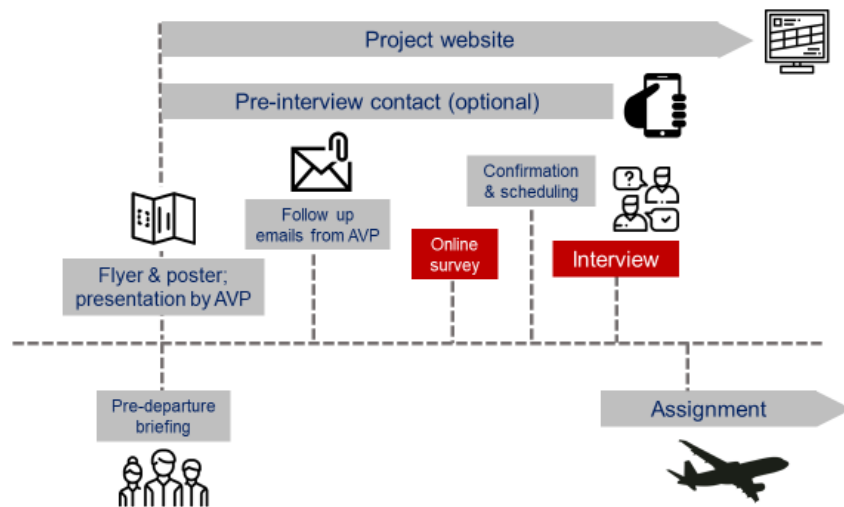
A graphic summary of the main recruitment activities is presented in the timeline at Figure 1.

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<sup>2</sup> More details regarding interpretative, longitudinal qualitative interviews as a research technique, including strengths and weaknesses of the approach, are included in the *LSAV (Phase One) Inception Report (April 2019)*. Also see: Hermanowicz, J. C. (2013). 'The longitudinal qualitative interview', *Qualitative Sociology*, 36, 189-208; Saldaña, J. (2003). *Longitudinal Qualitative Research: Analyzing Change through Time*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira



**Figure 1: Participant recruitment timeline (Phase One)**



Inquiries from prospective participants that resulted from this process were managed by the research team using the procedures outlined in the flow chart at [Attachment 3](#).

### Participant engagement

The engagement strategy for Phase One focused on minimising participants' burden and making their involvement interesting and relatively simple. Participants were offered the option of online surveys for some data responses (rather than during the interview), as well as a choice of mediums and times for conducting the interview. Interviewees made efforts to establish rapport with participants throughout the interview, while confining interview questions to germane issues and, where appropriate, reiterating the benefits of the study. Interviewees were vigilant of time over-runs, as well as signs of confusion or concerns about the topics being discussed or information disclosed. To reduce the likelihood of unintended attrition, multiple contact points were obtained from participants. Follow up 'thank you' emails provided multiple contacts for the researcher team and project website.

Participants in Phase One were generally supportive of the project's objectives and favourable in their view of the benefits. Several reported enjoying and/or benefitting from participating in the Phase One interview. All made verbal commitments to continue participation. Two participants emailed the interviewers additional information subsequent to interviews being conducted.

In line with the engagement strategy outlined in the *LSAV (Phase One) Inception Report (April 2019)*, a summarised 'reader-friendly' versions of key findings, approved by the program, was circulated to participants for input and comment on 30 September 2019, with 14 responses received (response rate of 25%). The full text of responses is at [Attachment 4](#). These are discussed in Section 3.4.1. A summarised version of the key results will also be circulated via email to participants.

### 3.2.2 Data Collection

Data were collected via a semi-structured interview. All except four interviews ( $n = 51$ ) were preceded by a brief online survey that captured participants' relevant demographic and background details.<sup>3</sup>

One-to-one interviews were conducted by one of the three Australian-based research team members (Devereux, Everingham, Fee) across a 14-week period between 08 April and 09 August 2019. Interviews ranged from 29 to 106 minutes in duration (mean: 58 minutes) and were conducted by Skype, telephone, or face-to-face. All interviews were audio recorded and full transcriptions made.

For Phase One, interviews focused on participants' personal details (e.g. background experiences, career plans, motivations), and their contact with the program. This was supplemented with 'replicated' questions pertaining to participants' current (at that time) attitudes, behaviours and capabilities, and future plans.

While the structure of interviews varied to suit the context and flow of each particular conversation, an indicative interview schedule, approved by *UTS Human Research Ethics Committee*, is at [Attachment 5](#), and summarised in Table 2 on the following page.

<sup>3</sup> Four participants were unable to or chose not to complete the online survey. In these cases, relevant data was collected at the start of the interview.



**Table 2: Summarised interview schedule (example)**

Type	Theme
Time-specific themes	<b>Personal details:</b> About yourself and why volunteering (what hope to get, how relate to current stage of your life, family & friends' response) Expectations for your time in-country (role, partner organisation, culture, support from the program, challenges, personal changes)
	<b>Program contact:</b> Contact with the program to date (experience with recruitment/selection processes – how find position, involvement of partner organisation, program support, advice) Value of pre-departure preparation activities (relevant/interesting, any change attitude, what learn, what take forward to placement, missing)
Replicated themes	<b>Current attitudes, behaviours and capabilities:</b> Current cultural acumen (how well informed about conditions on the ground – language, connections, sources/research, general cultural intelligence) Current community & civic engagement (involvement, feelings toward – interest groups, social groups, volunteering, host country, host country contact)
	<b>Future Plans:</b> Future plans – 5 years from now (career, personal, involvement with development, volunteering, host-country or partner organisation)

#### Limitations and challenges: Data collection

Despite the first wave of data collection occurring earlier than anticipated, delays in data collection resulted from the smaller-than-expected cohorts of volunteers at the scheduled PDBs – necessitating an additional recruitment phase on 03-05 July - and delays in receiving responses from some participants when scheduling interviews.

These factors contributed to the final Phase One interview being conducted on 09 August 2019, rather than early July as planned. Empirical materials for 33% of the sample (18 respondents) were received for analysis on or after 19 July. While this did limit the available time to analyse the full data set for the preparation of this report, it is not expected to impinge on the future waves of data collection in Phase Two or ongoing analysis planned with the data collected in Phase One (See Section 6).

Of note is that the research team experienced some challenges contacting participants after their arrival in the host country, both via email (e.g. no reply or long delays in responding to inquiries) and via Skype (poor quality lines and regular drop outs). The latter problem was also encountered during interviews with participants in Australia, especially regional and rural locations.

### 3.2.3 Sample Composition

The sample population for Phase One comprised volunteers commencing program assignments as volunteers or as AADs in 2019 and who attended PDBs between May and July 2019.

**Overall, the recruitment approach was successful and the assistance and support of program staff was critical to this success.** As Table 3 shows, it resulted in a sample for Phase One of 55 participants being recruited from four PDBs, slightly below the target of 60 participants for Phase One. This represented a participation rate of 38% of all volunteers attending the PDBs at which recruitment activities occurred (n = 144) – exceeding the anticipated response rate of 30% - and 29% of eligible volunteers attending PDBs between February and August 2019.<sup>4</sup> Just three participants who had made initial inquiries with the research team chose to not participate.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Based on data made available by program staff; n = 190.

<sup>5</sup> No explanation was provided by one volunteer, while two others (partners) indicated that the long-term commitment being asked of participants was a factor in their decision.



**Table 3: Participation in Phase One by pre-departure briefing**

Date	01-03 May	22-24 May	12-14 June	03-05 July	Total
Attendees at PDB (full)	32	50	25	37	144
Inquiries to participate	10	19	16	13	58
Final participants (Phase One)	8	19	15	13	55
% all attendees in final sample	25%	38%	60%	35%	38%
% inquiries in final sample	80%	100%	94%	100%	95%

The sample includes 50 volunteers and five approved accompanying dependants (AADs).

The remainder of this section canvasses participants' personal antecedents and the nature and locations of their assignments. Further details of the sample are discussed in Section 4.1 (Participant Profile). In addition, [Attachment 6](#) includes tables containing aggregated summaries of participants in relation to key demographic features while [Attachment 7](#) profiles individual participants' main demographic characteristics.

### Personal and professional background

**Demographics:** Participants' ages at pre-departure ranged from 22 to 74 years (mean: 42.9 years). The sample's age distribution shows a U-curve pattern reflecting generally larger numbers of young and elderly participants, with 22% of the sample within the age range of 27-30 years old at pre-departure, and 20% within the 58-62 year-old range. Just nine participants (seven of whom were women) were between 35 and 57 years old, the period when participation in the labour force is generally among its highest levels, especially for women.<sup>6</sup>

Sixty-four percent (35/55) of participants are female; one participant indicated 'prefer to self describe' as their gender identity. The largest proportion of participants identified as being 'Australian (Other)' (36/55). Other national identities (by ancestry) reported by participants included Scottish, Chinese, French, Australian Aboriginal, Irish, Malaysian, German, Italian, Welsh and English. Six participants (11%) reported being from homes in which a language other than English (LOTE) is spoken. Three (5%) reported having a disability. The average ages of the six LOTE participants (39.5 years) and the three participants with disabilities (28.3 years) are below the sample means.

**Residence (State/Territory and rurality):** As Table 4 shows, participants from all Australian States and Territories are represented, with the largest proportion being from New South Wales (20/55, 36% of participants) and Victoria (13/55, 24% of participants). Queensland, which comprises 9% of the sample and 20% of the Australian population, and South Australia (4% and 7%) have the lowest representation in terms of sample composition compared with Australia's population distribution.

Ten participants (18%), including five from New South Wales, reported living in non-urban areas of Australia (i.e. regional/rural). Seven of these were male (70%) and 90% had previously lived overseas (9/10). Six of the ten participants from regional/rural Australia were undertaking their first volunteer assignment. While three regional/rural participants were in their 20s, including both from Queensland in this category, the average age of regional/rural participants (48 years) was older than that of their urban colleagues (42.2 years).

**Education levels:** Ninety-five percent of participants (52/55) hold either a bachelor degree (25/55, 45%) or masters/doctorate degree (27/55, 49%). At least 7 participants (14% - #08, #09, #10, #13, #23, #29, #35) plan to continue studying formal education programs during their volunteer assignments (typically post-graduate distance education programs with Australian universities).

**Professional background:** Professionally, the background of participants is diverse, with the largest occupational categories being Education/Training/Library and Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design (both 18% of the sample), and Community/Social Development (13%). The experience of participants in their occupational category varies from nil to 41 years (mean: 13.99 years).

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (March 2018): Labour force, detailed, cat. no. 6291.0.55.001



**Table 4: Participants' residential location (State or Territory)**

	Total		Residence Regional / rural	Gender			Age at pre-departure (years) <sup>a</sup>					
	n	%		Male	Female	Self- identify	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79
New South Wales	20	36	5	8	12	-	4	5	1	5	3	2
Victoria	13	24	1	3	9	1	6	2	-	1	2	2
Western Australia	6	11	-	1	5	-	2	1	1	1	1	-
Queensland	5	9	2	2	3	-	3	-	-	-	2	-
Australian Capital Territory	4	7	-	3	1	-	3	1	-	-	-	-
South Australia	2	4	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
Tasmania	2	4	1	1	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
Northern Territory	1	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
International	2	4	-	1	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>% total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>

<sup>a</sup> Estimates included where data was unavailable from program staff.

**Approved accompanying dependents:** Five approved accompanying dependants (AADs) are part of the research sample; two males and three females. Substantially older than the remainder of the sample (54.8 years compared with 41.7 years), all have previously lived overseas and one has completed a previous volunteer assignment with a volunteer program affiliated with the program.

### Sample representativeness

While the study does not seek the statistical generalisation from a representative sample demanded of quantitative research approaches, comparisons were conducted between the main identifying features of the study's sample (n = 55) and those of: (i) all volunteers attending the four PDBs in 2019 from which participants were recruited (n = 144)<sup>7</sup>, (ii) all volunteers attending PDBs between February and August 2019 (n = 190)<sup>8</sup>, and (iii) all program volunteers on assignment during the financial year 2018-19 (n = 1017).<sup>9</sup>

These comparisons reveal the LSAV Phase One sample was similar in make up to all three comparison groups in terms of gender distribution (63-66% female) and average age (42.9-45.6 years).

The proportion of Phase One participants whom reported having a disability (5%) was slightly higher than those of the larger sample of 190 program volunteers (2%) and all program volunteers in the field (2%). Moreover, while study participation by State/Territory of residence was broadly comparable with those of the larger sample available for comparison (n = 190)<sup>10</sup>, in general the home States of the research team - NSW (36%) and Western Australia (11%) – comprised a larger proportion of the sample than those in the program (25% and 6% respectively). This is exemplified in the first table at [Attachment 8](#), which summarise features of program volunteers (February-August 2019) by State/Territory of residence, gender and age category.

### Assignment characteristics

The study participants are undertaking assignments ranging from nine to 78 week's duration<sup>11</sup> (mean: 45 weeks). Two thirds of the sample (35 assignments) are undertaking assignments of exactly 12-months duration. Just 6 participants (#02, #04, #10, #34, #44, #48) have assignments under six months duration.

<sup>7</sup> Based on data made available by program staff.

<sup>8</sup> Based on data made available by program staff. Excludes CV Global, Farmer Volunteer, and CWIE volunteers.

<sup>9</sup> Based on data made available by program staff.

<sup>10</sup> Comparisons of State/Territory of residence was not able to be conducted with FY2018-19 program volunteers based on the data made available.

<sup>11</sup> Some participants have reported an assignment duration that differs from the duration indicated in their position description. In these cases, the duration indicated by participants is used. Assignment duration includes 5 x approved accompanying dependents (AADs).



### The long and short of assignment duration

The relative lack of diversity in assignment duration is of interest in light of the program's stated objectives to offer a variety of assignments that cater for a diversity of applicants (*AVP Recruitment Strategy*). Some participants indicated the (relatively short) assignment duration as an important consideration for their decision to apply to the program. One first-time volunteer (#34) explained '*I applied for the one that was only going to be six months as the first one*'. Another had to reduce a planned four-month placement because of pressures from her employer in Australia (#44). Yet another short-term assignee observed: '*I would've loved to stay longer there, but because I have a mortgage and a life here, I couldn't afford to stay any longer*' (#02).

Several participants who were, or were accompanied by, approved accompanying dependents sought a 12-month placement in order to benefit from the support offered by the program for the AAD. In one case, the length of the position was negotiated upward for that specific purpose.

One participant suggested that short-term assignments might be especially suitable for repeat volunteers, who can more quickly develop the relationships needed to be effective capacity developers. However, repeat volunteer assignments were, in fact, marginally longer than those of other participants (44.9 weeks compared with 44.4 weeks).

Participants' assignments are hosted in all six geographic regions and 16 of the 26 countries in which the program operates. The regions hosting the largest number of the study's participants are 'East Asia' (19/55 assignments, or 35%) and 'Asia Archipelago' (15/55 assignments, or 27%) while just four participants (7%) are assigned to 'Papua New Guinea'. Table 5 below provides an overview of the types of assignments hosted in each region (organisation type), while Figure 1 on the following page shows the geographic distribution of assignments by region and country.

'Government agencies' (22 assignments) and 'domestic NGOs' (20 assignment) comprise a total of 84% of the 50 assignments being undertaken by the participants.<sup>12</sup> In four of the six geographic regions (Asia Archipelago, Central and North Pacific, South Asia and Africa, and South Pacific) these two organisational types accounted for all the partner organisations. 'International NGOs' (4/50, 8%), 'intergovernmental agencies' (3/50, 6%), and 'private businesses' (1/50, 2%) are less widely represented in the sample.

**Table 5: Assignment destinations (by organisation type)**

	Total		Partner organisation type					Nil <sup>a</sup>
	n	%	Government Agency	Domestic NGO	International INGO	Intergovernmental agency	Private business	
Asia Archipelago	15	27	6	8	-	-	-	1
Central & North Pacific	5	9	3	2	-	-	-	-
East Asia	19	35	5	5	3	3	-	2
Papua New Guinea	4	7	1	1	1	-	1	1
South Asia & Africa	7	13	4	2	-	-	-	1
South Pacific	5	9	3	2	-	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>

<sup>a</sup> Non-working approved accompanying dependants.

### Assignment representativeness

The duration of the study participants' assignments (mean: 45 weeks) is similar to assignments undertaken by all volunteers attending PDBs between February and August 2019 (mean: 44.9 weeks, n = 190) and those attending the four PDBs from which participants were drawn (mean: 44.1 weeks, n = 144). The types of partner organisations hosting the study participants are generally reflective of the 633 partner organisations being supported in 2018-19, with government agencies and domestic NGOs comprising the largest proportion.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, a halt on assigning volunteers to Africa<sup>14</sup> while participants for this study were being recruited meant that none of the sample were deployed to Africa, a region hosting 10% of

<sup>12</sup> Excludes five AADs who are participants but whom have no formally assigned role.

<sup>13</sup> Based on data provided by program staff showing 35% of partner organisations are domestic NGOs and 27% governmental agencies.

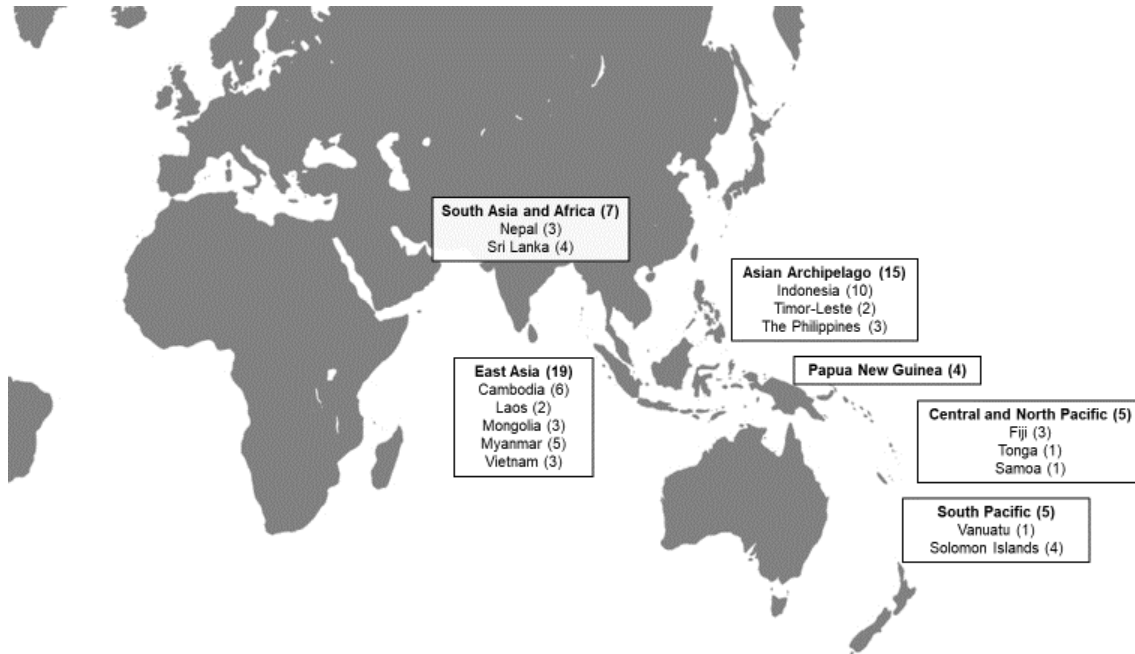
<sup>14</sup> Volunteer assignments were temporarily halted while DFAT confirmed geographic priority locations of the Program.





the program's volunteers.<sup>15</sup> At the time of finalising this report, the research team is discussing with program staff the possibility of including additional participants commencing in 2020 if/when deployments to Africa re-commence.

**Figure 2: Assignment distribution by region**



### Position descriptions

Of the 50 position descriptions (PDs) made available for analysis<sup>16</sup>, 17 (34%) explicitly identify a 'mentoring' role in the job title. These 'mentoring' roles are typically being undertaken by repeat volunteers (8/15, 53%), and older volunteers with slightly more professional experience (mean age at pre-departure: 47.3 years, average 15.8 years of experience in their profession) compared to the sample's average. All 17 of these roles are with domestic NGOs (n = 8) or government agencies (n = 9), from a variety of industries and geographic regions.

Commonly listed selection criteria in these PDs include the following five categories of traits, qualifications, skills and/or experiences:

1. **'Technical'** expertise directly relevant to the role (i.e. domain-specific technical knowledge, qualifications, skills or experiences) is identified multiple times in all PDs (mean: 3.90 per PD), typically as required/essential criteria.
2. **'Capacity development'** skills or experiences (e.g. mentoring, coaching, training or other forms of interpersonal capacity development that go beyond the technical features of the role, whether or not this is articulated in the role title or description) are identified in 28 PDs (56%).
3. **'Culture'** related traits, experiences or skills (i.e. cultural awareness, cross-cultural experience, the specific culture, and 'developing country' context) are identified in 23 PDs (46%)
4. **'Interpersonal'** skills or experiences (e.g. teamwork, general communication and other 'soft' interpersonal skills not related to interpersonal capacity development) are identified in 22 PDs (44%)
5. **'Diversity'** skills or experiences (e.g. working with diverse groups and/or in diverse contexts, whether or not this is explicit in the role title or description) are identified in 14 PDs (28%)

<sup>15</sup> Based on data provided by program staff for all program assignments during financial year 2018-19; 97/1017 assignments in Africa, comprising: Republic of South Africa (57), Tanzania (28), eSwatini (7) and Lesotho (6).

<sup>16</sup> Excludes five AADs.



## 3.3 Data Analysis

Interview transcriptions, proofed for accuracy, formed the basis of qualitative data analysis. After removing extraneous text (e.g. the study's ethical parameters and purpose, initial rapport building), the full set of transcriptions rendered 445,099 words for analysis (mean: 8093 words; range: 4855 to 16,348 words per interview). In general, interviews with AADs were briefer than those with volunteers.

Transcripts were supplemented through access to position descriptions for 50 participants (excluding 5 AADs and one participant whose PD was unavailable at the time of the interview<sup>17</sup>). In some cases, these position descriptions enabled interview questions to be targeted at features of participants' volunteer assignment (e.g. expectations relating to assignments with a designated 'mentor' role).

Separate analytical procedures were used for different parts of the study, the details of which are outlined in Sections 4 and 5. The quantity of data and the constrained time-frame necessitated a systematic and high-level process of data reduction and analysis. Central to this were structured data analysis protocols; an example of the protocols used to analyse the 'contact with the program' data (reported in Section 5), can be found at [Attachment 9](#). Supporting this approach was the preparation of narrative Case Files for all participants, which summarise participants' pathways to the program and other relevant background and experiences. Copies of Case Files for all 55 participants have been provided to program staff with this report.

### 3.3.1 Reliability and Validity Checks

The process of thematic coding and theme development was undertaken to ensure themes were exhaustive and adequately discriminant, and that the themes generated were sufficiently descriptive to be used as a basis for future coding in subsequent phases and/or replication studies. Within the limitations of the time available, the analytical process included multiple steps to validate the emergent themes articulated in Sections 4 and 5.

First, analysis commenced soon after data collection, with the research team discussing the efficacy of the interview schedule and the prominence of particular themes arising from interviews. This enabled interviewees to directly address emergent themes in subsequent interviews (e.g. the importance of peer interaction during PDBs). Second, as firmer classifications and themes became operationalised (e.g. the nine classifications of career stage, Section 4.1.2), detailed coding templates were developed to guide the thematic analysis via a process of pilot coding followed by cross-coder reliability checks. Coded outcomes were also cross-checked by one of the chief investigators against draft and final Case Files, interview transcripts, and with interviewees where required. Two participants were re-contacted after their interviews to clarify data provided earlier. For Case Files, a sample of thirteen (24%) was reliability cross-checked with the transcript by an independent research team member. Notes were exchanged and, where appropriate differences discussed and/or changes made to the content.

Next, the tentative outcomes presented in a draft report were shared with program stakeholders and the study's research steering committee via a draft report (02-25 September 2019) and at a sensemaking workshop on 09 September 2019. Four pages of notes, suggestions and feedback (1616 words) were received on 25 September 2019 relating to terminology, formatting, accuracy of some program data, and the content and presentation of outcomes. This feedback resulted in numerous changes to this report's content and structure.

Finally, a summarised version of key outcomes (13 pages, 8303 words), approved by program staff, was sent to all study participants for comment and feedback on 30 September 2019.<sup>18</sup> Fourteen responses were received comprising 2229 words (range: 10-477 words; mean: 59 words), representing a response rate of 25%. These responses can be found at [Attachment 4](#). In general, participants' comments were supportive of the main themes, with 10/14 expressing agreement with all or parts of the report, and none reporting disagreement or dissatisfaction. The section drawing the most input and suggestions was participants' contact with the program prior to deployment (Section 5 in this report). Several relevant suggestions were made; these relate to, for instance, the breadth of analysis reported (e.g. excluding AADs), and in-country features of relevance for phase 2 (e.g. expatriate communities' influence on the volunteer experience). The input also resulted in several changes to the current report.

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<sup>17</sup> The outstanding PD has subsequently been obtained and will be used in phase 2 analysis.

<sup>18</sup> Participants were asked to provide general comments and feedback to research team member/s via email or via an online form, with particular emphasis on: "1. To what extent and/or in what ways do the content of this summary reflect your experiences? 2. What have we missed (experiences or ideas) that might be of interest to the program?"





## 3.4 Ensuring the Study's Ethical Standards

All aspects of the research design of Phase One were conducted in compliance with research framework approved UTS Human Research Ethics Committee prior to commencement of the study. Project approval number HREC-ETH 19-3663 relates (15<sup>th</sup> April 2019). The approved research framework outlined several procedures to ensure these ethical standards. The procedures that were used throughout Phase One (and in some cases continue to be used) are summarised in the table at [Attachment 10](#).

### 3.4.1 Ensuring Participant Confidentiality

#### Handling interview transcripts

Electronic audio files of all 55 interviews were collated and stored on a password protected UTS server. All audio files were transcribed in full by an external contractor: [Sharyn Taylor Transcribing & Secretarial \(STTS\)](#). The audio file of each interview was shared with STTS via a password-protected DropBox folder accessible only by STTS Director, Ms Sharyn Taylor, and the project Team Leader (Dr Fee). The audio files were deleted from this folder once each transcription was completed.

Textual transcripts (MS Word) were first checked in full for accuracy by the interviewer and then coded using allocated pseudonyms. This corrected version of the transcript was then stored on the project's secure folder for use in analysis throughout the project. A second round of coding for anonymity was undertaken to remove a broader array of identifying detail from each transcript before these were provided to program staff. This was done to ensure that detail throughout the transcript (e.g. organisations' or individuals' names, professional experiences, locations or academic qualifications) could not be used to identify participants. To facilitate this process, the coding rubric at [Attachment 11](#) was developed and utilised. The table's left-hand columns identify fifteen types of content that were redacted and example/s of each. The right-hand columns of the table show examples of how this identifying content has been rendered in the fully-anonymised transcripts, copies of which have been provided to program staff.

The process of transcript redaction, not part of the project's original scope, proved to be more time-consuming than anticipated. For this reason, just a sample of anonymised transcripts are made available with the accompanying documents to this report. The full suite of anonymised transcripts will be provided to the program upon finalisation of this process by the research team, expected to be November 2019.

#### Managing publications and reports

The provision of full transcripts to the program also influenced decisions about the nature and extent of identifying features that could be included in Case Files and this report. Where possible, this report identifies participants' numeric code or pseudonyms (not both) to allow readers to cross-reference these with the participants' full interview transcript or Case Files (not both). At the same time, efforts have been made to ensure that quotations and other identifying details included in this report and in the sample Case Files are appropriately modified to ensure participants' confidentiality. For these reasons, some identifying features or attributions have been excluded from some sections. A similar procedure is proposed for any academic publications that may arise from the research team's work on Phase One (see Section 6.2) and subsequent phases.



## 4. Participant Characteristics

This section addresses the two research questions:

1. What are the personal and professional characteristics of volunteers entering the program, including their motivations and expectations?
2. What are volunteers' current (a) behaviours, (b) capabilities, and (c) attitudes that are relevant to the program's objectives?

While many of the broader characteristics of participants may be recognisable to the program (and volunteer agencies in general), this section seeks to highlight features of particular interest to the program and most relevant to the LSAV, such as participants' stated motivations for entering the program and the ways that these intersect with their career stage.

### 4.1 Participants' Personal and Professional Characteristics

The literature review undertaken at the commencement of Phase One suggests that participants' in-country experiences and post-assignment trajectories may be strongly influenced by their pre-assignment motivations and current career stage (i.e. how participants' volunteer assignments intersect with their current careers).<sup>19</sup> For this reason, Phase One interviews explicitly addressed these features. Sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 present an overview of the sample's responses.

#### 4.1.1 Participants' Motivations

Responses for each participant were coded to one or more of six volunteering motivations using labels identified by earlier studies: values, understanding, enhancement, career, social, and protective.<sup>20</sup>

Table 6 on the following page briefly describes each motivational category and identifies those participants who, our analysis revealed, were most strongly motivated by each function.

#### Classifying participants' motivations

Analysis of participants' motivations drew on responses to interview questions asking why they had chosen to volunteer and what they hoped to achieve from this. Additional relevant responses from other sections of the interview (e.g. future plans) were also included. Where multiple reasons were provided, interview questions aimed to distinguish primary motivations (e.g. asking participants to prioritise these). Approved accompanying dependants, some of whom had also applied for volunteer roles in the program or who had completed previous volunteer assignments, were asked about their own motivations for their involvement in the program and/or their support for their partner's assignment.

Coding of these responses was based on conceptualisations derived from Clary et al.'s (1998, 1999) 'volunteer functions inventory.' This model identifies six psychological functions (personal and social) that can motivate individuals to volunteer. While developed primarily for domestic, rather than international, volunteering, its widespread global usage in studies, including qualitative research and its recognition of the potential for multiple simultaneous psychological functions made it an appropriate fit with the dataset.

A coding template, based on Clary's six volunteer functions, was developed and used independently by three members of the research team to code a sample of 13 transcripts, with explicit attention to multiple motivations and the prioritization of these in the mind of the participants.

Results of this coding were cross-checked and adaptations made to the wording based on a discussion of the results and minor discrepancies on the coded results. The revised template was then validated via a second round of independent coding by the two chief investigators that was cross-checked for reliability. The full data set was then coded using the final coding template.

#### Sources

Clary, G. E., Snyder, M., Ridge, R.D., Copeland, J., Stukas, A. A., Haugen, J., & Miene, P. (1998). 'Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: A functional approach', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(6), 1516-1530

Clary, E.G. & Snyder, M. (1999). 'The motivations to volunteer: Theoretical and practical considerations', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 8, 156-159.

<sup>19</sup> Meneghini, A.M. (2016). 'A meaningful break in a flat life: The motivations behind overseas volunteering', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(6), 1214-1233.

<sup>20</sup> Clary, G. E., Snyder, M., Ridge, R.D., Copeland, J., Stukas, A. A., Haugen, J., & Miene, P. (1998). 'Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: A functional approach', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(6), 1516-1530.



**Table 6: Participants' motivations for volunteering (categories and examples)**

Motivation	Description	Participants reporting as primary motivation
1. Values	Express/act on important values like humanitarianism, social justice (give back/help/make a difference and/or address social justice/human rights)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Samantha, Kevin, Bronwen, Cherie, Nick<sup>1</sup>, Dylan<sup>1</sup>, Willow, Stacey, Felicity, Susan, Bernard, Carly, Sarah<sup>1</sup>, Kris<sup>1</sup>, Silvio, Deirdre<sup>1</sup>, Betty<sup>2</sup>, Gareth<sup>1</sup>, Charlie<sup>1</sup>, Willimina<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>
2. Understanding	Learn more about the world or exercise often unused skills (apply theory/study/unused skills and/or learn other language/culture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harry</li> </ul>
3. Enhancement	Grow and develop personally or psychologically (new challenges; e.g. applying knowledge in new setting and/or new experiences/adventure/space to slow down/reflect)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Barbara, Beth, Serena, Quan, Wendy<sup>1</sup>, Andrew, Vivienne, Angela, Germaine<sup>1,2</sup>, Addison<sup>1</sup>, Brice, Fiona<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>
4. Career	Gain career relevant experience (as a stepping stone or to acquire more experience at the start of a career, or building on and using skills in new context)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jeffrey<sup>1</sup>, Bettina, Grace, Nancy, Petra<sup>1</sup>, Mary, Norma, Olivia, Melissa, Richard, Keith, Martha, Robin, Barry</li> </ul>
5. Social	Strengthen social relationships and networks (friends, colleagues, family are engaged in this and/or value this)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Darcy, Amelia<sup>1</sup>, Howard, Stephanie<sup>2</sup>, David<sup>1,2</sup>, William<sup>1,2</sup></li> </ul>
6. Protective	Reduce negative feelings like guilt or address personal problems/issues (feel fortunate, desire to give up or share resources or expertise)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Christine<sup>1</sup>, Catrina</li> </ul>

All names are pseudonyms      <sup>1</sup> Indicates repeat volunteer      <sup>2</sup> Indicates approved accompanying dependant (AAD)

In general, motivations 1-3 are **outward-focused** (seeking, learning, expressing values, applying skills elsewhere), whereas motivations 4-6 are mainly **inward-focused** (escaping, career-building, personal enhancement, widening social acquaintances).<sup>21</sup>

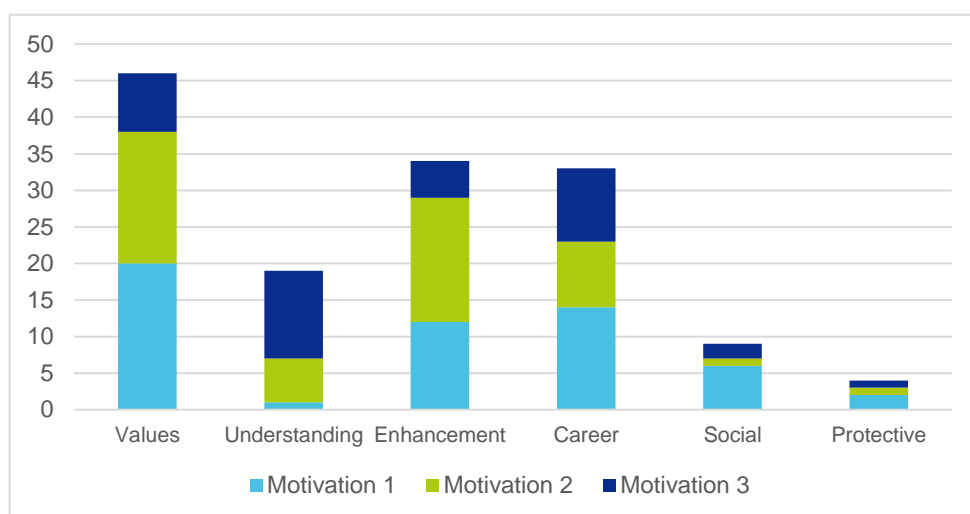
In total, 145 motivations were identified (mean: 2.6 per participant). 'Values' (n = 46), 'enhancement' (n = 34) and 'career' (n = 33) were all reported by more than 50% of the sample, with 'values' (20) and 'career' (14) the two most commonly reported primary motivations. Just four participants identified 'protective' motivations, while 'understanding' (19 responses) was only identified as the primary motivation by one respondent (#51). Our analysis shows that 33 participants possess mainly outward-focused motivations, while 22 have motivations that are primarily inward-focused.

For each participant a prioritised list of up to three distinct motivations was identified. The chart in Figure 3 distils the number of participants classified to each category of motivation as their first, second and third most prominent motivation.

<sup>21</sup> Meneghini, (2016)



**Figure 3: Participants motivations for volunteering (frequency of reporting)**



Not evident in Figure 3 is the combination of motivations reported among the sample. Forty-three (78%) participants identified at least two of 'values', 'enhancement', and 'career' in their assignment motivations. Ten of the 14 participants reporting 'career' as their primary motivation identified 'values' as a subsidiary motivation, while all but two of 20 participants motivated primarily by 'values' also identified 'career' or 'enhancement' functions to their assignment. **In other words, the majority of participants combined external 'doing good' objectives with more inward-directed objectives:**

*I'm having a bit of a mid-life crisis, and this opportunity came up and I thought it's probably going to give me a different perspective on life, and everything else ... I think it will actually help me to grow, sort of personally and professionally in the sense of, you know, I'm maybe mentoring somebody who (has) completely different experience or different expectations and at a different pace of learning, or you know, I mean, at the same time, I expect to learn from them as well ... I do want to give something to, you know, serving communities or just give my skillset back to the people and sort of ... a sense of sort of job satisfaction, and also be able to help others.' (Quan coded 1 for Enhancement, 2 for Values and 3 for Career).*

#### 4.1.2 Participants' Career Stage and Focus

The relatively large number of participants reporting career motivations (33/55, 60%) supports existing academic research noting the strong intrusion that international volunteering has on the professional life of volunteers (compared to domestic volunteering), and the strong emphasis of volunteering for development on the sharing of relevant professional expertise (compared to unskilled international volunteering).

Interview transcripts for each participant were coded to identify up to two career foci or stages within four over-arching dimensions (career break, career progression, career transition, career extension) and 13 categories of career stages. These dimensions and categories are summarised in Table 7 on the following page. A more detailed version of the full coding table is at [Attachment 12](#).

All except one participant (#18, retired AAD), articulated a relationship between their current role in the program (as a volunteer or AAD) and their career. Several identified multiple different career foci (total of 81, mean: 1.47 per respondent).



The two right columns of Table 7 show the number of participants who were classified against each dimension and each category of career stage, along with the number classified for each as their primary career focus (in brackets). The centre column identifies the name (pseudonym) of participants who were classified with this as the primary career focus of their assignment.

As indicated in Table 7, the most commonly identified dimension was 'career progression', recorded for 28 participants, 21 of these as the primary career focus. Both 'career transition' (24 participants, 13 as primary career focus) and 'career extension' (20 participants, 14 primary) were prominent among certain groups of volunteers.

The two categories from this classification that are addressed most often in international volunteering research, 'Launching' (2a) and 'Contributing' (4b) were well represented in the sample. Yet the two categories most commonly evident in the sample were 'Developing' (2b) – enhancing a career through developing experiences and expertise – and 'Moving forward' (3a), transitioning to a new career or sector.

**In short, the results suggest that participants were acutely aware of not just the career implications of their assignment, but also of the potential career benefits of their placement with the program.**

### Classifying participants' career stage

Classification of participants' career stage focused on understanding how their volunteer assignment intersected with their professional careers. Career was defined as '*evolving sequence of work experiences that an individual accumulates over time*' (Arthur et al. 1989, p. 8). Data for this classification came from different sections of the interview transcripts; primarily questions asking respondents to relate their assignment to the current stage of their work and non-work life. Coding of responses from approved accompanying dependants was based on their responses to questions relating to the impact of their involvement in the program on their work/career, their plans for their time in-country, and their future plans at the completion of the assignment.

A coding template was developed that drew on existing frameworks of career stages (Super 1957) but which was heavily adapted to suit the context of international volunteering.

As with the categories of participants' motivations reported in Section 4.1.1, a draft coding template that included tentative category labels, detailed definitions and examples was created. This was reliability checked by three of the research team and, following minor modifications, validated via a second round of independent coding by the two chief investigators. The full data set was then coded using the final coding template.

A copy of the full coding table can be found at [Attachment 12](#).

#### Sources

Arthur, M.B., Hall, D.T., and Lawrence, B.S. (1989) *Handbook of Career Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 8

Super, D. (1957). *The Psychology of Careers*, New York: Harper.

**Table 7: Participants' career focus (relationship of the volunteer assignment to career)**

Dimension	Category	Description	No. reporting (primary)	
1. Career break	1a. Refreshment	A volunteer assignment as a circuit-breaker from a career that is established but is not fulfilling the needs of the volunteer, and so volunteering is a response to a sense of dissatisfaction or staleness with a current role. <a href="#">Christine<sup>1</sup></a> , <a href="#">Barbara</a> , <a href="#">Beth</a> , <a href="#">Serena</a> , <a href="#">Quan</a>	5 (5)	9 (7)
	1b. Interlude/hiatus	A volunteer assignment as an interlude from an otherwise satisfying and/or stable career that will be returned to after the volunteer assignment is completed. <a href="#">Samantha</a> , <a href="#">Wendy<sup>1</sup></a>	4 (2)	
2. Career progression	2a. Launching	A volunteer assignment as an entry-point to a new career. <a href="#">Kevin</a> , <a href="#">Bettina</a> , <a href="#">Grace</a> , <a href="#">Nancy</a> , <a href="#">Petra<sup>1</sup></a> , <a href="#">Harry</a>	8 (6)	28 (20)
	2b. Developing	A volunteer assignment as a means to consciously develop or enhance a career through the acquisition of skills, experiences, opportunities, and/or networks. <a href="#">Bronwen</a> , <a href="#">Cherie</a> , <a href="#">Nick<sup>1</sup></a> , <a href="#">Dylan<sup>1</sup></a> , <a href="#">Willow</a> , <a href="#">Mary</a> , <a href="#">Norma</a> , <a href="#">Olivia</a> , <a href="#">Melissa</a> , <a href="#">Richard</a> , <a href="#">Andrew</a> , <a href="#">Vivienne</a> , <a href="#">Angela</a> , <a href="#">Darcy</a>	20 (14)	
3. Career transition	3a. Moving forward	A volunteer assignment as a way to transition to a new career or sector. <a href="#">Stacey</a> , <a href="#">Felicity</a> , <a href="#">Germaine<sup>1,2</sup></a> , <a href="#">Addison<sup>1</sup></a> , <a href="#">Keith</a> , <a href="#">Martha</a> , <a href="#">Robin</a> , <a href="#">Jeffrey<sup>1</sup></a>	15 (8)	24 (13)



	3b. Leaving behind	A volunteer assignment in response to a forced career transition (e.g. redundancy, labour market conditions). <a href="#">Catrina</a> , <a href="#">Susan</a> , <a href="#">Bernard</a> , <a href="#">Barry</a> , <a href="#">Amelia</a> <sup>1</sup>	7 (5)	
	3c. Moving over	A volunteer assignment as a way to transition to a new geographic location.	2 (0)	
	4a. Extension	A volunteer assignment as a way to remain engaged in professional life after 'formal' working life is finished or winding down. <a href="#">Brice</a>	6 (1)	
4. Career extension		A volunteer assignment as a means to use career expertise, reputation or recognition as a tool to contribute altruistically.		20 (14)
	4b. Contribution	<a href="#">Fiona</a> <sup>1</sup> , <a href="#">Carly</a> , <a href="#">Sarah</a> <sup>1</sup> , <a href="#">Kris</a> <sup>1</sup> , <a href="#">Silvio</a> , <a href="#">Deirdre</a> <sup>1</sup> , <a href="#">Betty</a> <sup>2</sup> , <a href="#">Gareth</a> <sup>1</sup> , <a href="#">Howard</a> , <a href="#">David</a> <sup>1,2</sup> , <a href="#">Charlie</a> <sup>1</sup> , <a href="#">Willamina</a> <sup>1</sup> , <a href="#">William</a> <sup>1,2</sup>	14 (13)	

<sup>1</sup> Indicates repeat volunteer

<sup>2</sup> Indicates approved accompanying dependant (AAD)

All names are pseudonyms

Excludes one participant (Stephanie, an AAD) whose interview revealed no relevant career stage

Table 8 on the following page combines the analysis of participants' motivations (vertical) and career stages (horizontal) from Tables 6 and 7. It has provided the starting point for profiling the study's participants, outlined in Section 4.1.3.



**Table 8: Participants' career stage and motivation (distribution of responses)**

		----- Career Break -----		---- Career Progression ----		----- Career Transition -----			----- Career Extension -----	
		Refresh	Interlude	Launch	Develop	Move forward	Leave	Move over	Extend	Contribute
Outward-focused motivations (n = 33)	Values		Samantha	Kevin	Bronwen, Cherie, Nick <sup>1</sup> , Dylan <sup>1</sup> , Willow	Stacey, Felicity	Susan, Bernard			Carly, Sarah <sup>1</sup> , Kris <sup>1</sup> , Silvio, Deirdre <sup>1</sup> , Betty <sup>2</sup> , Gareth <sup>1</sup> , Charlie <sup>1</sup> , Willimina <sup>1</sup>
	Understanding			Harry						
	Enhancement	Barbara, Beth, Serena, Quan	Wendy <sup>1</sup>		Andrew, Vivienne, Angela	Germaine <sup>1,2</sup> , Addison <sup>1</sup>			Brice	Fiona <sup>1</sup>
Inward-focused motivations (n = 21)	Career			Bettina, Grace, Nancy, Petra <sup>1</sup>	Mary, Norma, Olivia, Melissa, Richard	Keith, Martha, Jeffrey <sup>1</sup>	Robin Barry			
	Social				Darcy		Amelia <sup>1</sup>			Howard, David <sup>1,2</sup> , William <sup>1,2</sup>
	Protective	Christine <sup>1</sup>					Catrina			

<sup>1</sup> Indicates repeat volunteer

<sup>2</sup> Indicates approved accompanying dependant (AAD)

All names are pseudonyms

Excludes one participant (Stephanie, an AAD) whose interview revealed no relevant career stage



### 4.1.3 Participant Profiles

A tentative classification of participant ‘types’ was developed as the focus for between-group comparison during data analysis for Phase Two. This draws on the career and motivational factors summarised in the previous sections, and has resulted in the identification of three broad categories of participants encapsulating 83% of the full sample. These classifications continue to be refined with the view of more clearly distinguishing the illustrative characteristics below and to include additional groupings for the remaining 11 participants yet to be classified.

The three classifications are summarised in Table 9 and illustrated briefly below. We caution that, while within-group similarities are apparent and are emphasised in the summaries below, great variety exists in terms of individuals’ background experiences, reasons for participating in the program, and expectations and hopes arising from their involvement. Further refinement of the within-group and between-group similarities and differences is necessary. This will comprise an important part of the analytical platform of Phase Two.

**Table 9: Participant profiles (classifications and characteristics)**

Classification	Typical characteristics	Participants
<b>Launchers</b>	<p>Using their volunteer assignment as a stepping stone to launch a career in a sector or profession that allows them to express their values (typically international humanitarian aid and/or development)</p> <p>Young and inexperienced professionally, but well-versed in ‘theoretical’ development discourse and principles</p> <p>While career-focused, strong values embedded in their emergent career plans; active and disparate civic engagement, often outside professional training</p> <p>Confident in their skills and globally-oriented, with international experience despite their age and a desire for a global career</p>	Kevin, Bettina, Grace, Nancy, Petra <sup>1</sup> , Harry, Samantha, Keith
<b>Veterans</b>	<p>Applying their expertise accumulated through a long career to a volunteer assignment, usually in order to achieve a positive outcome</p> <p>Many retirees with vast experiences; most financially secure</p> <p>Post-career expression of values, older, good, continuity of what doing but towards something good, sometimes passion for profession</p> <p>More likely to be from an Education/Training/Library background</p>	Carly, Sarah <sup>1</sup> , Kris <sup>1</sup> , Silvio, Deirdre, Betty <sup>2</sup> , Gareth <sup>1</sup> , Charlie, Willamina <sup>1</sup> , Fiona <sup>1</sup> , Howard, David <sup>1,2</sup> , William <sup>1,2</sup> , Stephanie <sup>2</sup>
<b>Enhancers</b>	<p>Progressing their professional career through opportunities available in the volunteer role or context (progressors) or by using the volunteer assignment as a pathway to enter a new sector or context (transitioners)</p> <p>Largest proportion from Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art &amp; Design professions and less attuned to development ‘issues’, although seem to have absorbed the key philosophies of the program</p> <p>The group most likely to identify financial considerations and to be studying formal education program during the assignment</p>	<p><b>Progressors:</b> Bronwen, Cherie, Nick<sup>1</sup>, Dylan<sup>1</sup>, Willow, Mary, Norma, Olivia, Melissa, Richard, Andrew, Vivienne, Angela, Darcy</p> <p><b>Transitioners:</b> Stacey, Felicity, Germaine<sup>1,2</sup>, Addison<sup>1</sup>, Martha, Jeffrey<sup>1</sup>, Amelia<sup>1</sup></p>

<sup>1</sup> Indicates repeat volunteer    <sup>2</sup> Indicates approved accompanying dependant (AAD)    All names are pseudonyms

#### 1. The ‘Launchers’

The defining element of these eight participants is their intention to use their involvement with the program as a stepping stone to a future career that enables them to combine a professional training and interests with the opportunity to express firmly-held values, typically in the international humanitarian aid and/or development sector.

*Volunteering (is) both a personal and a professional decision, I guess, because this job, this opportunity will open up professional opportunities for me afterwards, but also it directly aligned with personal growth and all of my goals ... I've always wanted us to go overseas and volunteer*  
– Nancy

The majority of Launchers are making a direct transition from university studies to the volunteer assignment as their first full-time professional role (*‘The Australian Volunteers Program is a really good way of making that step between University and field work’*, Grace). This group come from a range of disciplinary





backgrounds. Yet multiple Launchers intimated a 'common narrative ... for younger people' and for university students that development volunteering was something you 'have to do ... to get an entry-level job' or a 'foot in the door' in international humanitarian or development careers. One repeat volunteer observed that the 'minimum requirements' for paid roles in the sector 'scare you'.

Although much younger than others in the sample (mean age 23.6 years at pre-departure), this group may be among the most internationally-focused, with all but one Launcher having lived outside Australia, typically via short-term internships or university programs (although two have completed previous volunteer assignments). Most speak multiple languages and express a desire for global careers with INGOs, intergovernmental agencies or sector-specific organisations.

While career-focused, all but one Launcher have 'values' as a prominent motivation, and their future plans reflect a desire to embed their values (e.g. human rights - Samantha, Nancy; sustainability – Petra) as central to their emergent careers. In other words, **for Launchers, the volunteer assignment is central to their desire to integrate their strongly-held beliefs within a career that allows them to express these values.**

While lacking professional experience (mean = 1.2 years), this group is generally well-versed in 'theoretical' development discourse and principles. Perhaps because of this, while pragmatic about the difficulties of entering the labour market with limited experience, when asked about their expectations and anticipated challenges, most 'launchers' expressed confidence they had the cultural and professional wherewithal to perform well during the assignment. Five of the eight Launchers are female, six are from urban areas, and one – Petra, who is continuing a current placement - is a repeat volunteer. Half of their assignments are in countries in the Asia Archipelago (4/8).

Finally, consistent with the centrality of values to their professional lives, this group has an impressive record of active and disparate civic engagement, often outside their professional training. Thus, the assignment with the program seems a logical extension of their domestic civic engagement. On this point, it was apparent that some from this group wanted to distinguish their decision to volunteer through the program with other forms of volunteering. Nancy says:

*So I've got a history of volunteering, unpaid work ... but all within the field of human rights, essentially it's just my main focus, my career but also personally as well that's what I'm passionate about and motivated in, so this was kind of the perfect next step after I'd finished my Masters. I've always wanted to volunteer abroad but I wanted to do it in the right way. So more of like longer term as opposed to like voluntourism with three weeks over there and coming back.*

## 2. The 'Veterans'

The second group, which we label Veterans, comprises 14 participants. The key feature of this group is their desire to use their professional experiences and expertise, accumulated across a long career, toward their volunteer assignment. The main reason for this is to make a contribution, and thus express positive values that may have not been a central part of their earlier career (e.g. 9/14 members of this group had 'values' as the primary motivation):

*I'd gained a lot of knowledge in my working life and I started to think, well if I don't do anything that just all dies with me. So I thought, it's not mine to hang onto. So I thought, well it would be good to pass something onto other people ... I just like passing on knowledge to people and I get a great deal of satisfaction back - Charlie*

In other words, whereas the Launchers used their volunteer assignment to embed their values within an 'ethical' career, **Veterans saw their assignment as a way to apply their expertise, gained through various professional pathways, to express an important valued-related goal.**

At the same time, other purposes, including a passion for the profession and a desire to remain productive, were apparent. The personal development side of motivation is also important, highlighted by the fact that 9/14 were in the 'enhancement' motivation category (1,2 or 3).

Unsurprisingly, this was the oldest and most experienced (professionally) of the groups, with a mean age of 64.2 years at pre-departure, and an average of almost 28 years of professional experience. It was also the most gender balanced of the groups (50% female/male), partly strengthened by the fact that 4 are approved accompanying dependants. This group is more likely than other groups to have partners who are part of the formal volunteer program and some expressed the sense of a 'team' approach to their assignment.

This was the group with the largest number of members expressing 'social' motivations (6/14), reflecting the importance of friends and family also engaged or valuing volunteering. Three of 14 Veterans have doctorates, and eight are classified as 'Education/Training/Library' specialists. Three are from regional/rural areas.



In terms of the volunteer assignment, Veterans were more likely to take on a position with a formally designated 'mentor' role (6/14); five members of the group articulated prior experience in this. They were also more likely to seek a role that matched their current skill-set.

Despite their extensive experience, only one Veteran has prior work experience in the host country and five had accepted assignments that involved some degree of role change (from their previous experiences). Half of this group (7/14) are repeat volunteers with some having done more than one prior assignment. Thus, on the whole they bring particular experience of both working in cross-cultural environments and with various iterations of the program.

### 3. The 'Enhancers'

The group labelled 'Enhancers' comprises 22 participants in two sub-groups. Like other groups, their career stage was a defining feature of their volunteer assignment, albeit with subtly different foci.

The largest of the two sub-groups, which we tentatively label 'Progressors' (14 participants), see their assignment as a way to progress their professional career through the opportunities that are available in the volunteer role or context. This group will be applying their expertise in a new context (e.g. international, development-focused rather than profit-focused) or in a unique role that matches but extends their interests; indeed, Progressors is the group most likely to be undertaking a role that involves a fundamental change from the role that they had previously held (8/14). Like the Veterans, this group was conscious of accepting an assignment based on its fit with their current skill set (5/14 respondents) and as a way to express their values (11/14). However, they also articulated learning objectives (assignment choice) or 'understanding' motivations that they linked clearly with their career ambitions. Perhaps consistent with this, Progressors are the group most likely to be undertaking ongoing formal education during their assignment. Just seven of the 55 participants reported this (13%); four fell within the group of 14 Progressors (29%).

We label the second group within this category 'Transitioners' (8 participants). As the label suggests, these participants were explicit about their volunteer assignment being a pathway to a different (new) career. For some, this was a transition from a government or corporate role to a similar role in international development. One participant described his view this way:

*I've heard from other people who've been in the program before that it's a useful way to get established in the development sector ... I knew (international volunteering) as ... one path – a very good pathway to get into the development sector ... I was just doing background research on LinkedIn to see what people have done and looking at their history ... through that research and talking to other consultancies in Australia you know how they got to where they were - Keith*

On average, the group has fewer years of professional experience than the sample average (7.2 years compared to 14 years), although Transitioners (9.4 years) tend to be more experienced than Progressors (5.9 years). Likewise, while both groups came from a range of age categories, the mean age at pre-departure is below the sample average of 43 years, with Transitioners (36.8 years) generally older than Progressors (31.2 years). Related to their career stage, this group was the one most likely to identify financial considerations and/or pressures as an important feature of their decision to volunteer ('as much as I love (this) stuff, I also like having an income').

This group had the largest proportion of participants from the Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art & Design professional category. Some from this category were surprised by the sense of community that they experienced at pre-departure briefings, and a few had not seen the connection to the bigger community of development practice (Section 5.3.2). Just three of the 14 Progressors are repeat volunteers (21%), while four of the eight Transitioners are (50%).

While career building was prominent for both Progressors and Transitioners, 16 of the 22 participants in this group had expressed strong 'values' motivations associated with their volunteer assignment.

For some Transitioners, the desire for a career that better matched their values was an important consideration; unlike Launchers, they bring specialised professional experience or acumen rather than training in international development. Nonetheless, noticeable in their expectations for their assignment was that many in the category seem to have absorbed the messages relating to capacity development approaches that were shared as part of the 'volunteer professional learning journey' ('I'm conscious that there's a lot of unknown'; 'It's important for me to go in and try to listen and learn'; 'I don't know that I have that many expectation because I know things will change and I have to be prepared for that').



## 4.1.4 Participants' Current Behaviours, Capabilities, and Attitudes

Across all phases of the LSAV, participants' attitudes, behaviours, and capabilities relating to five outcomes of interest to the program will be tracked. These outcomes, agreed in the *LSAV (Phase One) Inception Report (April 2019)*, are:

- International (experiences living and working overseas, including host country; languages spoken; cross-cultural experiences; global or cosmopolitan identity or mindset, career and/or attitudes)
- Career (professional qualifications and experiences; relationship to volunteer role; career stage and objectives)
- Civics (current volunteering and association with NFPs; attitudes toward aid & development; experiences with communities of interest or communities of identity; consumption of relevant media or information; relevant formal education)
- Personal (expected challenges and opportunities; future plans; personal commitments)
- The program (knowledge of and attitude toward the program; engagement with the program via RAVN; prior involvement with the program).

To monitor and identify changes to outcomes in Phase Two, analysis of transcripts during Phase One has resulted in the development of a detailed coding template to 'map' participants' changes throughout the LSAV. A copy of this template can be found at [Attachment 13](#).

The template has been applied to all 55 interview transcripts and will serve a central plank of preparation for Phase Two interviews. A sample of a baseline outcomes map for one participant (Amelia) can be found at [Attachment 14](#).

Similarly, while the utility of the outcomes table is primarily for pre/post comparisons, and most useful at the individual level, Table 10 on the following pages aims to summarise a few of the key features of the sample's outcomes in relation to variables of interest to the program. The table thus aims to provide further flavour to characteristics of the participants outlined in this section.

These characteristics are expanded further in Section 5, which focuses on participants' pathways to, and experiences with, the program prior to their mobilisation.

### From domestic volunteering to international volunteering objectives and back?

One noticeable feature of participants' journey to their international volunteer assignment that has emerged from individual outcomes mapping is the relatively high level of civic engagement that participants currently perform. In short, many participants are active volunteers, community organisers, advocates and consumers in relation to a variety of issues from human rights to gender equality and environment. Over 50% of study participants are active volunteers in their communities, a rate more than double the average for some cohorts of Australians.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between participants' current (mainly domestic) civic engagement and their volunteer assignment is interesting. Some participants viewed their assignment as a continuation of (domestic) volunteering that they had been performing previously (*'It's a continuation, it's another branch of that ... I feel we have a responsibility'*); others saw it as something quite distinctive (*'Oh, I think this one's quite different ... I'm not working anymore ... I've got the time to put in serious mileage'*). The intersection between current (domestic) civic engagement and the international volunteer position is something that will be monitored during Phase Two of the LSAV.

For volunteers with primarily values-based motivations, we'd expect domestic and international volunteering to be viewed as similar forms of 'contribution' and expression of their values. Others may see the two as very distinctive because of the level of intervention in their lives, the use of different skills sets, or the different objectives for each. It is feasible that participants' views about the parallels between these two streams of activity may change across the study and may influence their experiences in the program. This emergent finding is one feature earmarked to be tracked during Phase Two to examine, for instance, whether participants remain engaged with domestic volunteer networks while overseas, how (or whether) the participants re-engage with these organisations post-assignment, and whether residual benefits of their participation in the program flows through to their other civic activities.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (Volunteering graph data GSS 2014)



**Table 10: Attitudes, behaviours and capabilities across the sample (summary)**

Outcome	Summary of key behaviours, capabilities and attitudes
International (experiences living and working overseas, including host country; languages spoken; cross-cultural experiences)	<p><b>Behaviours:</b> Forty-seven participants (85%) have prior experience living and/or working overseas for durations ranging from several decades to just a few months - frequently (but not mostly) in low income countries. A number reported working and living in multiple countries and continents; at least six were born outside Australia.<sup>22</sup> Nine participants (18%) reported having prior work experience in the host country in which their assignment will take place, including 5 of the 7 participants who were referred candidates. Six of those participants who had worked in the host country (67%) were repeat volunteers.</p> <p><b>Capabilities:</b> Six participants (11%) speak a language other than English at home; many others were fluent in second or third languages. These included French, Khmer, Indonesian, Swedish, Tetum, Mandarin, Portuguese, Scots, Cantonese, Norwegian, Solomon Islands Pijin and Tok Pisin. At least seven participants were already adept at speaking the host-country's (non-English) national or operational language. Of the participants who identified as having ancestry from outside Australia, none were deploying to assignments in a related country; that is, none would be classified as 'diaspora' volunteers.</p> <p><b>Attitudes:</b> Across the sample there was strong interest in the assignment as an opportunity to live and work in the host community as a very different experience to the tourist one. Interest in or a desire to learn about the local culture and/or the host-country language was a stated ambition of more than half of participants.</p> <p><b>Observation:</b> Participants with prior work experience in the host country were slightly younger than those with no prior experience (mean: 41 years compared to 43.6 years) and tended to be less professionally experienced than those with no prior work experience in the host country (mean: 10.5 years compared to 14.9 years for those with no prior experience in the host country). Their assignments also tended to be shorter than others (mean: 281 days compared with 318 days).</p>
Career (professional qualifications and experiences; relationship to volunteer role; career stage and objectives)	<p><b>Behaviours:</b> At least 7 participants (14%) plan to continue studying formal education programs during their volunteer assignments (typically post-graduate distance education programs with Australian universities).</p> <p><b>Capabilities:</b> Ninety-five percent of participants (52/55) hold either a bachelor degree (25/55, 45%) or masters/doctorate degree (27/55, 49%). Professionally, the background of participants is diverse with the largest occupational categories being Education/Training/Library and Business/Marketing/Tourism/Art &amp; Design (both 18% of the sample), and Community/Social Development (13%). The experience of participants in their occupational category varies from nil to 41 years (mean: 13.99 years). A number of participants demonstrate their capability for working in international development through their experience in remote and Indigenous communities with some expressing an interest to pursue that further on return.</p> <p><b>Attitudes:</b> Those categorised in the 'career progression' stage (Section 4.1.2) hope in the future to consolidated their careers either in the international development sector or using the experience for recognition in the job market.</p> <p><b>Observation:</b> From the categorisation of career stages, 'career progression' was the most common primary priority (21) with the subcategory of 'develop' (14) the most pronounced. This was followed by the 'career extension' stage. All these participants were over the age of 50. As a motivation, career does not feature so strongly after 34 years of age.</p>
Civics (current volunteering and association with NFPs; attitudes toward aid & development; experiences with communities of interest or communities of identity; consumption of relevant media, policy; relevant formal education)	<p><b>Behaviours:</b> More than half of the participants already volunteer domestically either in a community of interest or a community of identity. Analysis of a sample of Case Files show that many reflect an interest in civic affairs, development and human rights, but do not participate actively in these sectors. Half of those who volunteer do so individually, while the other half volunteer with organisations.</p> <p>Forty-two percent of all participants have prior international volunteer experience of some kind. In addition to the repeat program volunteers (see below), at least 4 participants reported having undertaken various skilled and semi-skilled international volunteering assignments through myriad secular, religious and voluntourism agencies. Two additional participants (#08, #54) had been involved in starting or managing NGOs outside Australia, while several engaged in (additional) volunteering activities in-country whilst on assignment as either program volunteers or AADs. Several others had undertaken voluntary work whilst in paid employment overseas (e.g. #09), giving an international dimension to their civic contributions.</p> <p><b>Capabilities:</b> Examples from 20 Case Files show that approximately one third of these have a critical understanding/knowledge about the field of development, while other participants reported active citizen practices; organising and coordination experience; policy engagement; and management or leadership experience.</p> <p><b>Attitudes:</b> In 20 Case Files, eight participants demonstrate strongly engaged attitudes to human rights, development, and civic and community issues. Thinking about the future, participants talked about continued civic engagement through volunteering or careers that are socially or community oriented, as well as further international volunteer assignments.</p> <p><b>Observations:</b> Six participants have professional backgrounds within the Community/Social Development sector, a sector with particularly strong career links with international development volunteering. Five of these are female, three are repeat volunteers, and all have lived overseas. Their mean age (39.6 years) is slightly younger than other participants.</p>

<sup>22</sup> This was not directly asked of participants but arose in discussions during six interviews.



The program  
(knowledge of and  
attitude toward the  
program;  
engagement with  
the program  
programs like  
RAVN; prior  
involvement with  
the program)

**Behaviours:** Nineteen participants (35%) are repeat volunteers through the program or its earlier iterations, with the number of separate prior assignments ranging from one to over ten. Participants who had completed previous assignments with the program were aware of the activities of the RAVN and have contributed to some activities (e.g. survey responses). However, on the whole they have chosen to not actively participate in the RAVN (e.g. attend events). At least two are involved in managing social network groups designed to assist volunteers in host countries.

Monthly recruitment updates relating to the program are widely monitored by diverse participants, including whilst on assignment and/or for long periods prior to considering and/or making application a position.

**Attitudes:** Perspectives of first-time volunteers were generally positive about the program focus, pre-departure briefing experience, sense of professionalism, and available support. This embraces elements of confidence in the operation of the program, its alignment with their values, but also the delivery of transactional components of the program. Those with prior experience in the program reported a more critical view of the program and/or its processes that they had experienced to date. A number of participants explicitly distinguished the program as either distinctive within the aid program or qualitatively more developmentally sound (e.g. in philosophy/preparation of volunteers) than voluntourism literature or projects they were aware of, or in which they had participated.

Values, enhancement and career predominate as important motivational factors for volunteering; alongside these the importance of volunteering as a means of career progression should not be underestimated. The value attributed to volunteering by significant others may be important for recruitment and moral support.

**Observation:** Repeat volunteers were both older at pre-departure (55.0 years compared to 35.4 years) and more professionally experienced (20.7 years compared with 11.9 years) than first-time volunteers. In spite of the high proportion of repeat volunteers who had worked in their host country previously, this group were slightly younger than those without experience living in the host country (mean: 41.0 years compared to 43.3 years). In other words, **it tended to be the younger repeat volunteers who were deploying to an assignment in a country in which they had previously worked.**





## 5. Contact with the Program

This section addresses the final two research questions:

3. What are volunteers' experiences of their pre-departure contact with the program (recruitment, selection and preparation)?
4. How might volunteers' initial contact with the program be improved to create more favourable experiences and outcomes for volunteers?

It does this by addressing, in turn, participants' pathways to the program (Section 5.1), journey from application to selection (Section 5.2) and professional learning journey (Section 5.3). In doing so, our analysis aligns broadly with the *AVP Recruitment Strategy* phases of recruiting diverse volunteers, selecting the right volunteers, and mobilising effectively. The section concludes by suggesting ways to create more favourable experiences for volunteers during their pre-mobilisation contact with the program (Section 5.4).

Data analysis procedures for this part of the study are summarised at [Attachment 9](#).

A common theme across all three stages of contact with the program is the generally high level of uncertainty, and sometimes anxiety, that some participants experience relating to their application, their upcoming volunteer position, and their mobilisation. While these anxieties are offset by many of the systems and activities that the program has in place, many of the suggestions in this section address ways to prevent or mitigate this aspect of participants' experiences.

### 5.1 Pathways to the Program

#### 5.1.1 Finding a Role

Participants' initial contact with the program was indirect and instigated well before applying for a volunteer assignment. Many were introduced to the program via **friends, networks or family** (17 from 50 available responses, 34%), typically through direct contact with former volunteers who had acted as inspirations or who had specifically recommended the program, sometimes many years earlier:

*I met her just as I was starting to pack up to move back to Australia. So, our paths crossed at quite a nice time. And, yeah, so I was just chatting to her about what she'd been doing and she tells me (about volunteering with the program). And I was like, wow, that sounds really cool, I definitely need to go and check that out (#43)*

Other prominent routes to the program included personal past experiences – typically prior involvement in the program's earlier iterations (12 respondents, 24%), and newspaper advertisements (3 respondents, 6%).

Once this liminal introduction had been made, **checking assignment listings on the program (or AVI) website** (14 participants, 28%), or subscribing to the program's **email list or database** (12 participants, 24%) were the main contact mediums. Just one participant reported using social media; in this case (#11), the respondent came across a program post on a parallel social media site (international NGO) and subsequently subscribed to the program's mail list.

A common pattern was participants engaging in a lengthy incubation period prior to making inquiries about their chosen assignment. For some, this involved years or even decades of reviewing potential positions (e.g. checking internet job postings or email-lists) until the right position was found and/or the right enabling 'conditions' were present. In relation to the latter, the removal or loosening of personal anchors (e.g. parental or family care commitments, financial concerns) or professional fracture-points (e.g. lack of job opportunities in Australia, end of a current contract) were common stimuli for the decision to apply for a volunteer position. Others participants' spontaneous decisions to inquire about a position coincided with a bereavement (#04, #34), and/or feelings of dissatisfaction with their work. One participant (#26) describe being:

*... in a job that made me very unhappy. I was handed a redundancy much to my delight at the end of last year and I went travelling and then I just still couldn't motivate myself to apply for any more jobs ... I was getting these emails because I'd subscribed to the AVI newsletter about ten years ago. And then one came along about an info night so I went to it and I'm on the train going home from the info night, I looked up some roles and found one that I thought my skills suited, applied for it and now I'm going.*

#### Stronger partnerships with employers?

Participant #16 suggested that the program would benefit from stronger efforts to strategically partner with organisations in Australia as an '*avenue of recruiting as opposed to just whacking (positions) up on the internet*'. In his view, this may be especially helpful in recruiting '*people in the 30-55 period and particularly single women who ... often have very good experience and technical skill*' but whose careers may be disrupted by volunteering. It was suggested that the organisations may be well positioned to integrate the volunteer assignment into the employees' career progression and/or development plans.



In this regard, the program's ability to communicate regular reminders via an email list or similar media appears to be an important mechanism through which prospective volunteers' interests can be piqued about vacancies, events, benefits of volunteering, or other program features in a timely way.

### 5.1.2 Making the Decision to Apply

The data reveal that the two main contextual factors influencing participants' decision to apply for their volunteer assignment were their perceptions about: (i) the characteristics of the program, (ii) the characteristics of the role and context. Each is discussed in turn.

**i. Characteristics of the program:** Participants reported two main attractions to the program: (i) the nature of support that was believed to be available, reported by 14/50 participants (28%), and (ii) the reputation of the program as a legitimate and government-backed volunteer agency, which was highlighted by 16/50 participants (32%).

**> Program support:** Different types of support are valued by different types of participants. Some value the **financial and logistic support** that was offered – e.g. airfares, insurance, allowance or lower costs (e.g. #02, #08, #12, #14, #20). Other participants feel reassured by the attention to their **wellbeing and security** that the program was perceived to provide (e.g. #17, #18, #25). In general, younger participants with less professional experience are more conscious than older ones of the instrumental (including financial) support provisions, although this was not always the case (e.g. #25).

**> Reputation of the program:** Participants identified different features of the program's reputation that attracted them. Most commonly, this came from the **legitimacy** provided by the program's brand and its association with the Australian Government ('*It was the first and really the only site I looked at because it looked really professional. It had the DFAT logo; it had the Australian aid logo and I started scouring it*' - #24). One participant described the program as being 'aligned' by 'its bigger strategic thinking' in this way:

*It's not just like you're going to go and do something that ... might make a difference but really not meet longer term goals or be sustainable ... and just knowing that it's a legitimate program where it's Government funded and you have that support of people who are connected with the in-country team, because that was important to me (#30).*

In a similar vein, another (#15) explained:

*(I)t's solid ... having worked with a sort of semi-commercial (firm) – you'd sort of think how much time and energy do you have to research for your client groups are and how transparent are the relationships? So I chose Australian Volunteers because it is – it is working to government policy, it's legitimate and authentic and not perfect but probably about as good as you can get.*

Another who had previously set up several small international NGOs of her own volition commented that she viewed her assignment as '*distinct ... a lot more credible because it is through AVI*' (#08). Others compared the program to supply-based volunteer program ('*I didn't want to go with cowboy companies*', #25). More than one participant linked this reputation to '*career progression*' benefits (#14).

An important aspect of this reputation for at least 6 participants was their affinity with the program's **philosophy toward volunteering for development** (i.e. relationship-oriented, strengths-based, outcomes-focused capacity development). One (#11) described it as '*probably the closest to, in my opinion, an ethically sound model of overseas volunteering as you can get*'. Others reported program assignments as '*like skilled volunteering ... I wouldn't want to do anything unskilled or a little bit too tourism-y*' (#13) and '*really partnering with local people. Mentoring, capacity development, and, yeah, I guess the whole philosophy behind it is really more in line with my values*' (#08). A fourth (#28) described an assignment with the program as:

*Such a different kind of experience and that connection to people that (a friend who was a program volunteer) was working with and local people and the changes that he was making there were so impactful and positive that it was just like, wow, this is something that I would really love to be able to contribute at some stage when something pops up.*

#### Attraction to the program's philosophy: Pre- or post-PDB?

It remains unclear how much of participants' reported attraction to the philosophy of the program – for instance, the program's focus on strength-based approaches and the relationship-oriented nature of volunteering for development – precedes their contact with the program or was piqued during the selection procedures or preparation activities in which they participated. The latter point is discussed in Section 5.3.

A clearer understanding of this would be gained by collecting data earlier in the selection process; for instance, pre-selection interviews or analysis of volunteer video interviews, in particular responses to the video interview question 'Why do I feel that volunteering overseas is the right thing for me to do at this time in my life?'



## ii. Characteristics of the role and context

In addition to their perceptions about the program, a second major influence on participants' decision to enter the program came from the nature of the advertised role itself.

Typically, participants reported multiple reasons for applying for a specific role. Not surprisingly, this most commonly involved a role that **matched their current skill-set** (i.e. appropriate for their current expertise and experiences) – e.g. *'Not much has come up with AVI, as far as the Pacific, in that [ ] sector, and this popped up, like three months ago, so I was, bugger it, I'll do it now'* (#03). Equally important is that several participants described not applying for a particular role that, while attractive, sought expertise that they felt they may have lacked. In this regard, while participants became aware of the changeable nature of position descriptions after entering the program, the framing of the role and its requirements were commonly mentioned as important determinants of whether (or not) to apply.

In contrast, others with primarily career-oriented foci (i.e. career transition or career progression) sought a position that represented a **desired future role** that would allow the participant to experience and/or learn from the position (e.g. #40), the operating context (e.g. #09), and/or the partner organisation (e.g. #20):

*I think it's a good opportunity to use the skills that I currently have and have been developing but also use them in a slightly different way and see if that slightly different way is something that I really do enjoy, and then if that's the case then I can kind of act on that a bit later when I get back (#28)*

*This gives me a chance to work in a developing country on a [project] and maybe this might be able to get my foot in the door where I can be sort of working maybe as a consultant (#40)*

### Not necessarily a voluntary role!

Not all participants wanted, or were attracted to, a voluntary role. Some – primarily those with career-oriented motives and those wanting international experiences (e.g. #03, #09, #13, #37) – were seeking paid employment positions when they found the advertised role with the program. One respondent (#09) was unaware the role was a 'voluntary' position until well into the decision phase of her search: *I didn't really even realise that it was volunteering. I thought it was just local pay until I went through the process and saw that it was volunteer. I don't really feel like I'm volunteering for me as my costs are covered anyway*

Among the other employers that these participants considered (or applied for jobs with) were: prominent international NGOs, intergovernmental agencies, and private consultancy firms. No respondents identified Australian-based volunteer agencies as potential alternative employers. In other words, the data suggest that the 'consideration set' of potential employers for participants included primarily large corporate and reputable international employers within the development/aid sector.

A separate group of participants were volunteering as a 'plan B' (#36), after having sought paid roles, domestically and/or internationally (e.g. #01, #36, #40). These participants combined their desire to do *'something we'd always talked about'* with the professional opportunities (*'I did have a look at a couple of positions and I just thought, this is going to go nowhere'*, #40).

Notable among a small number of responses – repeat volunteers and first-timers alike – was an attraction to **the nature of 'capacity development' work**; that is, the opportunity to enjoy, learn from, or experience relationship-oriented, long-term interpersonal *'mentoring and skill sharing'* (#08), and *'something more relationship-building than task-driven'* (#09) – that allowed the use of a different skill-set and created a different professional experience for participants. Several mentioned the intrinsic satisfaction or benefits of *'connection to people ... local people'* (#28) and *'sustained contact in a community'* (#25). In these cases, it was the impression they had of how they were expected to perform their volunteer role, the *'sense of connectedness with each other'* (#04), not just the benefits of enacting their values and making a contribution, that made the assignment an attractive proposition.

### The role of family and friends

All but a few participants reported that their family and friends were supportive of their decision to accept their assignment with the program. Some also reported positive reinforcement after communicating the decision to friends (*'I think I had about 100 (Facebook) likes and about 50 comments from people all over the world ... just really lovely messages of support'*). The importance of the program's reputation, legitimacy (e.g. government funding) and particular support mechanisms (e.g. security, insurance) to volunteers' family and friends should not be under-estimated. One volunteer (LOTE, #23) reported that she *'told my parents word for word all the stuff (which was covered at the PDB) ... that was a big relief for them.'*

At the same time, the extent to which family and friends were involved in the decision-making process was unclear from the data available. While some participants were explicit about the influence of their family on their decision to volunteer (#17, #34), this was often not the case. One participant (#36) lied to an elderly parent about the duration of the assignment to avoid *'stress(ing) him out'*. Similarly, while some participants discussed their decisions to volunteer with friends or family, very few reported in-depth consultations with others (although this was not specifically addressed in interviews). Some accompanying dependents reported only minor roles in their partner's decision to apply:

*I didn't think he was going to get it, I didn't think he was going to go. He told me one day ... "I saw this advertisement I'm going to give it a go." And I said, "Okay, fine, go for it." ... And ... (then) he says, "I got a call from them there's a Skype interview, this Monday, there's a video interview next week." Every week there's something and then he said, "Alright you're going to have an interview." And I said, "Why me?" He said, "Because you're coming with me" (#18)*





A third, less prominent, attraction of the role to participants was its **location and context**. Some were attracted to work in a specific host-country because of their history studying or associating with it (e.g. #01, #04, #05, #29, #51) or their interest in it (e.g. #33, #28, #10): *'I think I was always interested in kind of going for (the) Pacific because I love that Pacific Islander culture and the people are lovely'* (#28); *'Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia. I was focussing on that area'* (#33). Others were attracted by the international nature of the role, irrespective of the specific host-country (#09, #36). For these participants, the adventure, lifestyle (e.g. community members rather than tourists), or career benefits of the international posting was decisive:

*I love traveling and it sounded like a really interesting opportunity to live overseas and really experience a different culture in a way that you wouldn't normally get to do* (#43)

## 5.2 The Journey from Application to Selection

Participants were generally favourable in their evaluations of the selection process, with 28 (51%) reporting generally positive experiences, 15 (27%) reporting generally negative experiences, and 12 (22%) mixed (i.e. neither strongly positive nor negative). In general, first-time volunteers were more likely to report positive experiences than repeat volunteers. Of those with favourable experiences, 5 were repeat volunteers (18%), while 47% of those with negative experiences were repeat volunteers (7/15).

Excluding the seven participants who were recruited through the referred candidate pathway, the bulk of participants found the **selection processes thorough, rigorous, time-consuming and onerous**. The time taken to finalise selection varied greatly; several participants expressed surprise at the speed (#03, #20, #25, #26, #34) while others were confounded by its slowness (e.g. #11, #15, #24, #36, #39). Representative terms used by respondents to describe the process were *'logical'* (#05), *'well organised'* (#17), *'massively time consuming'* (#34), *'slightly wearying'* (#15) and *'pretty good overall'* (#14).

Some participants viewed the level of rigour evident in the process to be representative of the professionalism of the program; for them, the exacting procedures appear to have reinforced their view about the quality of the support that they would receive during the assignment and the quality of the program overall. One participant (#24) described the screening process as:

*probably the most stringent job interview I have ever been for in my life. And I think it adds gravitas to it. It is time consuming but, I think it's very thorough and I think it makes it seem a bit more important.*

Other participants found the selection procedures unnecessarily onerous or bureaucratic, and observed how their commitment to the screening requirements (certification of documents, multiple interviews, preparation activities, referee contacts, multiple training programs) impinged on their many other work and non-work commitments during the (busy) pre-mobilisation stage (e.g. #10, #24, #28, #29, #34):

*You have to submit a video, and then you had to have another interview, and then you had to have another interview and ... it's like how many times can you talk about yourself in, in 10 different ways?* (#52)

Even some of the AADs we interviewed observed the difficulties in balancing their pre-mobilisation obligations to the program with other commitments (#18, #32).

Below we address four cross-cutting themes that were of importance to participants from a range of age categories and profile groups:

### 5.2.1 Self-service Portal

Overall, respondents found the online mediation of the application process impersonal but relatively straight-forward. The self-service portal was variously described as *'clunky'*, *'logical'*, *'all about the contract'* (rather than relationship) and *'clear'*. The benefits reported were that it was streamlined, generally well organised and *'pretty easy to navigate'* (#28). Dissatisfaction arose from (a) its impersonal nature, (b) some technical issues that led to applications being mishandled or inquiries not being responded to, and (c) difficulties finding someone or the right person, to speak with to answer questions or resolve issues. There is some suggestion that participants who were recruited from the later PDBs were less critical of the online systems, signifying that some of the technical issues may have been worked through in the early part of 2019. Yet comments about its impersonal nature persisted across all four cohorts of participants:

#### The pathway of referred candidates

Seven of the 50 participants accepting volunteer assignments (14%) were 'referred' by the partner organisation (#01, #02, #08, #39, #45, #46, #53) and so had pre-mobilisation experiences that differed from the majority of participants.

In most cases, these participants had established contacts within the partner organisation and were involved in creating or commenting on the position description in some form before it was formalised. Thus, positions for referred candidates were commonly designed with the individual volunteer in mind.

These participants came from a range of professional backgrounds. Five of the seven had prior experience working in the host country; three were in the host country when the position became advertised. The remaining two had visited the host country as tourists – in one case to visit a friend who was volunteering.

While these participants still reported anxiety and uncertainties prior to mobilisation, as well as frustrations with communication (delays, inaccuracies, lack of details), their different entry pathways to the program and greater certainty around their role and partner organisation make these a sub-sample that will be monitored separately during Phase Two.



*I think from going through recruitment through to what they call on-boarding I could probably judge it and explain it – the feeling kind of it is, I feel a little isolated ... I think they're good asking you questions and saying yes, but then ... you're very on your own' (#26)*

While most participants recognised the need for scalable and efficient procedures, several (mainly repeat volunteers) reiterated the importance of 'more one-to-one contact' (#06) or 'the human touch' (#16) to avoid the process being:

*... over technologarised – you know a pile of templates on a computer doesn't mean things are happening properly. One could give some information ... perhaps making sure that the human touch is maintained and the people know (what) the roles about it's not just oh you haven't filled the form out properly ... I've sensed that sometimes perhaps some of the staff that are working don't quite click with the implications of (volunteers' commitments) ... It's not that simple – you've got children, grandchildren and a house you own and all those sorts of things (#16)*

### 5.2.2 Intermittent, Reactive, and Sometimes Inaccurate Communication

Participants' pre-mobilisation experiences were hampered by long delays in receiving information, inaccurate information (that in some cases resulted in participants incurring large expenses) and intermittent or no communication. This feature was prominent in the experiences of 29/50 participants (58%) and strongly influenced their overall judgment of the experience.

The concern most commonly reported was receiving limited information and long periods of not being updated about progress both before receiving a conditional offer and prior to mobilisation (e.g. #06, #09, #31, #34). One participant (#30) found it 'a bit frustrating at the time' because 'you're kind of not sure what's happening ... (there's) no clear set ... process ... nothing will happen for a while then things happen.' Another (#36) explained it was like 'a burst of activity and then you hear nothing and you don't quite know what's happening during that time and then there's another burst of activity.' One participant, in their (anonymous) feedback to the draft summary of this report, emphasises the need for 'more transparency and immediacy' from program staff.

Related to this, an additional nine participants (18%) emphasised the responsive rather than proactive nature of contact from staff within the program (e.g. #11, #13, #16, #34, #35, #36, #37, #44). While particular incidents of proactive contact were noted – for instance, a Skype call from an in-country manager after a terrorist attack in the host country prior to the participant's departure (#25) – on this point the overarching sense of participants is:

*(Program staff) haven't been super regular; it hasn't been a lot of contact but the contacts I've had have been so supportive, people get back to you straight away if you have a question, no question is too stupid. It would be great to have a little bit more of that along the way initiated by them (#23)*

Other concerns with communication were associated with confusion about whom to contact and challenges in finding the 'right person' (or any person) to speak with about an issue. Several participants felt that this stemmed from inadequate communication between different units within the program:

*I would get five emails from different people asking the same questions from the team in Melbourne so I had to repeat myself a lot (#35)*

*I've had a lot of different people contacting me which I've struggled with a little bit. And a lot of different people contacting me about the same thing and so they'd sort of ask me to submit stuff and I'd already submitted it (#02)*

More than one participant felt that a designated 'case worker or someone who could check in with me every couple of weeks' (#44) would have prevented them feeling 'a little lost in the system'.

In spite of these hiccups, participants' interpersonal contact with program staff was generally positive. While a variety of experiences were reported, most saw program staff in Melbourne and in host countries as 'approachable' (#30), caring, and helpful when asked. A number acknowledged the challenges of managing a program of this size. And yet, as one observed:

*I completely understand they're managing so many volunteers at the same time with multiple different dates and organisations. But I think having, just knowing, sometimes I feel like I'm the sitting duck (laughing), like I've finished everything on my end, I'm like okay I don't know where everything is and I don't know if it's a normal amount of time or if I should send an email to follow up now that kind of thing. So yeah a little bit more clarity on the process and how long generally it takes would be useful, just because I know that it's all, they've got a lot going on.*

Collectively, these responses suggest that, as one repeat volunteer surmised, 'They are systems problems rather than individual problems, I think' (#15).



### 5.2.3 Contact with Partner Organisations

Among the features of their pre-mobilisation experience that participants found most beneficial was the opportunity to have direct contact with staff from the partner organisation, either as part of the selection process or after being made a conditional offer. Thirty-two participants (65%) reported having contact with one or more partner organisation staff as part of their selection procedures, typically via video interviews or (for those applicants who reside in the host country) in-country meetings. At least four participants had arrangements to speak with partner organisation staff during the selection process cancelled due to technical or logistic problems. Two participants reported dissatisfaction with these interviews due to the perceived lack of English language proficiency (#30) or apparent lack of interest (*'It felt a bit like, at that point, they were checking a box, rather than really interviewing me'* - # 29). However, overwhelmingly participants found their contact with partner organisation staff beneficial. Several recommended this as an important and necessary part of the recruitment process. For most, this contact provided a realistic taste of the organisation, its employees, the role, and even the work environment:

*I love that you get to have a conversation with someone in-country because straight away you pick up nuances of, well, they're sitting in an office, what does the office look like, what does their equipment look like, what is the conversation they're having? All that – you pick up a lot from that which was really nice (#23).*

*It was really good to have somebody who knew exactly what 'the go' was, I guess. She was lovely and she will be my direct line manager ... she kind of ... broke down what I'd be doing ... (that it) wouldn't be kind of intern admin roles, it would be ... deeper than that, which is exactly what I wanted to hear essentially ... (it) just yeah allowed me to get a feel of the organisation and also have a friendly face ... which helps a lot (#37)*

With few exceptions, participants who had no prior experience in the host country reported a lack of clarity about the role that they had been selected for, the partner organisation, and the environment in which they would be working. Several expressed uncertainties about the office environment, the extent of field work or travel that would be involved, and the finer details of the role itself (*'I'm not quite sure what to expect now, because I'm not sure whether I'm going to be confronted with a document that they would like to go through with me, or whether there's going to be out on the field'*, #10). Most who had no contact with the partner organisation during recruitment lacked knowledge of the organisation's size or the English language proficiencies of its staff.

In part to deal with this uncertainty, partner organisations were researched intently by some participants. Several, including some who had not been interviewed by the partner organisation during recruitment, instigated contact with the organisation before their mobilisation (sometimes mediated via in-country program staff). This was typically viewed as productive in helping to understand the conditions within the partner organisation and to begin developing fruitful relationships with key personnel. As an example, one respondent (#11) reported:

*I've had a lot of great contact actually with my partner organisation, particularly with the director. I've been able to speak to her personally and she's very eager and excited so I have the expectation obviously that ... they're actually excited to have me on board ... so they're going to use me ... yeah they're going to be willing to work alongside me*

In a few cases, online research of the partner organisation led volunteers to distil expectations about difficulties that they would face during their assignment (e.g. #28). One volunteer (#34), when discussing the challenges that he expected during the assignment, described finding media reports of a dispute between stakeholders that may be influenced by the work he would be performing (an infrastructure plan for a government agency). He observed:

*... (It's) something I've sort of gleaned from looking at the sort of legislation that I'm asked to produce this plan to meet, and actually, some article on the local news in the [host country].*

*Q: Is that right?*

*A: I just happened to Google and I came up with them. And so it's, there is some sort of sensitivity there about these changes ... they're going to (have an impact) in the bigger cities, so I don't know how it's going to be back where I am ... So, there was a fair bit of stuff that was on the news that I saw from the [host country] news, sort of thing.*

*... It's going to be challenge (laughs). I look forward to it.*

*Q: And which part (of the assignment) in particular will be challenging?*

*A: Getting a result with the [ ] plan that doesn't get too many people off-side and does meet the requirements.*



#### 5.2.4 Uncertainty, Anxiety and the Best Form of Realistic Job Preview

A common concern for many, although not all, participants across their contact with the program prior to their pre-departure briefing was their sense of isolation and uncertainty.

These feelings were exacerbated by technical glitches, difficulties finding people to speak with, conflicting information, long periods of no contact, the relatively 'isolating' nature of the online self-service portal and learning modules, and the relatively limited detail they had available about their role, the partner organisation, and the host country. Even position descriptions were described as 'extremely broad' (#22) or:

*quite vague ... when I did one of my interviews as part of the recruitment one of them was with the man who's the head of [the partner organisation] ... I sort of asked him about it ... it could be quite a big project especially for only one year, and ... I get (the) sense that ... they haven't really thought about how they want to structure it so it's quite an open sort of structure (#27)*

Participants' uncertainty does raise interesting questions for both the selection process and volunteers' subsequent in-country experiences. In general, effective recruitment and selection processes provide each candidate with a **realistic job preview** at multiple points in the process.<sup>23</sup> Through this, candidates become aware of the expertise necessary to perform the role, begin to understand the challenges in the role and work/non-work environment, and can begin making anticipatory adjustments that can help them to succeed during the assignment.

On the one hand, it seems sensible to forewarn participants about, for instance, the changeable nature of their position descriptions and the importance of these being open to re-negotiation in country with the partner organisation and program. In a development context, the diverse determinants of the role, including the partner organisations, the program and other contextual factors, can make this difficult, in which case the potential for an evolving role and changing expectations seem worthwhile highlighting. It is also true that, to quote one participant (#45), *'there's some parts of the realistic picture of living in [host-country] that the AVP program can't cover'*. Ensuring participants are clear about this at pre-mobilisation is a valuable way to prevent unexpected in-country shocks. One (anonymous) comment in feedback to the draft summary of this report observed that *'maybe, the (job description) should be highlighted as indicative, and prospective applicants encouraged to be not deterred by some aspects that they may be less comfortable with!'*

On the other hand, combined with other features reported so far, the lack of confidence in the position description may exacerbate felt anxieties among some volunteers about, for instance, their ability to fulfil the role, to achieve objectives, to have an impact, or even to be able to adequately negotiate a role that is suitable and desirable for them, the partner organisation, and the program.

Pertinently, position descriptions that are significantly different from the actual role may most impact volunteers who have specific career or learning motivations associated with their decision to volunteer, a large proportion of the LSAV sample (Sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). For this group, being confident that the role responds appropriately to local needs but also allows them to develop specific skills or experiences, appears to be an important consideration in their satisfaction. Consequently, more support may be warranted to ensure that the volunteer understands the context they are going into, and that the position description reflects these features, and the learning opportunities, as accurately as possible. One way to achieve this might involve efforts by the program to facilitate more formative discussions between a selected candidate and staff from the partner organisation as a way to begin reconciling participants' imagined and actual volunteer assignments and contexts.

### 5.3 Volunteer Professional Learning Journey

While participants reported a range of experiences (both good and bad) during recruitment and selection, it was the activities associated with the program's volunteer professional learning journey - online learning modules and in particular pre-departure briefing - that appear to have left the strongest impact on participants' overall attitudes toward the program. In other words, those who found the PDB *'fantastic, triple A-plus'* (#15), *'very professional and well run'* (#05), or *'an amazing, amazing experience'* (#19) tended to hold overall favourable perceptions of the program, while those who reported that *'a lot of what we'd done online was just repeated at the briefing anyway'* (#07) and found it *'terrible ... (not) a deep analysis at all and I think they should be better intellectually positioned in that space'* (#04), were generally less favourable in their perceptions of the program.

<sup>23</sup> Templer, K.J., Tay, C., & Chandrasekar, N.A. (2006). 'Motivational cultural intelligence, realistic job preview, realistic living conditions preview, and cross-cultural adjustment', *Group & Organization Management*, 31(1), 154-173.





### 5.3.1 Online Learning Modules

Participants had mixed experiences with their use of online learning materials. With some exceptions, the content was seen as 'sensible' (#22) and well structured (e.g. #28, #32, #37, #38) and the depth and currency of the content 'really informative' which 'got you thinking' (e.g. #10, #19, #24, #45, #47, #55):

*The social media portion I feel like they've updated, discussion around photos. I feel like that in the most recent ones they've done a lot more 'anti-white saviour' dialogue, which is good (#45, repeat volunteer)*

The activity that was seen as most beneficial was being directed to additional (and reputable) data relating to the host country. One first-time volunteer (#24) 'really enjoyed ... the country overview and causes of poverty and economic instability and various other elements that contribute to the country'. Another reported being so excited by the information she found that 'they said it was 3-4 hours, about 4 hours. I spent, probably twice as long as that' (#10). Yet another (#40) noted:

*I think the best (module) was doing our little research project where we had to do research on the country that we're going to. I thought that was excellent because it made you research and read and make notes ... I didn't know much about [the host country] beforehand but after reading the history and the conflicts and the causes of poverty, it's given me a really good background on the issues of [the host country]*

Notwithstanding this example, participants did question the amount of time needed to complete these materials (#06, #26, #29, #36). As with the self-service portal generally, technical hiccups were commonly experienced (#10, #34, #39, #40, #44, #50). While most felt the materials were well integrated with the content of pre-departure briefings and saw this relationship (12/55 participants), others found the two repetitive (5/55).

Pertinently, some felt the online materials were overly focused on compliance. One (#52) believed that the activities 'came across as very tick-a-box ... I'll be honest with you, I tried to do them as quickly as possible because they're pretty painful'. Another:

*... felt it was laid on too thick. I think there is check boxes. They've got to say yes, we've done this, we've done this, we've done this, we've done this, but after a while you are thinking look maybe you could summarise a bit because by the time you are 2-3 hours into it you have forgotten what you did in the first hour anyway (#42)*

On this point, it was noticeable during interviews that some participants were somewhat vague about the content they had 'learned' (or completed) during the online modules ('I can't really think, (can't) remember a question off-hand', #36; 'I can't remember that far, (it's) long ago', #38). Thus, while the materials were generally recognised as offering value, the extent to which this knowledge stays with participants may be questioned, especially if the activities are seen as compliance- rather than as learning-oriented. It is feasible also that the quantity of materials and the time involved rendered some of this content a little overwhelming in the busy period of participants' pre-mobilisation. Opportunities to reinforce important features of these topics during in-country orientations or other in-country workshops may be beneficial and, for some topics, potentially more meaningful once participants have accumulated a body of personal in-country experiences.<sup>24</sup>

### 5.3.2 Pre-departure Briefings

Overall, participants were favourable of the content, design and facilitation of the PDB they had attended. Even those participants who were critical of some parts of the content or approach, and/or – in the case of repeat volunteers – sceptical of the need to (re-)attend a PDB, recognise the importance of covering many of the topics.

Specific content areas seen as being most beneficial were 'practical' briefings on safety, security, health and/or insurance (25/55 respondents, including 4/8 of the participants with no prior experience living outside Australia), cultural awareness activities (11/55), and the program's development approach (20/55) - specifically around strengths-based approaches to development (#01, #15), relationship building (#14) and sustainable development more generally (#07, #11, #30). As one participant explained, 'The (PDB) made me re-evaluate what volunteering actually was.' Another (#14) observed:

*I think that's sort of the nature of the program, from what I've gathered is that - rather than being quite results orientated, it's more relationship focused which I think leads into why their capacity development was the way it was ... I never quite thought of capacity in that way so I think it was a bit – it was pretty cool.*

<sup>24</sup> Hou, N., Fan, J., Tan, J. A., Hua, J., & Valdez, G. (2018). 'Cross-cultural training effectiveness: Does when the training is delivered matter?', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 65, 17-29.



Scenarios that enabled a depth of thinking and interaction about the complexity of issues was the pedagogical approach most commonly lauded. The session on public diplomacy was the one drawing the emotionally strongest feedback, with some participants pragmatic about its benefits and others sceptical of its rationale:

*I was frustrated in the training that we spent 3½ hours on PR and public diplomacy but we only spent an hour, 1½ hours on safety and security. And I think that is really twisted priorities, we did a lot on PR because the aid program is, is honourable to the processes of the current Government (#54)*

Several participants reported that their experiences at the pre-departure briefing had changed their views about their assignment or set new expectations (especially for those with no prior 'development' experience or training). The following description by a first-time volunteer from a business background is typical of these, and encapsulates both her previous uncertainty and the value of the briefing:

*It's definitely changed my perspective of the role. I think maybe because I didn't have any information and I didn't talk to the organisation, I really wasn't sure what kind of skill I should be doing because usually if I get a task, if I start working for an organisation on a contract basis and I know it's coming up, I would start developing some plans and doing some research and getting resources ready, but when I found that out I thought, okay, well it's not like that, it's more about relationship building. So yeah, it definitely changed my perspective of it (#09)*

Awareness of child protection issues, being introduced to development principles, and understanding the program's development philosophy were the topics about which large numbers of participants reported a particular change of perspective or learning outcome.

Like others who had not volunteered previously, repeat volunteers were generally appreciative of having attended the PDBs. Seven reported that it had improved from earlier versions they had attended, and some valued the opportunity to consolidate previous learning and/or experiences. At the same time, others – including some who reported returning to Australia specifically to attend the briefing (e.g. #01, #41) – found the experience redundant. One proposed that customised content might be appropriate for this group; another suggested an abridged version for repeat volunteers:

*I feel like they could have almost done a bit of advanced standing, like okay, maybe you don't need to sit through all of this, so I found the days quite long ... I sort of feel like there should be an abridged version for people who have done the program before (#21)*

In general, the participants most critical of the PDB content were repeat volunteers and those with backgrounds or training in international development:

*The first day of the pre-departure briefing was ... what does participation mean, and what does development mean, and it was like, you know, I just wrote this three-thousand word essay critiquing this whole ... language and approach ... personally, I didn't get anything out of those sessions, but I can see the value of what it – you know, what that does, normatively for the program (#29)*

Moreover, a small number of participants were critical of the relatively limited coverage of issues relating to gender and/or diversity and inclusion. While many participants were keen to reduce, rather than expand the content of PDBs, these comments are consistent with the findings of the program's *Gender Analysis Phase 1 Report*.<sup>25</sup> Among other topics that participants suggested for inclusion in future PDBs was stakeholder management (e.g. managing relationships with governments and various funding agencies and INGOs).

Notwithstanding these experiences, two overarching themes dominated participants' responses relating to their attendance at PDBs: opportunities to interact with other volunteers, and having access to country-specific information prior to mobilisation. Each is discussed further below.

**> Interacting with other volunteers:** Overwhelmingly, participants reported that the most beneficial feature of the PDBs was the opportunity to interact with other volunteers (42/55 participants, 76%), and suggestions to formalise or strengthen the interactive and social components of the briefing were the most commonly reported suggestion to improve PDBs.

According to participants, this interaction offered two main benefits.

First, and most notably, hearing about the uncertainties, confusions, anxieties and questions of other volunteers *'in the same position, or even more stressed'* (#37) provided *'motivation'* (#40), *'reassurance'* and *'comfort'* (#43) to participants that helped to *'ease the nerves'* (#37):

*Just realising that the other people had the exact same questions – I found it really comforting to see that there were people lots more anxious than I was about the whole thing. I was like, oh*

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<sup>25</sup> *Australian Volunteers Program Gender Analysis – Phase 1 Report* (March 2019). Recommendation 8 states that the program 'provide high quality training on gender equality and women's empowerment in all volunteer pre-departure briefings and in-country orientations, plus follow up learning.'



*okay, I'm fine. I'm not that stressed, it's okay. Which I know is not nice for other people to be stressed, but it was nice just to realise, oh okay, no, I'm fine (#43)*

*Because they're in the same boat as you, they're also confused and don't know what's going on or they're not, they have questions and uncertainty. So just being able to meet people and understand that you're not the only one - I think that was very helpful (#30)*

In light of their feelings of relative isolation until that point, a number found the interaction at the briefing 'makes you feel like you are a part of something bigger' and helping to:

*... reduce(d) the feeling of isolation because up to that point, you're just dealing with the internet and the portal and doing the online learning on your own and there's a little bit of interaction with people at the end of an email at the AVP, so to suddenly be in a group of people, yeah, it definitely reduced the feeling of isolation (#40).*

Another participant described interacting with other volunteers 'an affirmation of what you're doing and why people are doing things, and how you feel about what you're doing' (#10). A repeat volunteer (#15) explained the benefit to her of these bonds in the following way:

*From previous pre-departure (briefing), we made contacts with people who maybe were not in the same country (as) but we stayed in email contact. And they became a really powerful support network ... you got some mileage out of that. There was a mutual understanding of the sort of frustrations and challenges which are part of the volunteering experience.*

Second, interacting with other volunteers allowed participants, especially first-time volunteers, to benefit from the cross-cultural, international, and in some cases country-specific experiences of the cohort:

*A couple of them have already been living in-country. So, it was invaluable talking to them and just getting practical tips and stuff (#43)*

Particularly valued were the insights of repeat volunteers, a point raised by 13 of the 36 first-time volunteers. Thus, while some repeat volunteers found the briefings redundant and suggested customised or streamlined programs ('I like to meet my fellow volunteers, but I don't think I could sit through all again', #55), their insights about the program, expatriating, and development volunteering were valued and sought out by others at the briefings. All but a few participants felt that opportunities to interact with other volunteers should be expanded and formalised within the curriculum of the pre-departure briefings.

### Transferral of attitudes from PDBs?

While some participants were vague about particular content of the online learning materials with which they had engaged, there was evidence that many of the key themes of the 'volunteer professional learning journal' had resonated with participants. Noticeable was the attitudes that most participants expressed toward their expectations for their assignment, with many using terminology similar (in some cases identical) to messages reiterated throughout the pre-departure briefing (e.g. the need for greater flexibility, openness and patience, holding fewer expectations). Thus, while participants' actions during pre-mobilisation and their interview responses revealed an underlying discomfort with some of the uncertainty they felt, many were primed for and aware of the need to be 'open to the unexpected':

*...you know, that (the job description) is guidance, you know, it's what we like to see but we need to go and find out exactly what the role is, you know, what the partner organisation wants, etcetera (#17).*

*I just don't really want to build up all these ideals and then get there and be disappointed. I think that in this kind of scenario, it's a lot better for me to be open-minded and just be like, you know what, I'll just do what they want me to do and go from there (#20).*

Similarly, remarkably similar attitudes were expressed by multiple participants towards supply-based volunteering programs (voluntourism) and particular relationship-building approaches (e.g. attending church services to establish social capital in some Catholic countries). Thus, the participants' responses to a range of topics reflected transferral of shared attitudes from their contacts with the program.

The data available did not offer an explanation for these patterns, and a more reliable measure of this would come from interviewing participants before their contact with the program (e.g. comparing video interview responses with the LSAV interview data). Nonetheless, the research team plans to continue exploring this emergent theme in Phase Two to track the extent to which these attitudes are retained, refined or rejected in coming years.

> **Access to country-specific information:** As well as interaction with other volunteers, participants craved what several termed 'practical' information relating to the host country, locality or partner organisation (contrasted with criticisms of some content being overly 'textbook' (#52) or 'generic').

Indeed, the absence of advice relating to the host country at PDBs (e.g. information about the logistics and practicalities of packing for, settling in, adapting to, and living in the host country) was the single feature most commented on in relating their experiences of their contact with the program.

While most (although not all) participants were aware that country-specific information would be provided at the in-country orientation, as the following interview extracts exemplify, the majority wanted access to this before mobilisation:



*We have ideas from other volunteers from the past who have experienced working in a similar area, to give us a bit more of an idea of what we could do while we're there, because while the information was very good, it was very broad and it wasn't necessarily the in-country or [host country] specific (#20)*

*I think the only downside of that is that you don't then get (country-specific) information until you arrive. So, I think it would be nice to be told a little bit more what you can expect from your in-country briefing and what you can expect from the Australian based briefing, just to manage expectations (#43)*

#### Personal contact with program staff

As well as their fellow volunteers, the other group with whom participants appreciated personal contact was the program staff. As well as receiving answers to specific questions on issues like the current security situation in a locality (#17, #18) and safety protocols (e.g. #33), it allowed participants 'to put faces to all the emails' and helped them 'feel reassured that there were people there who care about these things' (#44). Indeed, the responses of several volunteers suggested that their attendance at the briefing, their personal contact with program staff, and learning more about the support provisions the program had in place, helped to mitigate some of the uncertainties that had been building in earlier weeks.

Taken collectively, participants recognise that pre-departure briefings are intensive, and we are reluctant to suggest adding more content to an already crowded curriculum. However, the experiences reported by participants suggests that two features seem worthy of further investigation and consideration by the Volunteer Services Team.

First, on balance, we propose that the program consider the risks and benefits of using repeat volunteers in more formal ways during pre-departure briefings to help make the experience more meaningful for them and more 'practical' (i.e. oriented toward the specific practicalities of preparing for mobilisation) for others. The overwhelming desire for greater peer-to-peer interaction and for more country-specific information suggests an opportunity for the pre-departure briefings to model the type of relationship-oriented approach that is central to the program's philosophy through the use of repeat volunteer 'mentors' to lead (and potentially plan) semi-guided discussion sessions with groups of first-time volunteer protégés.

While this presents challenges and risks to the program (e.g. loss of control of messaging), it appears that the experiences and views of repeat volunteers are already being sought and shared, albeit outside the structured curriculum. Considering ways to formalise this has the potential to improve the already positive experience for both repeat volunteers and novices. One participant, in their anonymous feedback to the draft summary of this report, strongly endorsed this finding.

Second, related to this, we would suggest considering ways that volunteers are encouraged and supported to engage in self-learning approaches to identify more practical, country-specific information prior to the PDB, where this could be shared and discussed, supported by returned volunteers along with program staff. More broadly, multiple options exist to develop different kinds of in-country information within the current framework of the *Program Recruitment Strategy* and the *Program Professional Development and Learning Journey*, including expanding the 'meet a returned volunteer' component of the *AVP Professional Development and Learning Journey* to include more options to speak with returned volunteers before departure, or formalising pre-departure contact between volunteers and in-country managers and/or partner organisation staff. The option also exists to re-configure pre-departure and in-country orientations so that some (or more) country-specific content is 'front-loaded' to the pre-mobilisation stage to offset some participants' concerns about this - and to emphasise the importance of continuous learning and reflection at all stages.

These suggestions, and those peppered throughout earlier parts of this section, provide the foundations for addressing the final research question (how volunteers' initial contact with the program might be improved to create more favourable experiences and outcomes for volunteers). Specific recommendations are distilled in the following section.





## 5.4. Recommendations

Drawing on our analysis of data collected during Phase One of the LSAV, we propose the following ten recommendations that, on balance, are likely to lead to improved experiences for volunteers during their contact with the program prior to mobilisation. Where appropriate, we indicate the section of this report that contains germane supporting detail.

### Volunteer professional learning journey

- Participants emphasised the value of PDBs as opportunities to interact with other volunteers and to gain 'practical' country-specific insights (Section 5.3.2). While neither of these appear to be prominent in the current formal PDB curriculum, a review in terms of content and approaches may allow more constructive engagement with repeat volunteers on PDBs and the benefits of their involvement to be more formally established within the current program.

**Recommendation 1: That program staff consider using repeat volunteers in more formal ways during pre-departure briefings to help make the experience more meaningful for them and more 'practical' (i.e. oriented toward the specific practicalities of preparing for mobilisation) for others.**

**Recommendation 2: That program staff consider ways that volunteers be encouraged and supported to engage in self-learning approaches to identify more practical, country-specific information prior to and during the PDB, where this could be shared and discussed, including through direct contact with returned volunteers and program staff. Changes would need to be structured to ensure continuity of across online modules, PDBs and in-country orientations.**

### The journey from application to selection

- Participants reported a diverse set of experience with the online self-service portal and associated processes (Sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.4). It is unlikely a single system will satisfy all applicants. Nevertheless, feedback that indicates the online system (Section 5.2.1) – and the structure and timing of communication from program staff in support of the portal (Section 5.2.2) – may create barriers for some volunteers being able to (i) present themselves in their best light during the recruitment process, and/or (ii) prepare appropriately for important pre-mobilisation tasks (e.g. Section 5.2.4).

**Recommendation 3: That program staff review the online pre-mobilisation systems to ensure they enable effective engagement by a wide pool of applicants and to improve the experiences of candidates in the system, including but not limited to participants' access to accurate and timely information. This review should focus on (a) the accessibility of the self-service portal; and (b) protocols and standards for communicating with applicants/volunteers, including 'transition' points in the process that involve a changeover from one program team to another (e.g. from recruitment to contracting to pre-mobilisation).**

**Recommendation 4: That program staff establish a set of practical standards for the provision of information to, and for initiating personal contact with, applicants/volunteers during all stages of pre-departure in order to mitigate feelings of isolation or uncertainty. This should include clear protocols relating to the regularity, nature and extent of information and contact to be made available. This review could consider the feasibility of using a 'case worker' approach (i.e. a single designated contact point for each volunteer).**

- Participants were clear in the value they attached to their engagement with partner organisations prior to and after their selection for an assignment (Section 5.2.3) as a way to better understand the context of the assignment and the reality of their volunteer experience. Despite this, unevenness was apparent and appeared to have contributed to some participants' sense of anxiety.

**Recommendation 5: That program staff review consistency of practice in relation to candidates' access to and opportunity to have meaningful contact with partner organisation staff at the pre-deployment stage, with consideration of making this a requirement pre- and post-selection, except in cases where all parties (candidate, partner, program) agree otherwise.**

**Recommendation 6: That program staff consider providing guidance and/or technological assistance to volunteers and partner organisations to support productive engagement at, before, and after the selection stage.**



- Participants' experiences suggest the potential for improving a shared understanding across the program, volunteers and partner organisations of the volunteers' assignments, particularly on the status of the role's position description (Section 5.2.4). While the importance of accurate position descriptions prior to selection is noted (Section 5.1.2), value is also likely to be derived from helping a preferred candidate and a partner organisation begin to establish a more accurate shared understanding and/or realistic expectations prior to mobilisation (Section 5.2.4).

**Recommendation 7: That program staff review the current approach to developing and communicating assignment position descriptions, and consider early interventions with partner organisations and volunteers to manage expectations of the role and the potential variations that may be experienced.**

- While a range of factors contributed to participants' decisions to apply for particular roles (Section 5.1), the results confirm that many volunteers bring multiple and diverse motivations to the program (Sections 4.1.1 and 5.1.2), in some cases specifically linked to (their perceptions of) the features of the advertised roles, the duration of the assignment, and the partner organisation (Sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2). The motivational categories identified in this report offer the potential for more targeted matching of volunteers to positions.

**Recommendation 8: That program staff consider ways to align volunteers' motivations about a role to specific features of the partner organisation or the assignment (including duration, key functions/outcomes, destinations, and selection criteria).**

### Pathways to the program

- Participants' experiences in being introduced to the program and to particular positions highlight the importance to the recruitment process of volunteers' existing social networks and the program's ability to communicate regular and timely electronic notifications (Section 5.1.1). While these are opportunities to be built on, the reliance on existing contacts and subscription may serve to limit the diversity of potential applicants that the program is able to reach, and so contribute to under-representation by some groups of Australians (e.g. rural/regional residents, particular age cohorts, diaspora communities). While the data collected in this study prevents specific recommendations, the use of a variety of outreach platforms offers the potential to broaden the diversity of prospective volunteers.

**Recommendation 9: That program staff continue to make use of social and electronic media to communicate vacancies, events, benefits of volunteering, or other program features in a timely way.**

**Recommendation 10: That program staff review current approaches to recruitment to actively seek to engage a wider potential applicant pool beyond those currently associated with the program via social or electronic networks. This may involve more refined recruitment processes for particular (types of) roles (e.g. memberships of professional and/or trade associations), destinations (e.g. diaspora communities), or assignment configurations (e.g. duration variation), as well as building partnerships with organisations that may assist to increase the diversity of applicants.**



## 6. Phase Two

The following tentative proposal is presented by the research team for the structure and timing of Phase Two of the LSAV. These include a number of optional activities that, we believe, offer benefits to the study's relevance and quality but could be funded separately or removed from the key design elements. All activities proposed below are designed to address the overarching research question of the LSAV:

**(How and why) does volunteers' participation in the program influence them personally and professionally in ways that are relevant to the program's objectives?**

The details in the proposal assume that:

- The scope and purpose of the LSAV remain relatively stable, and the research design of Phase One be deemed generally acceptable for continuation in Phase Two;
- That the five broad categories of outcomes reported in Section 4.1.4 (i.e. international, professional, personal, civic engagement, and the program) continue to be tracked in Phase Two;
- Phase Two of the project commence on 01 December 2019 and be completed by 30 June 2022;
- The specific deliverables for Phase Two are similar in scope and form to those of Phase One (i.e. draft and final report, sensemaking workshop, brief interim reports);
- Fully-anonymised digital transcriptions of all interviews are made available to the program at the completion of each wave of data collection;
- A more comprehensive budget will be agreed upon once a decision has been made about the scope;
- The research team is able to utilise data collected during Phase Two for (non-identifying) academic publications;
- The commencement of Phase Two will include a brief review of issues arising from Phase One;
- The timeframe outlined in Section 6.1 (Table 12) is generally agreeable.

Accordingly, we propose that the central framework for Phase Two revolve around:

- Individual longitudinal qualitative interviews with the sample recruited in Phase One be the main data collection tool, and de-identified transcriptions of these interviews be the main empirical materials produced for analysis;
- At least two waves of interviews: (i) T2 - an in-country interview to occur during the latter stages of each participant's assignment (September 2019 to April 2020), and (ii) T3 – a post-assignment interview to occur after the completion of participants' assignments (October 2020 to July 2021). Indicative interview schedules for Phase Two, along with a table indicating the approximate timing of these<sup>26</sup>, pending input from program staff, are attached in [Attachments 15 and 16](#) respectively. For the (up to) 110 interviews for Phase Two, it is proposed that nine be conducted in 2019, 53 in 2020, and 48 in 2021 (FY19-20: 55 interviews, FY20-21: 51 interviews, FY 21-22: 4 interviews);
- Separate analyses and reporting for in-country data (T2) and post-assignment data (T3);
- Analysis for T2 incorporating both cross-sectional analysis (i.e. summarising and comparing participants' different in-country experiences) and longitudinal analysis (examining plausible relationships between T1 and T2 responses). We additionally propose that T2 analysis incorporate a separate set of analyses focused on participants' ongoing contact with and support from the program during the period of their time on-assignment. Analysis of this phase may benefit from access to certain de-identified records collected by program staff (e.g. details of in-country learning (ICL) activities);
- Analysis for T3 incorporating both cross-sectional analysis (i.e. summarising and comparing participants' different in-country experiences) and longitudinal analysis (examining plausible relationships between T1, T2 and T3 responses). We additionally propose that T3 analysis also address participants' contact with and support from the program after the completion of their assignment, including participants' interactions with the RAVN network and other post-assignment support mechanisms provided by the program. Analysis of this phase may benefit from access to certain de-identified records collected by the program (e.g. details of RAVN events and other activities);

<sup>26</sup> In general, post-assignment interviews (T3) are scheduled to occur roughly 12 months after the completion of the assignment. However, this varies greatly due to the variety in anticipated end-dates of participants' assignments. For instance, in order to meet the project's time frame, one post-assignment interview will occur just five months after the completion of the assignment.



- Pending funding, the option for additional waves of data collection be considered, with interviews occurring roughly annually across at least two more time periods (T4 and T5). We see the continuation providing insights into long term processes of change that have rarely been documented in international volunteer outcomes. They link strongly to the program's objectives that 'Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally' and that 'volunteers (current and returned) promote greater cultural awareness and build stronger connections between partner countries and Australia.' This would start to better document the way the program helps to meet the Australian Government objective that Australians are more globally literate and connected;
- In view of this, two activities for Phase Two that we believe contribute to both the reliability of the study's results and their integration with the program's broader objectives are suggested. Summarised in Table 11, these include the opportunity to formalise collaboration between the LSAV research team and personnel involved in the RAVN to capitalise on the two related data sets via joint analysis and, if viable, publication or communication of outcomes, as well as the opportunity to externally validate the study's results with focus groups of returned volunteers (including but not confined to LSAV participants).

**Table 11: Proposed activities (Phase Two)**

Proposed activity (and timing)	Features	Benefits/outcomes
Collaborative analysis of data from LSAV and RAVN survey (mid 2020 and/or mid 2021)	1-2 day research workshop (LSAV researchers & RAVN team) to integrate & analyse data sets and begin scoping consolidated output	Stronger integration of results of two research projects – to inform T3 interviews and/or to (T3) Joint publication/report combining two datasets
Focus groups of returned volunteers	Facilitated focus group of returned volunteers (including some participants of LSAV) to discuss emerging themes arising in T2 and/or T3 interviews	Input to and/or validation of study's emerging results prior to being finalised

## 6.1 Project Timeframe

It is proposed that Phase Two of the project commence on 01 December 2019 and be completed by 30 June 2022. Table 12 on the following page provides a timeframe. A tentative budget for these activities is presented in the Annexe, submitted with the supplementary materials of this report (Budget – LSAV Phase Two).



**Table 12 Overview of project timeframe and main deliverables (Phase Two)**

Stage	Main activities	Timeframe (2019-22)	Main deliverables
Project agreement & contracting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contracting</li> <li>Ethics approval</li> <li>Inception workshop</li> <li>Inception report</li> </ul>	December 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inception workshop</li> <li>Inception report</li> </ul>
Data collection (T2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant contact and interviews</li> <li>Transcriptions</li> <li>Data management</li> </ul>	December 2019 to April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant overview (T2)</li> <li>Interview transcriptions</li> </ul>
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief interim progress report</li> </ul>	April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interim progress report</li> </ul>
Data analysis (T2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual Case Files</li> <li>Cross-sectional &amp; longitudinal analysis</li> <li>Critical analysis of in-country experience (e.g. program support)</li> <li>Draft interim report (in-country experiences &amp; T1-T2 analysis)</li> <li>Collaborative analysis (LSAV/RAVN)*</li> </ul>	May to October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RAVN team workshop*</li> <li>Report (RAVN/LSAV)*</li> <li>Draft interim report</li> </ul>
Sensemaking and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultation on draft report</li> <li>Sensemaking workshop</li> <li>Final report</li> </ul>	October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensemaking workshop</li> <li>Final report</li> </ul>
Data collection (T3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant contact and interviews</li> <li>Transcriptions</li> <li>Data management</li> </ul>	October 2020 to July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant overview (T3)</li> <li>Interview transcriptions</li> </ul>
Data analysis (T3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual Case Files</li> <li>Cross-sectional &amp; longitudinal analysis</li> <li>Critical analysis of post-assignment experience (e.g. contact with RAVN)</li> <li>Interpretive discussions of outcomes with participants (focus groups)*</li> <li>Draft final report (Phase Two)</li> </ul>	August 2021 to January 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 x participant focus groups*</li> <li>RAVN team workshop*</li> <li>Report (RAVN/LSAV)*</li> </ul>
Sensemaking and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultation on draft report</li> <li>Sensemaking workshop</li> <li>Final report</li> </ul>	February 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li></li> </ul>
Ongoing participant engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project website</li> <li>Participant outreach and updates</li> </ul>	Ongoing throughout project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated program website</li> <li>Project infographics and summaries</li> </ul>

\* Indicates activity or outcome associated with activities outlined in Table 11.

## 6.2 Ongoing Data Analysis and Outreach (Phase One)

The limited timeframe of Phase One necessitated some non-critical activities be deferred until October-December 2019 and 2020. These activities emerged from discussions with program staff at Phase One inception and sensemaking workshops and are surplus to the project's agreed deliverables. Pending any further discussions with program staff, they include:

- Using IVCO 2020, being hosted in the Pacific in October 2020, to convene an international workshop to showcase the study and its outcomes, encourage comparisons of research being undertaken by other volunteering programs, and catalyse new thinking amongst peer volunteering programs. This would link to the *Australian Volunteers Program Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework* (2017 p. 20) objectives that 'the program is recognised by peer volunteering programs as best practice and innovative' and 'innovations, learning and Australian Volunteers Program achievements are promoted and shared in the volunteering and development community overseas and in Australia.' It would also encourage coordinated or joint research combining IVCO practitioners and researchers (e.g. Forum Research, Policy and Practice Group), contribute to the work of United Nations Volunteers, Forum, CSD and academics on the Global Research Agenda, and be informed by conclusions from the Global Technical Meeting on Volunteering convened by United Nations Volunteers and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (July 2020, High Level Political Forum, New York). If this proposal was of interest, Dr Devereux could prepare a basic plan and budget proposal to help facilitate this. More detail on the proposal is included in [Attachment 17](#);
- Presenting select features of baseline data at the *International Society for Third Sector Research* Conference in Montreal, June 2020 and *IVCO conference* in Fiji, October 2020;
- Submission of an academic article to an appropriate journal outlining insights emerging from the study's literature review and emerging results.



## 7. List of Attachments

Number	Attachment	Report section
1	Terms of Reference Request for Quote (RfQ) – Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers	1
2	Photograph of poster to promote participation at pre-departure briefings	3.2.1
3	Flow chart of procedures for handling inquiries from prospective participants	3.2.1
4	Participant feedback on draft research summary (30 September to 11 October 2019)	3.2.1
5	Interview schedule used to guide Phase One interviews	3.2.2
6	Aggregated tables summarising sample characteristics	3.2.3
7	Sample: Anonymised list of participants (key features)	3.2.3
8	Comparative data tables: (a) Features of program volunteers (2018-19) for comparison with sample, (b) Comparison of sample with pre-departure briefing cohorts on available features	3.2.3
9	Data analysis procedures (participants' contact with the program)	3.3
10	Procedures used to manage the study's main ethical concerns (Phase One)	3.4
11	Coding rubric (transcript anonymisation)	3.4.1
12	Coding template: Career stage classifications	4.1.2
13	Coding template: Participant's outcomes (attitudes, behaviours, capabilities)	4.1.4
14	Sample outcomes map for one participant (baseline)	4.1.4
15	Tentative interview schedules: Phase Two (in-country and post-assignment)	6
16	Tentative interview timetable: Phase Two (September 2019 to July 2021)	6
17	Details of proposed international researcher practitioner workshop	6.2

