

Management Response to the 2025 Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers Program (2017-2027)

This document outlines DFAT's response to the independent evaluation of the Australian Volunteers Program (AVP) prepared by Tetra Tech Pty Ltd in February 2025. It summarises the key recommendations in the review and provides a response and proposed action. This document is not an exhaustive summary of all the review comments. AVP is delivered by a consortium made up of Australian Volunteers International, DT Global and Alinea.

Evaluation Recommendations and Responses:

Recommendation 1: Clarify the links between AVP and DFAT's country level strategic objectives and consider how to reflect this in the Program Logic and outcomes framework.

Recommended actions	Response	Action plan
AVP and DFAT should consider whether and how to review the program logic or introduce additional data that will meet DFAT's needs for information about the partner organisations engaged with the program and the fit with Post strategic interests.	Agree	DFAT will review and refresh program logic in the design process of the next phase. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) data and lessons learned from current phase will inform these changes.
In reviewing the public diplomacy strategy (planned for 2025), AVP should take this into account, to ensure public diplomacy is clearly defined and understood across all stakeholders. Ensure that efforts are then resourced appropriately at regional and country level. The program's definition of public diplomacy should differentiate between Australian and country-facing objectives, and between public diplomacy related to awareness-raising and recruitment of partner organisations/ volunteers, and public diplomacy to strengthen support for the Australian aid program and bilateral relationships. Other diplomatic interests and pursuits favoured by Posts should also be considered here and clearly articulated as reasonable expectations within a future public diplomacy strategy, or not.	Agree	AVP and DFAT will work to address this in the Public Diplomacy Strategy due in August 2025 and note as lessons learned for design of next phase. Work underway by AVP to increase resourcing and priority to regional and country level PD and Communications focus in program.

Recommendation 2: Elevate visibility of policy compliance and risk management to better reflect AVP efforts, and clarify implications for Partner Organisation (PO) capacity development and engagement outcomes

Recommendation actions	Response	Action plan
<p>AVP should work to strengthen visibility of policy compliance and risk assurance, so that it is elevated to the same level as program effectiveness in management, communications with staff and DFAT, program reporting and updates to Posts. Noting sensitivities, AVP should consider providing more detailed reporting on changes in country risks identified, and numbers of incidences / country over a reporting period. Similarly, country-level reports on progress towards policy compliance could be included.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Work underway to address in Quarterly Risk Report, Risk Register, Annual Report and program management meetings. Recommendation also noted as lessons learned for design of next phase.</p> <p>AVP planning following actions to address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • updated template for quarterly risk reporting to DFAT – ensuring report reflects discussion of all risks in risk register, not just health and security • Incorporate risk across other reporting (Annual Reports, MYPRs) • Regular engagement with Posts (in line with the R&R document) will include risk discussion/reporting, including PSEAH
<p>The time and effort taken to bring partners up to speed for due diligence purposes may have implications for AVP’s ability to bring new partners on board, in turn affecting targets for number and type of partner organisations engaged at country level. AVP should consider how these factors could be reflected in Country Program Plan (CPP) targets, indicators and strategies for partner organisation engagement and capacity development. Collaboratively working through any changes with DFAT would strengthen visibility and understanding of how risk assurance and policy compliance requirements are impacting program delivery. There is also potential to document and share learning around this sensitive area of work for other development programs who may be experiencing similar challenges</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT and AVP to work collaboratively to strengthen compliance and risk management, noting DFAT policy and legislative requirements. Example of progress already made against this recommendation, includes strengthened compliance with DFAT Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Harassment (PSEAH) and Child Protection policies under AVP.</p> <p>AVP to explore opportunities to improve timeframes and processes as well as improve</p>

Recommendation actions	Response	Action plan
		communications to stakeholders (including Posts and partners) to manage expectations on due diligence requirements and realistic timeframes etc.
DFAT should clearly articulate priority concerns with specificity and agree with AVP on timed targets for resolving key issues to be referred to in management meetings. This will assist AVP to respond and prioritise in line with DFAT concerns. DFAT monitoring visits should be resumed, with assessment of risk processes as a key agenda item.	Partially agree	<p>Management meeting minutes and action items will be used for specificity and to track timeframes. Increased informal communications will also help to clarify and build mutual understanding.</p> <p>Monitoring visits will be subject to resourcing and budget availability.</p>

Recommendation 3: Strengthen coherence by creating a stronger and more explicit connection between Posts, HDS and AVP

Recommended actions	Response	Action plan
<p>It is noted that strong relationships between partner organisations and AVP are vital to the delivery of an effective program, though it is the collaboration between the three partners mentioned that this evaluation has found to be in need of attention. Current tools (Country Program Plans) are helpful but not sufficient to ensure coherence and shared understandings. AVP is responsible for delivering the program and managing relationships at country level, but Posts are communicating concerns about the program back to HDS, that have often already been raised with the program. DFAT HDS should convene regular joint meetings to discuss annual plans and strategies, ideally face to face as part of monitoring visits.</p>	<p>Partially agree</p>	<p>DFAT notes the need for improved three-way communication between AVP, HDS and Posts and will work with AVP to develop a stakeholder engagement plan to improve communications and governance.</p> <p>Work underway by DFAT and HDS to improve communication and collaboration through regular meetings and contact with an aim to build mutual understanding.</p> <p>Subject to available budget, DFAT to conduct monitoring visits to Posts and AVP office in Melbourne (at least bi-annually) to meet with leadership, staff and stakeholders.</p> <p>HDS monitoring visits to overseas locations will be subject to resourcing and budget availability.</p>

Recommendation 4: Ensure learnings and impact of the AVP tools such as Innovation Fund/Hub and impacts grants, and the Indigenous Pathways Program are documented and presented to allow for learning and adaptation in the future

Recommended actions	Response	Action plan
<p>Noting that program tools and initiatives including the Innovation Hub have been revised and scaled down during the 2024 change process, there is value in documenting and summarising the value add and achievements of these tools to ensure their objectives and potential future contributions are not lost. As part of this, undertake a close-out review of the Innovation Hub/Fund, recognizing the contribution the fund made to improving volunteering processes, and utilizing these findings to strengthen messaging and offerings that will attract volunteers and partner organisations to apply.</p>	<p>Partially agree</p>	<p>AVP to complete a close out review of the Innovation Hub.</p> <p>Some achievements and lessons learned from Innovation Hub have already been documented by the program and will be included in the close out review.</p> <p>Lessons learned from this review will inform design of next program.</p>
<p>Continue to document insights and lessons from the Indigenous Pathways program to share for other DFAT development programs.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Case studies and lessons learned are underway and will address this recommended action.</p> <p>The AVP Indigenous Pathways team will continue to engage with and be available to DFAT Office of First Nations and looks for ways to share learning with others, including through the Association of First Nations Australians in Development and by participating in events such as the Australasian Aid Conference.</p>

Recommendation 5: Refresh MEL system and tools to strengthen utility and engagement with data within DFAT

Recommended actions	Response	Action plan
The program should identify ways to integrate data linking annual reporting more directly to Country Program Plans with targets to strengthen the country level story of change and reflect country strategic alignment	Agree	<p>DFAT and AVP to work on improving engagement from Posts, HDS to facilitate. As per response to Recommendation 3 above, AVP and DFAT to agree stakeholder engagement plan to improve communications and governance.</p> <p>Noted as lesson learned for design of next phase of Australian Volunteers Program.</p> <p>Templates for Country Program Plans and reports to be revised to enhance alignment.</p>
Review current monitoring and reporting tools to explore how to appropriately capture and reflect negative or challenging experiences expressed by volunteers and partner organisations	Agree	DFAT notes the role of MEL, as well as feedback and lessons learned to inform program decision making and performance.
Reporting should provide greater detail on risk management and policy compliance in annual reporting to strengthen visibility and accountability, commensurate with the high priority and resources utilized for this area of work.	Agree	Work underway with AVP to increase risk reporting and visibility in fortnightly meetings and program reporting.
Strengthen country volunteer case studies linked to Country Program Plans to show strategic contribution and include quotes from host organisations. Ensure the program has adequate resources at regional level to craft these stories for publication on relevant platforms that will reach Post audience, partner organisations and DFAT in Australia	Agree	<p>Work underway with AVP to increase resourcing to communications positions in each region. Communications team will work closely with MEL coordinators to develop case studies and share country level information.</p>

Recommendation 6: Articulate country-level strategies for partner organisation engagement

Recommended actions	Response	Action plan
<p>AVP should articulate context-specific partner organisation engagement strategies that clarify goals and targets for recruitment, to match country strategies, long-term capacity development aims, regulatory contexts, due diligence and other factors that affect the development and maintenance of relationships with long-term and newer partner organisations. This could be integrated into Country Program Plans. The process should ensure space for local partners to influence the country-level strategy in line with AVP commitment to locally led development and good partnership. Pending resources, progress could be monitored, used for In-Country Management Team management and included in reporting. Note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach, given different restrictions and potential in each country.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Future updates to Country Program Plans will include Partner Organisation engagement strategies.</p> <p>Note the need for locally led decision making however program activities and decisions still need to align with DFAT priorities.</p> <p>HDS, Post and AVP to explore options to improve partner organisation input and lessons learned to inform program design and delivery. AVP Locally Led and MEL Frameworks have already started work that aligns with this recommendation.</p>

Recommendation 7: Review management support for In-Country Management Teams (ICMT) to ensure clear targets and sufficient resourcing and support to meet the program’s demands

Recommended actions	Response	Action plan
<p>To address concerns from DFAT that some country teams are not adequately responsive to DFAT requests at Post, AVP should assess the value of reviewing and clarifying ICMT performance targets to build ownership and accountability at country level. Noting ongoing resourcing discussions, since ICMTs and regional teams must meet the program’s wide range of complex requirements, this evaluation underlines the importance of adequate resources, training and mentoring to deliver on these targets and objectives including public diplomacy, risk and compliance, supporting volunteers, building and maintaining relationships with and onboarding partner organisations.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>DFAT notes the need for increased resources, support and guidance to ICMTs that play a critical role in supporting AVP deployments in-country and liaison with Posts.</p> <p>Work underway with AVP to increase resourcing and support to ICMTs to improve overall performance.</p>
<p>AVP should also share more detail of regional and country implementation and support in DFAT meetings and reporting, to generate greater awareness of different contexts and progress.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>This will be achieved through existing program reporting and more regular updates as standing agenda in fortnightly management meetings.</p>

Recommendation 8: Refresh the partnership between AVP and DFAT to improve the process for resolving challenges and create opportunities to document lessons and insights

Recommended actions	Response	Action plan
Undertake a collaborative review of partner (DFAT and AVP) objectives, ways of working and communications to complement the contract and clarify processes and timeframes for sharing and resolving specific issues, such as the long-standing questions over the strategic approach; partner organisation recruitment and risk assurance	Partially agree	<p>Work underway to improve collaboration through increased communications (i.e. more frequent meetings and face to face working interactions where possible).</p> <p>Partnership brokering and the collaborative review have been deferred in consideration of the current stage of the program cycle (due to end June 2027) and competing priorities. The need for brokering and review will be reassessed in Q4 2025 and actioned if required.</p> <p>DFAT notes other actions arising from this review are likely to address this recommendation.</p>