

# INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEERS PROGRAM MANAGEMENT RESPONSE – SEPTEMBER 2021

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## Summary of management response

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DFAT commissioned an independent evaluation of the Australian Volunteers Program in October 2020 to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and future direction of the program. The final evaluation report was submitted and accepted by DFAT on 30 April 2021 and contains valuable findings on the program's performance to date, as well as recommendations on how to ensure the program can continue to deliver results within an evolving global context. DFAT agrees with all nine of the evaluation recommendations and will address them over the coming months.

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action Plan	Timeframe
<p><b>1. That DFAT and the program work together to refresh the program’s outcomes and logic. This is an opportunity to reposition the program in an evolving global context, to consider the benefits of alternative volunteering modalities, and test and recalibrate priorities to help to build a consensus amongst program stakeholders.</b></p>	<p>Agree.</p>	<p>DFAT agrees that the changing global context as well as evolving foreign policy priorities since the program was first designed warrant a re-examination of the program’s outcomes and logic, with a view to making any necessary updates.</p>	<p>DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff will work together to revise the program logic, with the assistance of external specialists as required.</p>	<p>Completed by 30 November 2021.</p>
<p><b>2. That current strategic partnerships are expanded, and new partnerships are explored to identify and scale up new volunteering modalities, multiply capacity development outcomes, and increase the program’s profile and outreach through leveraging international networks.</b></p>	<p>Agree.</p>	<p>The program has proven over time that strategic partnerships (between Australian organisations, partner organisations in-country and DFAT) lead to effective capacity building outcomes in the long term. There is value in exploring new partnerships to enable a wider reach of the program and generate new volunteering modalities. Experience shows that strategic partnerships are resource intensive, and it will be important to ensure there is adequate management capacity (within DFAT and the Program).</p>	<p>DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff will work together to seek out new partnerships that add value to the program’s aims, within Australia and overseas.</p>	<p>Beginning in FY2021-22 and ongoing.</p>
<p><b>3. That consideration is given to establishing appropriate, consultative, or advisory mechanisms in-country to engage government, peak bodies representing the</b></p>	<p>Agree.</p>	<p>The establishment of an advisory mechanism relevant to a specific country context may provide an additional forum where partner governments, diverse community voices and other sectors can be consulted – ensuring both greater ownership</p>	<p>DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff will develop terms of reference for two pilots which will be conducted in two countries to test how this mechanism can be</p>	<p>Beginning in January 2022 and further expanded in FY2022-23 upon successful completion of pilots.</p>

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private sector, small and medium enterprises, and civil society with DFAT and program managers at a strategic level.		and ‘voice’ from counterparts in-country as well as from our DFAT posts.	established and inform future program operations.	
<b>4. That in refreshing and recalibrating the program’s outcomes and logic, particular attention is given to reviewing two of the three End of Program Outcomes, ‘The public in Australia better appreciates the value of international volunteering’ and ‘Australian volunteers gain professionally and personally,’ to ensure logical articulation into program goals, a description of the desired future ‘end state’ and compliance with DFAT standards.</b>	Agree.	After nearly five years of implementation, it is timely that DFAT examine whether the End of Program Outcomes remain relevant and align with policy priorities.	DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff will work together to revise the program logic, with the assistance of external specialists as required.	Completed by 30 November 2021.
<b>5. That DFAT examine the value for money assessment and build on it by commissioning relevant follow-up work as required.</b>	Agree.	The Value for Money Assessment undertaken by the program comprises a ‘proof of concept’ and was envisaged to be an initial overview assessment only, to be followed by a more extensive assessment at the end of the current phase (i.e. mid-2022).	DFAT will commission a Value for Money assessment in 2022.	Completed in 2022.

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<p><b>6. That DFAT and senior program staff work together to address the role of the Program Management Group to ensure that it is fulfilling all of its mandated functions and DFAT is receiving an appropriate level of performance assurance and transparency commensurate with its role as the program's funding body.</b></p>	Agree.	<p>To complement these program-focused assessments, DFAT will commission a value for money assessment, the findings of which will inform future ongoing management of the program.</p> <p>As the program's governance body, the Program Management Group provides DFAT and senior program staff with a mechanism to discuss program issues at a strategic level bi-annually.</p>	<p>Through a process of internal review and consultation, DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff will scrutinise how the Program Management Group is currently functioning and measures that can be taken to strengthen its functions. This will include updating the Program Management Group's terms of reference.</p>	<p>Completed by 30 November 2021.</p>
<p><b>7. That DFAT and senior program staff work together to update the program's approach to risk management to include all main categories of risk.</b></p>	Agree.	<p>DFAT welcomes the opportunity to ensure all relevant risks in the program are adequately captured within the program's risk approach and aligned with DFAT's aid risk management framework, noting that risk review, monitoring and mitigation is an ongoing process.</p>	<p>The program's Risk Management Committee (which includes representation from DFAT) will review the program's risk management documentation to ensure all relevant categories of risk are captured within the program's risk approach.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p>
<p><b>8. In refreshing the program logic and End of Program Outcomes, thought should</b></p>	Agree.	<p>DFAT agrees that the onset of COVID-19 and the significant restrictions on international travel presents an opportunity for the Program to</p>	<p>This will be considered as part of the program logic refresh process completed by DFAT and</p>	<p>Completed by 30 November 2021.</p>

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<p><b>also be given to how best to incorporate alternative modalities within the program logic, and how success or failure of such modalities is to be determined.</b></p>		<p>explore additional ways it can achieve its End of Program Outcomes. This includes ways the Program can encourage and promote volunteering at local levels.</p>	<p>Australian Volunteers Program staff.</p>	
<p><b>9. That the contribution of the Innovation Fund to achievement of program goals is clarified and given more visibility in the program logic and the fund continues to be used as a vehicle to help the program stay strategic in approach and remain relevant as wider social issues shape the aid sector. In doing so there needs to be commitment not only to piloting alternative volunteering modalities but to mainstreaming them within the program.</b></p>	<p>Agree.</p>	<p>DFAT agrees that the Innovation Fund’s unique and rigorous model of piloting and testing new approaches and modalities should be given more prominence within the program logic and become formally embedded as part of program implementation going forward.</p>	<p>This will be considered as part of the program logic refresh process completed by DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program staff.</p>	<p>Completed by 30 November 2021.</p>