



New Australian Volunteers Program

Summary of Australia based Design Consultations

Melbourne 5th July, Canberra 6th July, Sydney 7th July, Perth 8th July

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Background

The Australian Volunteers for International Development program (AVID) was launched in May 2011 and is due to end in December 2017. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has commissioned a consultant team to work with the Australian Volunteers Section (AVS) to design a new program.

This report summarises the key issues and observations that emerged from consultations conducted in Australia from 5-8 July 2016. DFAT met with organisations from a range of sectors including mining and energy, retail, legal, personnel deployment, state government, education and business councils and chambers in Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney and Perth, to gather feedback on the Draft Design document for the New Australian Volunteers Program, and elicit new ideas for the program. The consultations included roundtable discussions with organisations and companies that have an interest in participating in the overseas volunteering program, as well as individual discussions with organisations and companies that may have an interest in management of the new program. The Draft Design document was released for public consultation in June 2016 on the DFAT website.

These consultations, together with the Desk Review and Aide Memoire (reporting on findings from consultations across DFAT and current volunteer stakeholders), provide the evidence base and rationale for key design decisions and directions, and will assist to shape the final program logic and high-level Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

Overarching observations

The overarching observations that emerged from the consultations are:

- ✓ There was strong interest in the program, and in engaging with the program to send volunteers overseas, from across private sector organisations consulted, and from universities.
- ✓ There was strong support for the sole-contractor model and for a longer term contract.
- ✓ Strengthening alignment between the in-country activities of the Australian Volunteers Program and the Australian Aid Program was welcomed, as was the introduction of greater flexibility in placement types (e.g. cluster models for placing volunteers, use of Australian Organisations and more).
- ✓ Audiences consulted were enthusiastic about the Australian Organisations / Partner Organisations model – seeing potential for the program to have a stronger base in Australia and longer-term engagement for Partner Organisations with an Australian Organisation or company.

Feedback on the Design

Partnerships Approach. The design opens up opportunities for a wider range of Australian groups, organisations and companies to become involved in international volunteering. The idea of increasing partnerships between Australian organisations and organisations in partner countries through volunteering was welcomed, as was the idea of tailoring partnerships to meet the needs of Overseas and Australian organisations. For example, the DFAT funded program deliverer could enable large private companies or foundations to fund volunteer placements, or an organisation might like to utilise the Australian Volunteering program mechanism to put their own staff into volunteer positions, or an Australian organisation may like to receive advice and support from the program to establish their own volunteer program. Tailored partnerships would also enable Overseas Organisations to have more options in determining the level and kinds of volunteering support they may need now and into the future.

Alignment of the program. The alignment of the new program to the Australian aid program priorities was welcomed.

Program logic. As the full program logic was not included there were just two comments. The logic should include a disability outcome and an outcome on how the program equips development professionals.

Youth, people living with a disability, indigenous peoples' inclusion. Many participants recommended that the program include ways (potentially quotas) to ensure inclusion and diversity, including for youth, people living with a disability and indigenous Australians (among others). Without specific measures it is likely that these groups will be excluded.

Indicators and Incentives. Those consulted welcomed the inclusion of indicators and incentives that seek to promote quality of placements and partnerships. These will refocus incentives to incorporate a more balanced approach to achieving a range of program outcomes. The Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) also needs to enable useful reporting on disability and other inclusivity focused outcomes – for example disaggregated data, separate indicators for volunteers with disabilities and beneficiaries with disabilities.

Advisory panel. It was widely felt that the Advisory Panel role and responsibilities in the program required clarification. For example, there was some confusion between a role in strategic direction setting, and more operational support roles. This could be addressed through the inclusion of a technical advisory panel that sits underneath the strategic advisory panel. It was also suggested that the Advisory Panel could include a regional disability representative.

Implementation. A number of suggestions were made in relation to the implementation of the program. These included:

- The design should further consider how the program will achieve its intended reach in Australia and overseas. For example, the design needs to consider how Partner

Organisations become aware of the program, and the support the program can offer to enable their participation.

- The design might suggest in-country access to accredited training for volunteers for their professional development as well as to improve their approach and success in building capacity.
- The pre-mobilisation training for volunteers could better prepare volunteers for the potential for natural disaster to occur whilst they are on placement, and how they can contribute to Partner Organisations disaster preparedness and management following a disaster.
- It was suggested that Program standards need to strike a balance between providing clear guidance and space for creativity and efficient processes.

Budget. In relation to the budget it was suggested that separate budget lines for supporting Australians with disability undertaking an assignment and funding to support programmatic disability outcomes overseas are required.

Feedback on the Design document

Document is too detailed at times. The preliminary design document tends to shift between a strategic approach, to a more detailed level of instruction.

- The design document needs to be strategic, while allowing space for the implementing partner to work through the details together with DFAT, in keeping with the Design principles and directions. In other words, the Design Document should focus on the 'what the program will do and achieve', and allowing 'how the program will achieve it' for DFAT and contracted organization to agree the best approach.
- Where details are required these could be appended, to enable possible tenderers to draw upon them as a resource, rather than be prescriptive guidance in the design document.

Lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities. There were many queries relating to DFAT Canberra, DFAT Posts, the advisory panel and the contractor's roles and responsibilities. Roles and responsibilities also needed to be clarified in relation to specific areas of the program including the innovation fund, leveraging other DFAT programs, and management of the Returned Australian Volunteers Network.