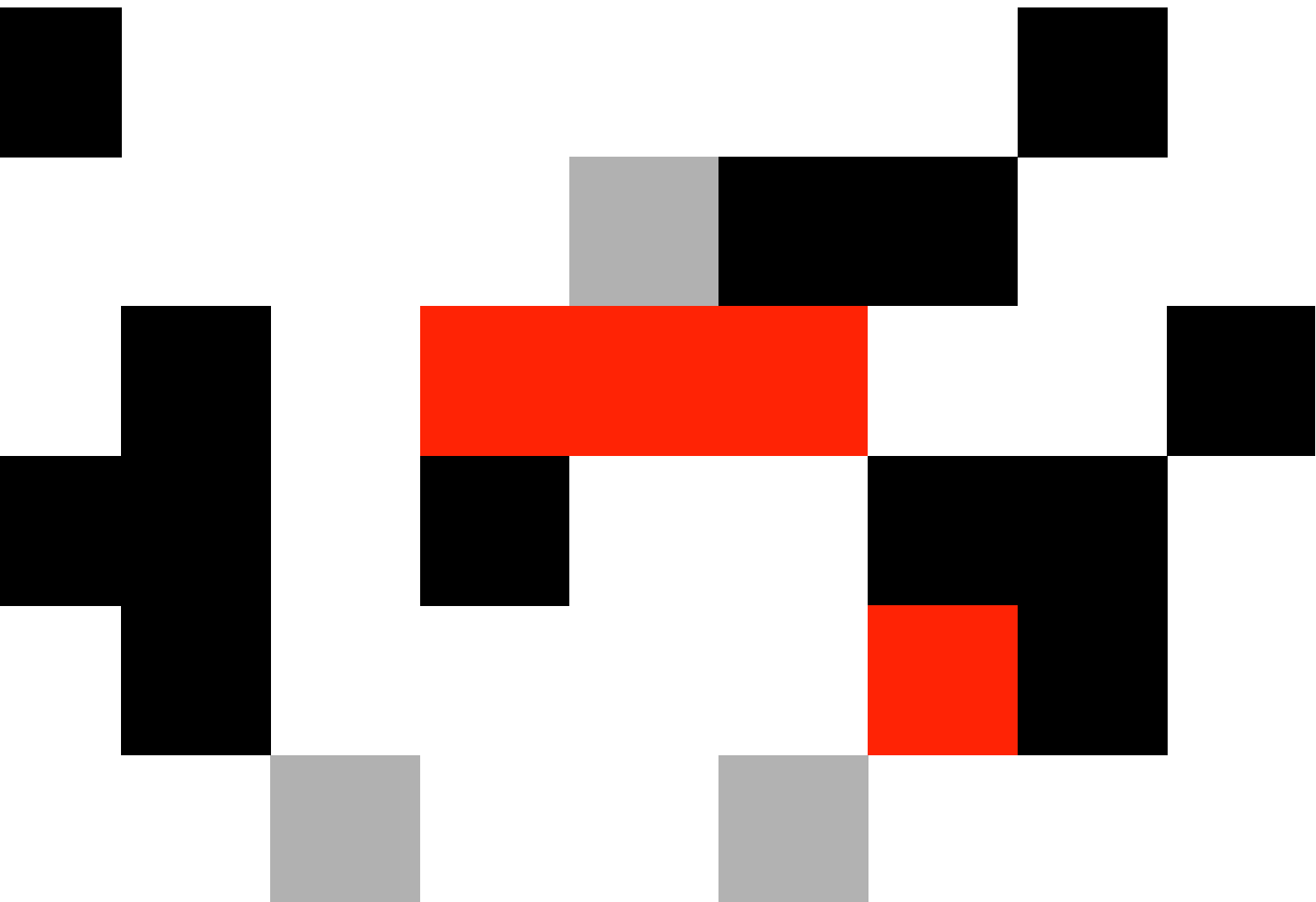UTS Business School

Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase 2)

Final Report

(October 2020)

Executive Summary

This report summarises results of the first wave of data collected in *Phase Two* of the research project, *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers*. The report presents results of interviews with 55 participants at the completion of their international volunteer assignment. It addresses participants' main in-country experiences, self-reported learning and changes, perceptions of in-country support from the program, and the perceptions of 38 participants who were repatriated in March 2020 as a result of the global escalation of COVID-19 cases.

Participants' in-country experiences

While each participant's assignment was unique, this report reports on four interconnected elements that had strong influences on the experience and learning of a large proportion of the sample. These are: (1) making efforts to engage in various forms of locally-led capacity development, including rapport and trust building with colleagues and the importance of adjusting or pivoting one's practices and/or objectives to changing contexts, partner organisation (PO) needs and locally-led capacity development, (2) being labelled 'volunteers', which influenced participants' social identity in complex ways by presenting challenges (e.g. a perceived diminution of respect with some stakeholders) yet benefits (e.g. being more readily accepted as insiders by peers), (3) enacting a variety of public diplomacy initiatives, most prominently (and most impactfully) through authentic, informal and low-key expressions of enthusiasm about their experiences, achievements and relationships with the host country, and (4) being part of rich and overlapping social worlds with spouses, family and friends and locals, that contributed to participants' wellbeing, cultural adjustment, networks, capacity development impacts, and in-country civic engagement.

Personal and professional changes

While several participants remained unclear of their future when interviewed at T2, 36 of the 55 participants in the study (65%) reported (anticipated) changed work or study plans between T1 and T2 that were not attributable to COVID-19. More than half of the sample feel their future career prospects are enhanced by their assignment, while 11 (20%) attributed their enrolment in formal programs of study to their experiences in the program; an additional four reported a change in direction of planned study programs due to their involvement.

Participants also reported a range of learning outcomes that they attributed to their assignment (average of nine per participant), that included cultural, professional and interpersonal acumen, as well as personal development outcomes like resilience and patience. Almost half of these outcomes could be classified as contributing directly or indirectly to the program's objective that Australians be more 'globally literate and connected.' Most learning outcomes were linked to activities that participants observed or undertook in the workplace, including performing roles that were unfamiliar, that involved greater responsibility, or that were not normally associated with participants' professional area. Their involvement in capacity development activities (e.g. mentoring, coaching) was a small but important part of this. Participants' experiences outside work (e.g. immersion in a foreign culture, informal discussions) were also places where their cultural acumen and self-awareness, in particular, were developed.

In-country contact and support

Participants' perceptions of the overall quality of support received from the program during their assignments were generally favourable. Participants were approving of the preparation they received for their assignment in pre-departure briefings and in-country orientations, and in particular the program's role in nurturing informal support networks with other volunteers, which participants drew on for social, informational and emotion succour during their assignment. Recommendations for improved volunteer preparation include stronger emphasis on providing realistic assignment previews, PO contact, and customising content of orientation programs and support to better address the demands of particular volunteers, including those deployed to isolated areas.

While differences existed across groups of volunteers (e.g. repeat volunteers) and in particular countries, most participants were appreciative of the quality and timeliness of advice and support they received from in-country management teams during their assignments. While this support was viewed as helpful and responsive, participants would have appreciated more proactive and unstructured contact from staff as a sign of genuine interest in their wellbeing. Some participants also believed that the efficacy of their assignment would have benefitted from greater consistency between their assignment preparation, their designated work role (position description), and the expectations, requirements and capabilities of the partner organisation.

Overwhelmingly positive feedback was received in relation to the planning, communication and mobilization procedures involved in the program's management of the COVID-19 repatriations. The post-assignment allowance, which was seen as helpful and sufficient, assisted almost three quarters of repatriated participants to continue providing support to their partner organisation in the weeks and months following their forced repatriation.

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Tables and Figures

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This report summarises results of the first wave of data collected in *Phase Two* of the research project, *Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers* (LSAV). The LSAV is being undertaken by a research team led by UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney for the Australian Volunteers Program (the program).

Phase Two of the LSAV commenced on 23 December 2019 and is due to be completed in February 2022.

The report presents results of interviews with participants at the completion of their international volunteer assignment undertaken between September 2019 and August 2020 (interview T2). These build on pre-assignment interviews conducted between April and June 2019 (interview T1), and which were the focus of the study's *Phase One* report[1] in October 2019.

The report addresses participants' main in-country experiences, self-reported learning and changes, and perceptions of in-country support from the program during their assignment. It also addresses implications of the repatriation of research participants in March 2020 as a result of the global escalation of COVID-19 cases and the risks posed to volunteers in the program, including participants' perceptions of the program's management of the repatriation processes. Recommendations can be found in Section 5.5 (pp. 31-34).

Supplementing this report is a separate document summarising participants' '***Individual stories of continuity and change',*** outlining the main T1-T2 changes for each of the study's 55 participants, as well as individual case files prepared for all 55 participants.

The main body of the report contains six sections:

1. Introduction and Background
2. Study Overview
3. Participants' In-country Experiences
4. Personal and Professional Changes
5. In-country Contact and Support
6. Next Steps

The contents of this report build on three reports provided by the project team:

- Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Inception Report (April 2019)
- Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019)
- Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Progress Report (April 2020)

Additional information was drawn from published academic studies, internal program evaluations, and consultations with several international researchers and program staff, as well as a variety of policy and program documents relating to the program, including the *LSAV Terms of Reference*, AVP's *Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework (2017-18)* and the AVP *Global Program Strategy (2018-2022).*

1.2 Background and Context

The LSAV 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 program influences volunteers personally and professionally in ways that are relevant to the program's objectives. Commencing in April 2019, the LSAV seeks to answer the following overarching research question:

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

The design of the study is primarily inductive, with qualitative data collected from a sample of 55 volunteers via a series of three semi-structured interviews across a 24-month period. The interviews are structured to enable data collection at three points during the participants' volunteer journey: (i) at pre-departure (interview T1), (ii) during – or shortly after the completion of – the volunteer assignment (interview T2), and (iii) following completion of the assignment (interview T3), approximately 12 months after interview T2.

2. Study Overview

2.1 Objectives and research questions (T2)

The primary purposes identified for participants' in-country interview (interview T2) were to:

1. Provide an overview of the depth and breadth of in-country experiences reported by participants;

2. Identify the nature of personal and professional changes (self-)reported by participants to date, and the reasons attributed for these;

3. Present a critical review of participants' perceptions of the quality and the impact of their contact with and support from the program and program staff

Building on these objectives, eight research questions are answered in the current report:

i. In-country experiences

1. Overall, how did participants experience their volunteer assignments (personally and professionally)?

2. What features of the volunteer assignment (including work and non-work aspects) had major influences on these experiences (and in what ways)?

ii. Reported personal and professional changes

3. What are the main personal and professional changes that participants reported arising from their involvement with program to date?

4. What features of participants' in-country experiences (appear to) have had the strongest impact on their reported personal and professional changes?

5. In what ways do participants' (reported) future plans reflect changes than might be associated with their participation in the program?

iii. Contact with and support from the program

6. Overall, how did participants perceive their contact with and support from the program and its staff during their volunteer assignment?

7. What features of participants' program contact and support contributed positively/negatively to their in-country experience (and in what ways)?

8. Based on participants' in-country experiences, how can the program improve the way it interacts with and supports its volunteers during assignments?

2.2 Data collection

2.2.1 Interview topics and structure

The structure for interview T2 was guided by a schedule addressing five broad themes linked to the study's objectives and research questions. These are summarised in **Table 1**. As it shows, time-specific themes addressed participants' in-country experiences and their contact with and support from the program and its staff. Replicated themes, which are repeated across all three data collection waves in the LSAV and are used to indicate intra-personal change, addressed participants' attitudes, behaviours, capabilities, and future plans, and their perceptions about how their involvement in the program has influenced these.

Table 1: Summarised interview schedule (thematic)

Type	Theme
Time-specific themes	**1. In-country experiences:** Overview of key features of participants' in-country experiences: professional (e.g. partner organisation environment, work role) and personal; major challenges, opportunities and events
	2. Program contact and support: Participants' contact with program staff and support mechanisms during the assignment, including their overall experience with in-country and Melbourne teams, the pertinence of particular features of this contact to their experience (e.g. influence of in-country orientation, workshops and seminars to their experiences), and their suggestions for improving in-country procedures and support
Replicated themes	**3. Reported personal and professional changes:** Participants' perceived changes in attitudes, behaviours and capabilities, and the main perceived reasons for these
	4. Future Plans: Participants' future personal and professional plans (5 years)
	5. Reflections: Participants' reflections on changes (perceived changes from T1-T2)

An abbreviated copy of the chronological interview schedule, approved by UTS Human Research Ethics Committee, is included at **Attachment 1**.

Several meetings were held between the research team prior to and during the data collection period to ensure the interview schedule was appropriate and the wording of questions clear and relevant. Minor refinements were made to improve the structure and clarity of questions as interviews progressed. Moreover, several changes were made to interview topics for those participants who underwent forced repatriation following the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes, approved by program staff and the research ethics committee,[2] are outlined in Section 2.3.

2.2.2 Data collection procedures (interview T2)

Procedures for contacting participants and arranging interviews were broadly similar to those used in *Phase One*. These involved initial requests from researchers (email or text) followed by scheduling arrangements, consent protocols, and interviews. The process is summarised in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Data collection procedures (T2)
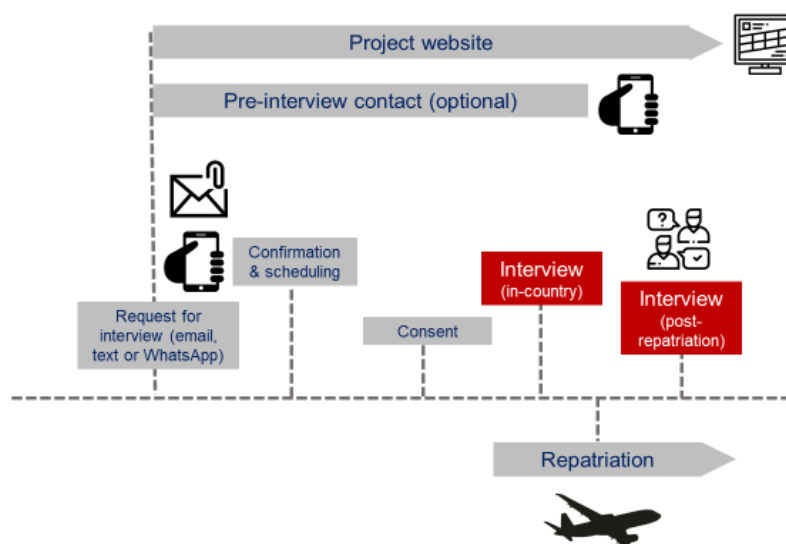
During the period 11 September 2019 to 19 March 2020, interviews were conducted with 16 participants, the bulk of these occurring in the final fortnight of participants' assignment whilst they were still in the host country. These 16 interviews were undertaken in accordance with the interview timetable outlined in the *Phase One* report.[3] Exceptions to this included some rescheduling resulting from participants' assignments being extended or truncated due to reasons unrelated to COVID-19. As Figure 1 indicates, the forced repatriation of some participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated changes to the timing and procedures for some interviews. These are discussed next.

2.3 Managing COVID-19 repatriations

2.3.1 Response to participants' forced repatriation

In agreement with Mr Jake Phelan (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Manager) and Mr Farooq Dar (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Advisor), contact with study participants was discontinued from 19 March 2020 to allow participants to repatriate and commence isolation in Australia without undue correspondence or stress. During this time, a message was posted to the LSAV website informing participants of this.

The 38 repatriated participants (and one who left the assignment just prior to repatriations commencing) were contacted on 06 April 2020 after approval had been given by the program. For these participants, interviews were scheduled as soon as practical, with the bulk occurring in April and May. All remaining participants were interviewed between April and August 2020; thus, **the study's retention rate from *Phase One* is 100%.**[4]

Interviews were conducted one-to-one by one of the three Australian-based research team members (Devereux, Everingham, Fee) at a time and via a medium that suited participants. Because participants were geographically distant from the research team at T2 – either on assignment or in isolation following forced repatriation - all interviews were mediated electronically (telephone, Skype, FaceTime or Zoom).

2.3.2 Mitigating negative impacts of participants' forced repatriation

Participants' repatriations created four main potential impacts for the LSAV. These relate to participant attrition, response biases, diminished intervention effects, and extraneous influences on post-assignment opportunities. The features of these risks, discussed in detail with program staff in March and April 2020, are summarised in **Attachment 2**, along with proposed approaches that were used to mitigate their detrimental impacts.[5] While most impacts could be offset to some extent (e.g. efforts to ensure retention), the main potential influence identified was the anticipated disruption of wider socio-economic conditions on post-assignment intentions (row 'd' in Attachment 2). Such dramatic extraneous events can create conditions that render attribution of changes more difficult. While these effects can be mitigated to some extent, they cannot be negated.

The forced repatriations reduced assignment durations, a feature that can limit volunteers' intrapersonal changes.[6] Across the sample, the forced repatriations led to the average assignment duration being cut by 27% from 317 days (anticipated at T1, as reported by participants) to 230 days at T2 (actual duration, as reported by participants). For the 38 repatriated participants, this amounted to a reduction in their planned assignment duration of 31% (from 366 days to 251 days).

2.3.3 Comparison of participants (in-country vs post-repatriation interviews)

Statistical tests were used to compare participants whose assignments were completed prior to the forced repatriations (n = 17) and those who were forced to repatriate before their assignment's planned end date (n = 38).[7] The results, reported in the progress report in April 2020[8], showed statistically significant differences between the two groups on a small number of variables: assignment duration, mean age, intentions to continue formal study during the assignment, and post-assignment plans (as articulated at pre-departure).[9] The experiences of these two groups of participants will be analysed and compared in subsequent reporting.

2.4 Data analysis and management protocols

The primary empirical materials collected during *Phase Two* are electronic copies of interview transcripts, supported through the creation and maintenance of a participant database, individual case files, and electronic copies of participants' consent forms.

All materials arising from T2 interviews have been managed in ways consistent with the UTS `Guidelines for the Management of Research Data' (September 2018) and following the data management procedures identified in the approved LSAV inception report.[10] Data records are stored in electronic form on a folder on *UTS OneDrive*, a secure server with password-protected access and coded with pseudonyms. Protocols are in place to ensure that no identifying information about any individual participants is shared with any person outside the immediate research team.

As with *Phase One*, interview transcriptions, proofed for accuracy, formed the basis of qualitative data analysis and narrative case studies developed during T2. The 55 T2 interviews averaged 73 minutes in duration, 26% longer than T1 interviews (average 58 minutes). The interviews rendered a total of 588,460 words for analysis (mean 10,699 words), 25% longer than T1 (mean 8,093 words).

Attachments 3.1-3.2 summarises the main data analysis procedures for T2. They link the main research questions identified in Section 2.1 (left column of the table in Attachment 3.1), with the two main stages of data coding (columns 3 and 4). As the attachments indicate, the analysis of T2 data incorporates tentative and intra-individual longitudinal comparisons between T1 and T2 data sets (e.g. changed future plans), as well as cross-sectional comparisons between groups of participants (e.g. comparing in-country experiences by volunteer type). The table at Attachment 3.1 also indicates the extension of participants' individual case files – commenced in *Phase One* - to include experiences drawn from interview T2. For interview T2, case files include a summary of participants' overall in-country experiences, major personal and professional changes reported, the attributed reasons for this, and participants' future plans.

Additionally, Attachment 3.2 summarises the approach used to analyse the learning and changes that participants reported and which they attributed to their experience with the program. It outlines the procedures used to distil a sample of 522 discrete learning outcomes linked to particular settings and contexts/situations. These outcomes are reported in Section 4.2 ('Changing Capabilities').

In line with the protocols developed during *Phase One*, numeric codes or pseudonyms are used to ensure participants' anonymity. In some parts of this report and in case files, quotations and other identifying details are modified to ensure participants' confidentiality. A similar procedure is proposed for any academic publications that may arise from the research team's work.

As with *Phase One*, a summarised version of key outcomes (18 pages, 11,947 words), approved by program staff, was sent to participants for comment and feedback on 10 November 2020.[11] Nine responses were received comprising 1619 words (range: 4-410 words), representing a response rate of 16%. These responses can be found at **Attachment 4.** In general, participants' comments were supportive of the main themes, with 6/9 expressing agreement with all or parts of the report, and several providing suggestions and clarifications. The input resulted in three minor changes to the report.

2.5 Participant profiles

A tentative classification of volunteer 'types', based on the way that their motivations for volunteering intersected with their career, was introduced in the study's *Phase One* report.[12] Building on this, an expanded typology of participants was developed for use in analysis during *Phase Two*. This identifies a more comprehensive set of seven participant types, summarised below and elaborated in **Attachment 5**.

- **Launchers** (8 participants, 15% of sample): A volunteer assignment as a stepping-stone to launch a career in a sector or profession that allows individuals to express their values, typically international humanitarian aid and/or development (*integrating values into a meaningful career*).

- **Enhancers** (7, 13%): A volunteer assignment as a means to consciously develop or enhance a career through the acquisition of skills, experiences, opportunities, and/or networks (*progressing a career through a meaningful and developmental experience).*

- **Transitioners** (11, 20%): A volunteer assignment as a pathway to enter a new sector or context, most commonly with an international - rather than domestic – focus (*entering a new sector or context that provides meaning*).

- **Career Breakers** (5, 9%): A volunteer assignment as an interlude to a career that may be returned to after the volunteer assignment is completed, but which – at the time of accepting the assignment - is not fulfilling the individual's needs (*taking a temporary and meaningful hiatus from an ongoing career*).

- **Imposed Transitioners** (7, 13%): A volunteer assignment in response to a negative career experience (e.g. labour market conditions) that leads the individual to consider a new profession or context (*undertaking a meaningful alternative to domestic work with career possibilities).*

- **Veterans** (12, 22%): A volunteer assignment as an opportunity to apply professional expertise accumulated through a long career in order to achieve a positive outcome (*applying career expertise toward a meaningful purpose*).

- **Non-working Partners** (5, 9%): Accompanying a partner on an international volunteer assignment as an approved accompanying dependant (*experiencing a vicarious assignment and adventure*).

This classification remains exploratory. It is used - along with other markers, such as participants' age, profession and partner organisation (PO) type - for between-group comparisons during analysis in this report.

With ongoing refinement, the typology is expected to inform data analysis of T3 interviews in 2020-21.

3. Participants' In-country Experience

This section addresses the first two research questions:

1. Overall, how did participants experience their volunteer assignments (personally and professionally)?
2. What features of the volunteer assignment (including work and non-work aspects) had major influences on these experiences (and in what ways)?

3.1 Overall experiences

Participants reported varied in-country experiences. While the qualitative and context-specific nature of responses mean that overall assessments may not neatly capture participants' ambiguous feelings and expressions, 22 participants (40%) reported having an overall **positive experience**.[13] These participants described their experiences as: *'stimulating, interesting, fascinating'* (#04), *'the highlight of my life' (#24)* and *'an amazing experience … great for me personally and professionally'* (#28). Nine of those reporting positive experiences were repeat program volunteers, like participant #33 whose assignment was *'outstanding … my first (volunteer assignment) was good, second one was better and this one was the best.'*

For 26 participants (47%) the experience was mixed, with substantial positives reported alongside impactful difficulties or challenges.[14] These responses included common reference to extreme highs and lows and to personal positives and professional challenges. One explained, *'It really has been an amazing experience overall … (but) there have been moments of horrible'* (#02). Another found at a personal level that s/he *'absolutely loved it (but) coming down to more technical skills in my profession … I probably didn't develop much.'*

Seven participants (13%)[15] expressed overall **negative feelings** about their experience. One described their time in-country as: *'a traumatic experience'* (#41) and another *'went through a phase where I thought I've failed at this assignment, I failed myself'* (#47). Challenging volunteer roles and/or the experience of being isolated were common contributors. Two of these participants were *Non-Working Partners* whose experiences for different reasons were confined to mainly domestic (i.e. house-bound) pursuits *('One of the things that I learnt though was that I'm not very good at being a dependent'*, #21).

While the sample size limits the extent to which statistical attributions can be made, and a range of extraneous features can influence participants' overall experiences, some patterns were evident in responses that may reflect the degree of 'fit' between individual and assignment, PO, and/or host destination. Of note, volunteers who were accompanied by a partner reported generally more positive experiences than those who were unaccompanied. There was also some evidence that repeat volunteers and older volunteers tended to view their overall assignment more favourably that novice and younger volunteers.[16] Regional differences were also apparent, with volunteers on assignment in the 'East Asia' region, and Cambodia in particular, tending to report positive experiences, while those in 'South Asia and Africa' responded less favourably.[17]

Three participants who had initially accepted longer-term assignments cut their assignments short for personal or professional reasons; three others moved (or had planned to move) to a different PO prior to being evacuated. These figures are comparable with data from typical program assignments.[18]

3.2 Features influencing participants' experiences (personally and professionally)

This section highlights some of the main cross-cutting themes identified by participants as having the strongest impact on their overall in-country experience. The nature of the interviews – which focused on exploring experiences identified as most pertinent by individual participants - mean that the features that were identified were diverse in context, nature and impact.

An important insight of the interviews was how much they revealed about the in-country experience of volunteers beyond capacity development and service provision. While we examine participants' experiences with the assignment itself, we also discuss the importance of other aspects of participants' lived experiences including 'out-of-work' time, relationships with expatriates (including other volunteers) and local community members, and the support volunteers get from friends and family (in-country and from afar). In this, the contributions to the study of *Non-working Partners* (i.e. AADs) offered valuable insight alongside the experience of all participants with spouses.

We also relate these non-work activities to participants' overall sense of wellbeing, a significant influence for some on their framing of the experience and to their learning outcomes (Section 4.2.2). In addressing some of the personal (as well as professional) components of participants' responses, we situate their reports of their time in-country within the wider social dynamics of volunteers' experiences.[19]

Our analysis identifies four interconnected elements that participants found to be important (and inter-related) components of their in-country experience: (1) 'locally led' capacity development, (2) the volunteer 'tag', (3) public diplomacy, and (4) social worlds. These themes, expanded in the following four sections, are discussed in the context of the high-level principle of 'valuing volunteering', central to the Australian Volunteer Program Global Program Strategy (2018-2022), which highlights the valuable contribution of international volunteering to supporting locally-led capacity development, representing Australia with integrity, and fostering people-to-people links and diverse mutually-respectful partnerships. These themes draw on the summary table with examples of coding from the in-country experience that is provided in **Attachment 6**.

3.2.1 Supporting locally led capacity development

Locally-led capacity development is a high-level priority of the Program Strategy and is defined there as 'a process of increasing and maintaining the capabilities of individuals, teams, organisations and communities in order to achieve a range of positive sustainable outcomes.' The program strategy also highlights that it 'cannot be imposed but must be locally-driven' and therefore must 'build on local, existing strengths and have realistic expectations' as part of a 'long term, complex process.'[20] Capacity development emerged as important in the conversations with over 30 participants.

i. Varieties of capacity development: Responses reflected a range of perceptions about what capacity development comprised in the context of participants' individual position objectives and responsibilities. Great variety also existed in the extent to which participants reported being able to enact capacity development, in particular participants' ability to achieve a '*people-centred* approach to capacity development.'[21] This variety of ways that volunteers contributed to PO capacity was a point reinforced by one participant in responding to a summary draft of this report.

Formal approaches to capacity development were reflected commonly through the many participants describing the staff training programs they contributed to or ran in their POs, whereas less formal approaches included efforts to coach, role model and work collaboratively with PO staff. For participant #17, capacity development was multifaceted and involved coaching and collaborating with his counterpart ('*trying to get him to step up to a higher level*'), helping develop formal training for other staff ('*I actually developed 3-4 different courses*'), and mentoring university student placements. A different participant in a government agency (#24) described her work as '*leading by example*' and '*always encouraging others.*' While this participant saw her assignment as primarily centred on capacity building ('*it's all about enabling and capacity building*') several were explicit in feeling that they were unable to play, what they felt, was the expected capacity development role. Reasons for this included limited opportunities for contact with PO staff, intended counterparts being busy or absent or no longer part of the PO, being utilised by POs for different purposes ('*I was used more as a resource than a capacity builder*', #51), and the length of time to effect organisational change because '*culture moves slowly*' (#16).

ii. Pivoting to the context for local-led capacity development: Pertinent here is the importance that many participants attached to recognising the need to 'pivot' in order to adapt their volunteer role to the changing nature of the context, or to the needs and preferences of their PO.[22] By 'pivot' we mean volunteers making unanticipated adjustments to their expected or designated roles in order to better align their efforts and expertise with those valued by the partner organisation and/or those demanded of the operating context. These pivots often occurred during times of uncertainty and confusion – sometimes early in the assignment; for others it took as long as '*six months to get the people that I worked with to realise that I needed to be able to do things*' (#26).

In many regards, this process of pivoting appears to have been a critical point in the assignment. As participants described it, staying engaged and motivated during this process required persistence and self-direction - both commonly reported learning outcomes (Section 4.2) – and was characterised by feelings of boredom, frustration and surprise, with the process unfolding quite differently to how some had anticipated.

Features making the process more complex included sometimes '*sporadic*' communication that '*required a lot of resilience to keep turning up and keep trying things, but also just a lot of boredom*' (#29), language barriers (e.g. #24) and competing agendas among stakeholders within the PO. For instance, participant #49 described juggling interests of at least four individuals (including the PO director) by '*gently bringing them on board to what I made sense of [what] they needed.*' This involved '*exploring with them what we could be doing*' across several months, including a workshop to gauge '*what do we want*' and putting these ideas back to staff ('*if this is what you want, these are the strategies we need*'). Thirteen participants explicitly talked about feeling '*outside the loop*' or that there was '*a whole lot of organisational stuff that is a complete mystery to me*' (#10).

In spite of these challenges, participants described a variety of ways in which these pivots unfolded and in which the more endogenous forms of capacity development occurred. For some it was negotiated explicitly with the PO at an official level; for others it occurred more organically or indirectly by participants proactively finding ways to gauge and contribute to what colleagues valued or responded to most. Fifteen participants described how they 'translated' information and policy to fit local contexts, conditions and capacity. For instance, participant #45 described a renewed sense of *'trying … to slow down … it's such a hard-wired thing in Australia to want to bash it out as quickly as possible.'* Several participants reported grading the way they communicated to be *'plain, simple, straight forward to fit the local context and stakeholders'* (#40).

Also apparent is the substantial impact that these pivots had on participants' own learning and change (also see Section 4.2). By way of example:

- Participant #04, who worked in a rural domestic NGO, ended up doing *'not quite what the job description said … different to what I thought I'd be doing.'* She worked closely with a designated counterpart – the PO Director – who *'soon figured out what we wanted, what I needed to do, what I was capable of doing … very strategic with the way she's used my skills'* (#04). Some of the major learning outcomes she reported from her assignment came from observing her counterpart's leadership style ('*very thoughtful … I really see those things that she does*') and the efficacy of the collaborative model of development she was using ('*it reinforces the value of working alongside local people … quite different to being an external adviser … it's deepened some of my concerns about the development industry and the way its (usually) done*').

- Participant #09 observed another volunteer (unsuccessfully '*really pushing to get things done*') and so '*learnt how the system works*' by changing her approach to focus more on '*relationship-building … having someone with a skill or just another viewpoint of just someone who's in the community talking to people and making friends … that's good.*' These experiences, she says, instigated a number of changes in her, including deep cultural understanding, interpersonal skills, a new approach to leading change ('*making things feel like it's their idea … just being there … being interested … making that connection*'), and a much stronger appreciation that '*you can't be an outsider and just implement something … it needs to be done (locally).*'

- Participant #55 found key parts of an original position description out-of-date because one staff member had left the PO ('*it took me a while to find out what was going on*'). She initially told them *'I came here for this'*, but following dialogue adjusted the focus and objectives of her role, realising that it was '*the best way for them.*' While the experience left her a little unfulfilled ('*stops and starts … it didn't work out so well*') she linked a range of learning outcomes to the process of '*having to change my approach*' that she believes will benefit her next work role, including the need for flexibility, clear communication, and not '*presum(ing) they're on the same wavelength as you are … they might have a totally different way of looking at it or approaching it.*'

iii. Behaviours supporting the process of role pivot and subsequent capacity development: Participants identified a number of behaviours that they felt supported their role pivot and the capacity development opportunities that stemmed from this. Two were most prominent.

- Understanding the local language was highlighted as important by nearly two thirds of participants, with half recognising that some local-language proficiency makes a real difference not only in gaining a better understanding, but also for building rapport with colleagues. In short, some level of host-country language proficiency seems to be an important bridge for exchange and understanding in successful pivots, and a contributor to participants' confidence.

- As the case in the box below highlights, engaging with colleagues through 'deep listening' was also an important quality for participants who felt that they successfully navigated the 'role pivot.'

Deep listening to understand the local context

Listening to understand the local context is reflected in the efforts of many 'outsider' volunteers trying to better understand the local context so as to engage with colleagues more as 'insiders.' Participant #05 found that the government agency within which she worked had a different perspective on her work area from that which she was used to: '*I ended up with people who really didn't have much of an idea about things that I know a lot about, so the expertise that I had has been quite difficult to apply.*' Over time she developed confidence, actively sought common ground with her colleagues to the point where she worked with them to write speeches for senior department officials, and tackled some areas outside her immediate expertise to create a sound organisational and financial footing for their work. Through this she was able to apply her expertise in new ways while still contributing to the department's main focus - its long-term economic potential.

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iv. Building trust and relationships that overlap work and non-work settings: Making the effort to build rapport and develop trusting interpersonal relationships with colleagues in the PO was a focus of many

participants. According to participants, these contributed positively to their efforts to develop capacities within the PO via a range of means. For instance:

- Participant #29's account highlights the importance of her **presence** in the NGO, working alongside her colleagues. She found productive time came *'just through conversations with people and slowly nudging and … convincing, getting certain things to happen.'* These elements, and the opportunities to disclose personal information – not something she would normally have done at work - '*was of more benefit to gaining … trust in my professional opinion.'*

- Multiple participants linked the benefits of trust-building to their **involvement in social activities**. For instance, one talked about volunteers taking part in a '*lunch food preparation roster'* and felt this created a shared *'spirit of volunteering'* and a sense in colleagues that *'they're actually kind of here to be friends with us.'* Participant #23 occasionally socialised with colleagues (e.g. dancing after a work awards night) which, she believes, helped forge '*friendships*' that '*flowed back into [the PO] where they became so supportive of … my ideas because I think I'd been supportive of them.'* She says:

    We had so many conversations about the struggles that they have and the feedback they were giving me on what to do for my assignment …. It was very mutual - me asking for their help and them also asking for my help

- Several participants emphasised the importance of viewing the assignment as a **mutual learning process, underpinned by a sense of equalising relations** and recognising a 'shared agenda.' These were expressed in different ways. Participant #45, for instance, talked of his work with a counterpart as *'very much a skill swap … he knows the place, the history … personal relationships with people working in the space for a very long time.'*

- The experience of equalising relationships and building trust as a basis for capacity development is also reflected in the way the participants' work overlapped with their social or 'outside of work' realm more often than some were used to. One *Veteran* (#48) identified the biggest impact of his assignment as the '*enjoyment*' he took from:

    … the […] people and living here and interacting with them. I don't have the responsibility of being in a workplace where I have a managerial position … as a volunteer it's a lot more relaxed and you get to know the people better and you can mix with them and socialise. The impact for me, I suppose, is that I get so much enjoyment out of it

- As the previous quote alludes, a number of participants felt that, in their view, their role as 'volunteers' – rather than paid consultant or line manager – contributed to a more equal and trusting relationship. Fourteen participants explicitly distinguished themselves from other foreigners by virtue of being volunteers who could provide independent support in-country through relationship building and neighbourly practical care. The idea of the 'volunteer' label being an important influence on participants experience is expanded in the following section.

Taken collectively, these reflections demonstrate the value of seeing capacity development in all its forms, not just through formal methods such as training. Schech et al. (2020, p. 252)[23] highlight the way Australian volunteers contribute to endogenous capacity development processes. They note that while the 'voluntary nature of the relationship' may mean that capacity development impacts are less 'predictable and controllable', it also allows 'time to explore and negotiate what contributions are most useful to an organisation within a specific context.'

The examples above show this process in action. Participants had to engage with different languages and contexts and pivot to adjust to the local situation and needs. Through this they were better able to nurture locally-led capacity development by deeper listening and working to become more of an insider, even though it was difficult, slow or frustrating, until trust and understanding of the local context was better advanced. This reflects the program strategy view highlighted earlier of engaging 'realistically' with the 'long and complex process' that must be 'locally driven not imposed.'

3.2.2 The volunteer tag: Insider/outsider

A second feature that influenced the experiences of some – although not all - participants was the complex associations that the label 'volunteer' had among the different groups with whom they worked and socialised.

Some participants felt that being designated a 'volunteer' diminished their technical expertise or the value of their contribution in the eyes of colleagues or external stakeholders. For instance, participant #35 felt that her *'technical respect'* differed from how *'international advisors were treated … they managed to kind of inflate themselves a lot more quickly to be able to … get what they wanted to do.'* Participant #13, assigned to a government agency, felt *'that word volunteering as a discourse really has constrained the program … my director sees 'volunteering' rather than us as technical experts.'*

This stereotype of volunteers as less respected or less valued was most often reported as coming from external stakeholders. By way of example, participants #05 described feeling like a *'second class citizen'* in the eyes of most DFAT staff, and at times in the eyes of the PO government agency chief.

At the same time, the majority of participants who highlighted the issue of volunteer status also distinguished the volunteer contribution as being distinctive, not always influenced by the external or technical agenda. That is, in participants' view their 'low' status as volunteers (which felt difficult in terms of whether their expertise was recognised, particularly by the PO hierarchy), also helped local colleagues view them as peers rather than advisers, and enhanced relationships and trust between them that, they felt, contributed to their acceptance as organisational insiders, and hence people more in tune with what was required for locally-led capacity development.

These differing perceptions of volunteers as insider/outsider both within the PO and in the wider local community produced benefits as well as challenges. In one case, it meant being accepted alongside other local people who worked with the NGO, not as formal paid staff but as 'interns' or local volunteers (#29). This type of local engagement and integration as a version of 'insider' rather than 'adviser'[24] is also highlighted by another participant who felt their volunteerism demonstrated that *'I wasn't an add on; I was part of the community'* which *'makes a difference because you don't really have another agenda for being there'* (#28).

This distinctive insider/outsider volunteer contribution tried to take on board the *'different agendas'* within POs because of their relationships with local colleagues. In most cases it was a complex and frequently unspoken negotiation amongst different stakeholders; highlighted by participant #49's experience of negotiating the agendas of different stakeholders. This provides a distinctive contribution to facilitating locally-led capacity development by being, to some extent, part of the community and the PO but simultaneously bringing in outside insights and independence.

3.2.3 Public diplomacy

The role of Australian volunteers and their contributions to the region was raised by over a quarter of participants. This is an important part of the Global Program Strategy which states 'If Australian organisations, partner organisations, volunteers (past and present) and DFAT promote the benefits of volunteering, then the public in Australia will better appreciate the value of volunteering and the contribution it makes to sustainable development.'[25]

While serious concerns about public diplomacy were expressed by some volunteers, this was outweighed in number by participants highlighting their positive contributions to public diplomacy and/or a heightened appreciation for Australia's contribution in the region, a prominent change reported by many participants (Section 4.3.1). Others highlighted their contribution to public diplomacy specifically through the program, noting *'it is a vital part of Australia to play…we're building those relationships, making the world smaller'* (#33).

i. Formal and explicit public diplomacy: Participants reported making a range of structured and proactive public diplomacy contributions during their assignments. These included public media through embassies or DFAT; engagement in public events like *International Volunteers Day*; writing articles for home newspapers, journals or magazines; and using social media.

Consistent with some participants' pre-departure view,[26] several - repeat and first-time volunteers alike - reported remaining sceptical of the purpose of public diplomacy and what the role entailed for them. Concern was expressed about having to *'toe the DFAT line and not criticise our government'* (#4) or that *'volunteerism be used as a political flag waving exercise'*, rather than being *'genuine'* (#16). One participant found it *'self-aggrandisement'* and in opposition to their view of the volunteer ethos (#48); another *'marketing the things the AVP's do to benefit the government's position'* (#54).

ii. Informal and authentic public diplomacy: At the same time, responses also **highlighted more abundant authentic but low-key expressions of public diplomacy**. Several participants saw an incongruity between their view of formal types of public diplomacy and their infectious enthusiasm for the authentic contribution of their work.

In many ways the most animated, and potentially impactful, diplomacy came from participants' genuine enthusiasm for the work, the program, and their relationships with the host country. Exemplifying this **subtle and informal diplomacy**, first-time participant #44 said the practical side of her work overshadowed her big picture cynicism of Australian and global politics; by contrast repeat participant #49 emerged from her assignment *'a little more cynical than I was when I began … about (Australia's) role'*, nevertheless with a clearer view of the distinctiveness of the program:

> *I see a two-way separation. One way is that talking about it and doing it. I actually see the AVI model, volunteering, as one that I believe in whereas the model of diplomacy with DFAT, I see that as separate and I don't believe in. So there's two-way separation, one between the AVI program and what DFAT is on about. I know they're linked, but in my mind they're two separate things*

Nearly half of the participants identified ways that they had discussed their assignments' impacts, the program's objectives, or features of the host country with family and friends. This took place via blogs, phone calls, group letters, emails and/or in-country visits. One (#55) talked of a group memo she sent to a list of family and friends, particularly *'the travellers'* which showed recipients that *'as for volunteering, that's a bit different.'* She felt some

didn't understand why she was volunteering abroad rather than domestically, so she liked *'to try and close that gap a little bit or make them understand a little bit.'* Another (#23) described her largely positive intention to '*share a bit more of the real-life experience*' with family and friends, explaining:

> *I don't think it was a bad thing either, because you talk so much about the good stuff too … it's just one of the amazing experiences of my life. So I spent weeks and weeks talking to friends about that, and putting things on Facebook and Instagram and it wasn't just the, the [cultural] ceremony or what you see on Facebook*

3.2.4 Social worlds

International volunteering has been seen as distinct from domestic volunteering partly because it means a considerable change that takes volunteers a long way from home for an extended period where they are immersed in another culture.[27] This is why the in-country experience captures work and non-work experiences. A key part of this is reflected in what might be termed participants' 'social worlds', where diverse people-to-people interactions are established. The Global Program Strategy highlights this through its high level principle to 'Build strong relationships and partnerships' because it understands 'the role volunteers play in fostering people-to-people links and building diverse partnerships between individuals, communities and organisations, thereby strengthening Australia's relationships across the region and globally.'[28]

We discuss six features that participants raised in interviews and which highlight the diversity of social lives they experienced. These features also reinforce the strong overlap between their non-work experiences and their efforts to develop capacity, to adjust to the local culture, and to develop personally and professionally as individuals.

i. Social worlds overlap with work: Many participants reported overlaps between work and personal aspects of their in-country experience. Rather than forming discrete spheres, non-work activities, while sometimes presenting frustrations and stresses, also brought new insights or understandings for participants (Section 4.3) as well as relationships that extended back into work settings.

One way it did this was through strengthening relationships during times when participants were '*hanging out'*, socialising with or visiting the homes of local colleagues. In some cases, this proved critical to the success of the volunteer role. An interesting example of this is participant #13, who initially found his work in a government agency '*depressing*' because it was slow, unclear and not progressing. However, things changed when a colleague '*took me around … introduced me to people'* with whom he '*ended up just hanging around'* in the office. This led to spending time with them outside work also, during which he:

> *… got to learn a lot more about how they lived, their work, how their family works, culture, how that interacts their daily life. … when I was trying to understand the country, and understanding the community, I discovered a lot more information outside the formal discussion of a policy … I discovered a lot more through that informal conversation with them about what's going on*

For some participants, especially younger first-time volunteers, the personal side of their experience led to reports of increased self-reliance, greater independence and personal confidence that flowed across to work lives. One (#11) described '*obviously a huge learning experience living independently … it gave me a lot of self-confidence.*' Another (#37) '*definitely grew as a person from the experience, learned some very important life skills, (my) independence grew, self-management, self-care.*'

The work and non-work aspects overlapped in other ways also. Participant #08 spoke of the way colleagues '*treated me as part of the family'* and rented her a room '*so we were working and living together'* which at one level was both appreciated but also created pressure ('*I could never just go to work and come home again, it's an ongoing relationship*', #08). Another (#29) highlighted how she would sometimes spend quiet periods at work on personal activities (including study or Innovation Associates work) but be invited to evening or weekend social gatherings with colleagues which strengthened relationships, understanding and ultimately trust for the work.

The challenges of balancing work and non-work features of the experience were most prominent among participants living and working in remote or inaccessible locations, where there were few foreigners, basic conditions and limited facilities/shops. In one case, a participant was the community's first volunteer. Another (#32) found the lack of privacy afforded in rural communities in the host country '*a bit confronting at times … they have a different perspective on privacy.*' Another (#23) highlighted the mental health challenges she experienced due to:

> *… the isolation … I was the only white person … (my) volunteer friends were in two separate major cities so their experience was different. I'd go into (work) every day. In [host country] relationships are key, people are so close. I'd immediately be engulfed in this beautiful family (at work), and then I'd go home to just being on my own*

At the same time, for some participants the isolated conditions led them to establish rewarding relationships with locals (e.g. landlords, neighbours). One (#30) whose overall experience was difficult, identified as '*the biggest impact … the relationships that I formed with local friends*', which included visits to their home villages and which has led to ongoing contact '*on Facebook'* since repatriating, using her basic local language skills.

ii. Contact with other volunteers: Unsurprisingly, large numbers of participants highlighted contact with other volunteers as important for their social and leisure activities (e.g. surfing or diving).

Just as prominently, participants' social contact with other volunteers proved to be valuable for assistance relating to their work role (#53), future career decisions (#14), or as sounding boards to make sense of experiences (#23) or '*troubleshoot things together*' (#29). One participant felt that the immersive experience of volunteering helped to forge relationships '*with none of the normal social barriers*', and so enabled them to be vulnerable and seek help if needed (#43). More experienced volunteers were sought out when volunteers were struggling with the assignment (#11), sometimes in lieu of consulting program staff (#07):

> *I was lucky in that I had other volunteers there and they'd already been there for a while, so stuff like that I would ask them [rather than reaching out to program staff]*

Another (#54) described an in-country '*coaching mechanism*' among volunteers involving:

> *… just sharing those similar experiences. It's something that a lot of people are going through … even if they hadn't had that experience, they had similar experiences … that was a real support network*

The value of these networks extended to volunteers in other countries or regions. Instigated at PDBs and maintained via social media (e.g. *Instagram, WhatsApp*) or in-county visits, these relationships offered surprising benefits. One participant reported sharing information relating to COVID-19 repatriations with volunteers based in a different country:

> *… who I'd met at the pre-departure … they were messaging me for updates and I was forwarding the country stuff that I'd receive from my team to them in […] because they weren't getting that [information] (#29)*

Another (#09) used her PDB networks to help solve a problem relating to her PO's operations by calling on a volunteer on assignment in a different country for advice:

> *… one of them was in [a different country] doing something with […] also, so I contact them and asked them like how they got the quality up because I just didn't have no idea how to start it, to start doing something like that because I've never done anything like that before, and she had some good tips*

As well as tangible advice, volunteer networks also appeared to be beneficial sources of inspiration, motivation and sustenance at times when participants' assignments became difficult. A repeat volunteer with vast professional experience (#05) described the in-country volunteer network as '*a tight knit community*' that were, for her, part of a '*life saving*' expatriate community essential for her sanity. A *Launcher* who experienced a challenging (first) assignment reported receiving support and informal mentoring from an older repeat volunteer without whom '*I don't think I would have stayed*' (#11).

Beyond this, participants reported benefitting from (and enjoying) opportunities to associate with a more diverse range of people (age, profession, interests) than they normally would. Participant #44 noted the value of getting different perspectives from '*people I wouldn't meet very often in regular life.*' Similarly, another highlighted the benefit of being '*thrust together with a bunch of people that I wouldn't really mix with… a totally different network*' (#22). Several participants also talked about the '*lifelong*' friends made with other volunteers. For some repeat volunteers[29] the ongoing power of those connections, despite living physically distant from each other, was also appreciated for its strategic potential. For example, participant #54 made '*lifelong friends*' that, he says, he may also benefit from ('*that shared experience is something that I can, it's not the right word but … exploit*').

A handful also highlighted the impact of negative or mixed experiences with volunteer networks. Conflicts arose in workplaces and in shared accommodation for some participants. Others reported volunteer communities as being '*clique-y … I don't feel part of that group… I think it's got to do with my age and judgements that people make about (me)*' (#01). Another (#35) reported mixing mainly with:

> *… other expats and I'd say probably about half of my close friends were other AVI's. And then the other half were just other expats that I'd met through different people. I didn't have many [local] friends, not through lack of trying, but … we had really different lifestyles and home and family are really big priorities for [local] people*

iii. Having local friends and relationships outside work: Establishing strong local friendships was identified as an important part of the in-country experience for almost half of participants (marginally less often than contact with other volunteers was identified).

Local friends comprised work colleagues and others. At least five participants spoke of intimate local relationships. Local friends and relationships were valued for opportunities for shared activities like visits to homes and villages, or participating in religious or social activities, and also as a way to access deep insights of the local culture. Participants with close personal relationships with locals were most likely to report that developing fluency in a local language or dialect was an important outcome of their assignment. Other participants talked of the blurring of personal and professional boundaries. At its most extreme, one participant reported visiting the homes of the PO's local clients, where she:

> *… met their families, ate together … that was really special … if it was somebody's birthday they would invite me to their home … it does blur that 'friend and professional' boundary but (is) also quite important there in actually developing authentic relationships (#08)*

For some, the networks that participants established with local friends extended beyond the temporal and geographic confines of their current assignment. Two volunteers returning to assignments in the same country were able to re-establish bonds with local friends made previously.[30] Others described plans to support local friends to study or visit Australia in the future.[31] One (#48) described how friends from the host country had used *Facebook* to re-connect with him via a family member whom they had met during an in-country visit.

iv. Civic engagement that contributed to capacity development outside the volunteers' formal role: Volunteers were influenced by different, and at times competing, demands beyond their formal role within or outside their POs.

While this sometimes posed dilemmas, it also provided an outlet for some participants – especially those who felt underutilised by their POs - to engage with the local community socially or in other ways. This led many participants to undertake additional discretionary or 'voluntary' contributions beyond their assigned role with the PO. These varied in extent, formality, and the degree to which they drew on participants' professional expertise; yet all contributed in some way to direct and indirect capacity development of individuals, organisations or communities that was additional to their formal volunteer role. One participant teamed with another foreigner to volunteer through a local religious organisation (#10). A *Non-working Partner* establish and convened a regular sewing group, drawing on equipment provided by her partner's PO (#18). Two participants organised unskilled volunteering opportunities during a 'holiday' from their volunteer assignment.

Local friends were key in drawing participants into these 'additional volunteering' roles. One participant volunteered through friends in a local NGO (#40), while another (#33) gave voluntary English classes at a local school and took on '*a bit of volunteering at a local library*' through a domestic NGO (#33), both via friendships established outside work. Less structured assistance for friends and colleagues to learn or practice English language was common.[32] Three participants highlighted how members of their PO boards had engaged them to support other organisations or initiatives in the same sector.[33] Several repeat volunteers talked about the ongoing contact and informal support provided to POs from previous assignments.[34]

v. Family, spouse and friends support and interaction: Another important feature of participants' social world was their contact with immediate partners and families who had accompanied them from Australia as AADs or outside the program. This was raised by almost half of participants as shaping their in-country experience in sometimes powerful ways.

Over a quarter of participants reported spouses or partners, not necessarily classified as AADs. These family partners provided important counsel, back up, encouragement and a sense of a shared in-country endeavour that involved, for instance, helping with day-to-day living, organising repairs, or accompanying volunteers on work trips, all of which made indirect contributions to the volunteer's ability to focus on their core role. Partners were also involved in more direct 'off-the-books' capacity development activities. A *Non-working Partner,* who was heavily involved in semi-formal volunteering to support the work of his partner, reported: '*I've never worked so hard in my life*' (#38), a view confirmed by his (volunteering) partner ('*he spent hundreds of hours … he'd be one extra person [in the office], they loved it*'); another organised formal weekly vocational classes for local community members (#18).

Participants with partners - who frequently used plural pronouns when describing their sense of shared experience, challenges, achievements and plans – spoke of the benefits and differences that being a 'team' created. A participant who had previously volunteered alone (#53) felt '*you're a stronger team but you're not as close with other volunteers*' as her previous assignment. She says, '*I helped (my partner) through the process … it really helped him having me there and vice versa.*' There were also times when partners could help bridge cultural barriers. One participant (#10) reported many of her interactions with local people as more insightful '*when my husband's present … its men who share with my husband … I couldn't have done it without him.*'

Other participants reported the support of partners visiting from Australia, with particular focus on the benefit of sharing the experience in person rather than remotely. One (#05) described how her visiting grandchildren '*really enjoyed the experience and understood what I was doing and why it was important.*' Another (#37) felt she could mediate a different understanding to her visiting partner and friends because of her local understanding and language. Another (#51), whose parents were unable to visit during his assignment, '*was pretty sad because we had so much to show them … (the assignment was) obviously such a big part of my partner and I's life now, even though it was only 7 months.*'

The majority of participants maintained regular contact with family and friends in Australia and valued this as a means of sharing the experience and helping to cope with the ups and downs of their assignment. Participant #47 described how having '*constant contact*' with family and friends helped '*keep me sane*' and gave her a new appreciation of their role in her life. At the same time, others described not sharing negative experiences with family and friends '*because everyone's immediate reaction is (to) come home*' (#02), or to avoid feeding negative stereotypes.[35]

vi. Travel and lifestyles: Finally, participants' descriptions of their time in-country highlighted the importance that many attached to travel and lifestyle features of their assignment, and to the role these played in their motivations for volunteering, and their wellbeing and enjoyment during the assignment.

Travel and lifestyle featured heavily among the descriptions of more than half of participants. While trips to explore regions or cities with spouses, volunteers or visitors was common, 'lifestyle' was the most common element savoured, with bars, live music or galleries the sites of meetings with locals, expatriates and volunteers alike. By way of example, participant #07 found her local colleagues generally busy with family and so:

> *I would just go wandering with friends all the time to see different markets and try different food. I spent quite a bit of time in the multiple, very cheap bars, so that was a lot of fun…I had a bike, so I'd ride my bike around the city, which was always a bit hair-raising but fun… and I joined a social netball club*

The other commonly reported positive lifestyle reflection was from participants expressing joy and/or gratitude for the generosity of local people. For example, participant #12 described how local acquaintances had '*pooled their money, went down to the shop outside and bought me a pair of pants*' when he tore his trousers at work. Others valued the different pace and feel of the in-country life, and getting a sense of local life alongside local people as residents rather than tourist. This offered opportunities to be more reflective about what those relationships and experiences meant. One (#01) described never being '*lonely, I always have company … it's a very social place to live.*' Another (#26) described '*just really enjoying my life, (I) was happy.*' Participant #42 thrived on '*more than the experience as being a tourist'*:

> *… the interaction with the people on the streets and just living here and I often see my water guy down the road and we go and wave to each other, and my pineapple lady … I wouldn't say it's to the depth of well I'm an expert of living here, but you've got a little bit more of an insight*

Participants' lifestyle also provided opportunities for contemplation. Three participants,[36] for different reasons that were sometimes outside their control, found parts of their assignment mundane, causing them to reflect more positively on home despite some in-country highlights. Another (#28) found that the lifestyle caused her to '*learn a lot about what I need in my own life to make myself happy … I actually need a lot less.*' Participant #03 enjoyed '*more laid-back culture where [he] felt less self-conscious and you can be yourself.*' He felt the experience has '*made me more open-minded … (it) gives you time to think about your own dreams.*' More of the learning outcomes that participants attributed to their non-work lives are addressed in Section 4.2.

3.3 Conclusion

Participants' lived experience with volunteering is evident not only in their formal roles and how they often pivot to make them fit in with local needs, but also their experiences embedded in foreign communities and mixing with diverse groups of people. Drawing on the experience as a whole, the results reported here demonstrate the importance of considering 'what else matters' in the doing of volunteering. It also reinforces the value of broadening the scope of volunteering beyond one category or stereotype, and beyond volunteers' formal roles.[37]

4. Personal and Professional Changes

This section addresses research questions three to five:

3. What are the main personal and professional changes that participants reported arising from their involvement with program to date?

4. What features of participants' in-country experiences (appear to) have had the strongest impact on their reported personal and professional changes?

5. In what ways do participants' (reported) future plans reflect changes than might be associated with their participation in the program?

Data here are derived cross-sectionally from self-report accounts of learning and change provided at T2, as well as longitudinal comparisons between T1 and T2 relating to features like participants' (intended) future plans.[38] Results are reported in three sections related to reported behavioural changes (Section 4.1), capabilities developed during the assignment (Section 4.2) and reported attitudinal changes (Section 4.3).

4.1 Changing behaviours

4.1.1 Future career and study plans

- **While several participants remained unclear of their future when interviewed at T2, 36 of the 55 participants in the study (65%) reported (anticipated) changed work or study plans between T1 and T2 that were not attributable to COVID-19.[39] *Enhancers* and *Imposed Transitioners* were most likely to report major changes, whilst *Veterans* were least likely.**

- **More than half of the sample feel their future career prospects are enhanced by their assignment.**

- **Five participants who held international career plan at T1 underwent a 'domestic realignment' in their focus as a result of their assignment, and are now seeking to apply their experiences in a domestic rather than international context (unrelated to COVID-19).**

- **Eleven participants (20%) attributed their enrolment in formal programs of study to their experiences in the program; an additional four reported a change in direction of planned study programs due to their involvement.**

- ***Imposed Transitioners* were the group whose future seems to have been most strongly influenced by their experiences in the program. *Launchers* and *Transitioners* were the groups whose future plans were most strongly affected by COVID-19.**

Major change in career direction: Discounting the impact to all participants' futures from COVID-19, comparisons between reported future plans at T1 and T2 indicate that 15 participants (27%)[40] experienced what appears to be a meaningful change[41] regarding planned future paid and/or voluntary work/careers.[42] This includes four *Enhancers* (50%) and three *Imposed Transitioners* (43%).[43]

These changes stemmed from contact with practitioners (e.g. access to role models and networks that presented new work opportunities), the volunteer role itself (e.g. exposure to new responsibilities), activities performed by the PO (e.g. particular areas of development or policy work), or exposure to the workings of 'international development' (e.g. understanding challenges presented by the resources available). The **case study** of Robin in the box on the following page shows how exposure to the sector and its actors and practices was '*absolutely*' critical to her being offered a follow-up job that met many elements of the '*dream*' position she had identified at her pre-departure interview.

Minor changes in career direction: In addition to these major changes, the assignment helped some participants to clarify a desired or anticipated career path: either through reaffirming a pre-assignment view about the viability or attractiveness of a potential future direction (16 participants[44]), or through rejecting an anticipated or potential avenue of future work as unsuitable (11 participants[45]). This was most common among *Transitioners*, like participant #06 whose assignment clarified a new career direction, gave her confidence about '*the skill set that I have to offer*' and the realisation that '*I need to be a bit more assertive with regard to what I want in my career*', or participant #39 whose experience in a small domestic NGO made him realise his temperament is better suited to '*a bigger global organisation*.'

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Case study: Opening doors and realising dreams

Robin's assignment arose after she had difficulty finding work in Australia. At pre-departure she reported believing that '*for me to find another job at my age is going to be impossible, so that's why I went down the route of volunteering.*'

The assignment role involved her applying her professional scientific training to an unfamiliar sub-discipline and in a new context. At T1 she explained, '*I've been working in […] for 30 years … so now to move on to […] that's really complementing my career.*' Although uncertain about the assignment ('*I think this will be quite different*'), at T1 she expressed the view that '*this (assignment) gives me the chance to work in a developing country on [a relevant issue] … this might be able to get my foot in the door where I can be … working as a consultant … short-term contracts in the field that would be absolutely fantastic, but that would be a dream.*'

Robin made substantial progress to realising this dream during her assignment. At T2 she described her assignment as '*excellent personally and professionally*', allowing her to gain knowledge of the (new) professional area in which she had applied her skills – a combination of '*background reading, attending meetings, attending some presentations, looking at the data*' and in particular '*writing [a] manual, that was really, really good actually because I had to go into so much detail.*' She saw the practical application (and challenges) of her work during field trips ('*a wonderful experience … very, very interesting … overnight in the village … seeing how […] operate from their homes*'), gained understanding of her operating context from working with external consultants contracted in to her PO, and benefitted greatly from '*bimonthly teleconference meetings*' with specialists in the region, who shared valuable specialist knowledge and were '*also very good support just from a health point of view.*'

At the time of her T2 interview, Robin had been offered a new (2-year) volunteer role with a major international NGO that arose directly from her assignment. It was through her assignment that she became aware of, had the confidence to apply for, and had sufficient experience to be offered, this job.

As her first exposure to international aid and development work, she believed that '*oh absolutely … doing this (assignment) has certainly given me a good understanding and obviously the confidence to apply.*' She says she would now '*like to continue doing this 'serious' volunteering work … it's almost like a paid job, we've got a work plan, we've got achievements, you have to come up with the goods*' because '*it's short-term and interesting and in different locations.*'

</div>

Using skills gained on assignment: Twenty-six participants (45%) – including two *Non-working Partners* – were explicit in stating that their future work prospects would build on the experiences, knowledge and/or skills they had accumulated on assignment.[46] An additional five participants[47] reported that having the assignment on their CV would be beneficial, even though the assignment did not necessarily enhance their career-related experience, knowledge or skills ('*it looks so good on my résumé, but when I think about what I actually did, I almost feel like a bit of a fraud*', #14).

International and domestic focus: When interviewed at pre-departure (T1), 23 participants (42%) reported future plans with a strong international focus, primarily relating to their career aspirations.[48] *Transitioners* (8/11) and *Launchers* (6/8) made up almost 60% of these. Of these 23 participants, five[49] experienced a shift during their assignment from being oriented internationally toward a more domestic focus when interviewed at T2.[50]

Four participants reporting a new domestic focus saw opportunities to apply the skills they had learned on assignment in a domestic setting. For three[51], this involved applying expertise with a strong international element in culturally-diverse Australia. For instance, participant #20, a *Launcher* who had originally envisaged an international career, explained:

> *I think I do want to focus on Australian issues … people who have come from disadvantaged backgrounds to be able to build their own life rather than have to rely on going into big businesses or big corporations.*
>
> *Q: Do you think that your experience with the program has influenced your desire to go in that direction?*
>
> *A: Definitely. When I came in, I knew that I wanted to work in development but I also wasn't sure in what capacity I could actually achieve that, so working with the AVP and through [the PO] made me understand why it was so important to have that initial capacity building so that people could build on from there and my experiences in [the host country] with the AVP program have … definitely highlighted how important it is to have it*

Two participants' domestic realignment was bulwarked by homesickness or a working partner;[52] two others expressed a desire to apply their professional interests and expertise – some of which were renewed or developed during the assignment, although not with strong cross-cultural elements – in a domestic context.[53] One of these (#39) explained:

> *What I'd like to do is work on similar issues that I was looking at in [host-country] but just in Australia … [my experiences] just might give me a slightly broader perspective or maybe I can sort of bring something else to the table when working on those kind of issues*

The **case study** of Vivianne – who had left her last job in Australia under difficult circumstances and who, at T1, had envisaged potential work opportunities for her expertise internationally - is one example of how this shift from an international orientation to a domestic orientation unfolded. For Vivianne, the assignment reinforced her passion for an area of her work that she had not been able to apply at home, but also her desire to base herself in Australia rather than internationally. The case also highlights the challenges she now faces in using her (renewed) passion to re-establish a career domestically.

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Case study: A renewed passion, but how to apply this in a domestic context?

Vivanne, an *Imposed Transitioner*, had initially envisaged using the assignment to gain experience that would allow her to work globally with an intergovernmental agency:

> *Ideally I would love to do this kind of thing in different countries. I'd love to do something with the UN; that's part of the reason why I went back and got my degree because I was looking at UN roles (T1)*

Vivianne described her experience as '*easily the most challenging, frustrating, rewarding, positive, frightening experience of my life … it was extremes some of the highest highs, some of the lowest lows … professionally the best experience I've ever had for sure.*' While she enjoyed some social contact with her colleagues, she struggled emotionally with the '*isolation … I didn't have a social life really*', and access to basic resources for her work and day-to-day existence.

In her post-repatriation interview, Vivanne's focus had changed from an international career to one based more in Australia ('*I don't feel the need to move to another country again anytime soon*', T2). While her experience was '*amazing*' yet costly ('*volunteering actually, wiped me out financially*') and she remains interested in international travel, she feels '*it's gone from wanting to live in another country to (now) take my 4 weeks of holiday and go and stay in country for a little while.*'

During her assignment, Vivianne had the opportunity to expand her experience in and passion for an area of her work in which she had studied. She explained, '*I think actually going volunteering, in this role has reignited a bit of a passion in […] for me, where it was waning a little bit to be honest with you.*' She describes getting '*really burnt out*' prior to the assignment:

> *… doing funding and managing staff. [during the assignment] I had to learn more about […] I don't know if it's broadened [my view], I guess it's taken it away from just the money side and providing 'right now' support to a bit of a longer-term (focus) (T2)*

Vivianne is now considering ways to apply this '*reignited'* passion and renewed focus to work in Australia, where her profession has different foci and expectations than the host country. Still yet to resolve how she might make this work for her, she observed:

> *[During the assignment] I did program development and a bit of a policy work, but here in Australia that means something very different. You need to get a whole degree pretty much to do policy work. So that's definitely an interest for me, that's probably something I could move into. But I am also really interested in staying in the […] space … the good thing and the bad thing in Australia is that we are actually quite progressive with […] so a lot of the groundwork has been done. Maybe I just need to become more aware of […] here in Australia and work on that, because that's what really excited me … I don't if I have the opportunity to do that in Australia. I need to find where those kind of gaps are, I guess (T2).*

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Study plans: While the forced repatriations may have led more participants to consider full- or part-time study than might otherwise have been the case, 15 participants attributed future or current enrolment in formal education programs to their experiences in the program. Of these 15, while four[54] reported a change in the direction of a study programs that they had already planned or commenced (e.g. focusing a research degree on issues observed in-country, using experiences garnered on assignment as foci for course work), for 11 participants (20%) their involvement with the program was the direct impetus for instigating a course of study in a different domain.[55] These 11 came from five of the seven volunteer types, mainly *Launchers* (4/8).

Most commonly (9/11) the main reason given for undertaking the studies was career-related; that is, to facilitate a change in career direction that was sparked during the assignment. The triggers for this varied, but included, for instance, exposure to experts in the field (e.g. observing the skillsets of the most effective actors, discussions with experts about emerging areas of interest) or exposure to a new passion/interest (sometimes through being asked to perform a new or unfamiliar role). In some cases, these planned programs of study built on distinctive features of the local culture and/or the cross-cultural application of their professional training or backgrounds.[56]

Certainty about future plans: While COVID-19 has exacerbated short- and medium-term uncertainty for participants, those who reported having a generally clear idea of their desired future work/career activities (n = 19[57]) outnumbered those lacking clarity (n = 12[58]).[59] *Launchers* (5/8) and *Enhancers* (4/7) were the two groups most likely to report certainty about their future, while *Career Breakers* (4/5) expressed the least certainty.

4.1.2 Ongoing engagement with partner organisations and the program

- **Seventy percent of volunteers (35/50) intend to continue an ongoing relationship with the PO.**
- **Eleven (22%) had extended their assignment before being repatriated. More than half of volunteers (56%), including 72% of those receiving the repatriation allowance, have continued to provide support to POs after returning to Australia.**
- **Just over half the sample (53%) indicated an openness or intention to volunteer through the program again in the future. Nearly two-thirds (64%) expressed an intention to remain formally involved in the program through RAVN. At least 38% have maintained ongoing contact with other program volunteers.**

Future volunteer assignments (including extensions with the partner organisation): At the time of the interview or their repatriation, 11 participants (22%) had commenced, or had planned to commence, extending their current volunteer assignment with the PO.[60] *Launchers* (4/8) were the group most likely to (have planned to) extend the current assignment.

Several others had applied for different volunteer assignments with the program or with the same PO,[61] while 29 (53%) indicated an openness or intention to volunteer through the program again in the future,[62] with *Imposed Transitioners* (5/7) and *Veterans* (9/12) most strongly represented.

At the same time, eight participants[63], including four *Transitioners*, who had signposted the intention to volunteer again during T1 interviews, expressed a change of view, indicating at T2 that they were now unlikely to volunteer again.[64] Other participants appeared less enthusiastic about volunteering again without ruling it out at some point in the future. Participants expressing reservations about future volunteer assignments provided a variety of explanations. For *Veterans*, issues of age and health were commonly cited. Three *Veterans* with records of multiple previous assignments reported feeling the need for a break[65,] while four[66] indicated they would only consider short-term assignments in the future. *Transitioners* and *Imposed Transitioners*, while generally open to more assignments in the future, were the two groups most likely to identify a desire for a remunerated position rather than a voluntary one in the future[67] and/or to indicate a lengthy break before considering another assignment.

Post-repatriation support for partner organisations: Twenty-eight participants (56%) reported varying levels of ongoing voluntary contribution to their POs post-assignment.[68] This comprised 72% of COVID-19 repatriates and 38% of non-repatriated volunteers.[69] Others made themselves available to help but left further contact up to POs.

Participants' ongoing commitment to their POs varied from ad-hoc contact when needed to '*five days a week … between just half a day (or) a few hours in the morning*' (#07). It took multiple forms, but typically involved volunteers contributing to specific projects they had worked on pre-repatriation, such as completing draft grant applications, writing policy documents, providing feedback or ongoing training (including in the use of technologies to keep POs open during pandemic-related lock-downs), managing social media and online platforms, or managing an organisation website. *Enhancers* (5/7), *Veterans* (9/12) and *Launchers* (6/8) were the groups most likely to provide post-repatriation support for POs.[70]

Ongoing contact with partner organisations: Thirty-five volunteers (70%) reported the intention of ongoing relationships with PO staff. In addition, at least two *Non-working Partners* (40%) who coordinated their own in-country volunteering roles also intended to maintain contact with POs and individuals with whom they worked.[71] A weak correlation exists between participants' reported plans to continue contact with POs at T1 (pre-assignment) and T2 (post-assignment).

Ongoing involvement with the program: Reflecting the overall goodwill toward the program across the sample, nearly two-thirds of participants (35/55, or 64%)[72] expressed an intention to remain involved in the program in a formal way via the returned volunteer network (RAVN)[73], a figure noticeably higher than the number indicating the intention to continue program engagement at pre-departure interviews.

Participants gave various reasons for their (anticipated) ongoing involvement, including wanting to share experiences with future volunteers, retaining contact with others who '*understood [their] experience*' (#23), hearing about '*what's happening and the sorts of roles that they're offering and stories that come out*' (#01), or wanting to involve returned volunteers in (domestic) social change programs ('*I think there's a lot of volunteers who will have that conversation, and we can learn to be allies and create some more pathways*', #04).

While some were uncertain about future involvement, six explicated the intention to discontinue involvement with the program.[74] One (#26) reported being '*still a little bit disoriented'*, while another remained '*stressed*' about the assignment - not the repatriation – and so was '*just focusing on my health at the moment … (the assignment) just really destroyed my confidence.*' Another participant who lived in rural Australia noted: '*It's about three hours for me. If I lived in one of the capital cities I'd probably be more involved.*'

Ongoing connections with program volunteers: Beyond formal program involvement, at least 38% (21/55)[75] had sustained some form of ongoing relationship with other volunteers on the program. While these were often based around friendships, at least one (#36) reported an ongoing mentor relationship with a younger volunteer, while another (#54) identified '*networks*' as the assignment's biggest impact, noting: '*the value is the network of volunteers I now have. … the opportunity to interact personally and professionally provides a network that otherwise I wouldn't have had … I look forward to making the most of it.*' Most repeat volunteers also indicated ongoing relationships with networks developed during earlier assignments. Just three participants had no intention of maintaining relationships with other volunteers.[76]

4.2 Changing capabilities

- **The most commonly reported learning outcomes related to 'cultural capabilities' (19% of reported changes), generic 'role performance and management capabilities' required to manage people and projects such as interpersonal skills, mentoring, coaching and/or introducing change (17%), and 'domain-specific capabilities' (14%).**

- **Almost a half of reported learning outcomes could be classified as contributing directly or indirectly to the program's objective that Australians be more 'globally literate and connected.'**
- **Most learning outcomes were linked to activities that participants observed or undertook in the workplace, including performing roles that were unfamiliar, that involved greater responsibility, or that were not normally associated with participants' professional area. Their involvement in capacity development activities (e.g. mentoring, coaching) was a small but important part of this.**
- **Participants' experiences outside work (e.g. immersion in a foreign culture, informal discussions) were also places where their cultural acumen and self-awareness, in particular, were developed.**

This section summarises the chief learning outcomes that participants attributed to their involvement in the program, and the main reasons given for them. The process for identifying and classifying these learning outcomes and their triggers is outlined in **Attachment 3.2**.

4.2.1 Major learning outcomes

On average, each participant was able to identify more than nine learning outcomes that they attributed to their in-country experiences (total = 522). These were classified into one of ten sets of learning outcomes, each comprising between 2 and 11 sub-outcomes. Descriptions of these can be found in **Attachment 7.1**.

Attachment 8 (panels 1-2) summarises the full sample of learning outcomes reported by each volunteer type, including those that participants identified as the outcome that (they felt) had the major impact on them. Across the sample, the most commonly reported learning outcomes were:

- **Cultural capabilities** (101/522, or 19%), comprising a richer understanding and appreciation of the host country's lifestyle, history, values, language or diversity ('culture-specific capabilities', 81 outcomes) as well as greater awareness of differences of perspectives stemming from culture and comfort working in culturally unfamiliar environments generally ('culture-general capabilities', 20 outcomes).

- **Role performance and management capabilities** (87/522, 17%) involving capabilities required to manage people and projects and to perform work that are not specific to the professional domain. These included generic interpersonal and managerial skills, as well as capabilities associated with developing others via mentoring, coaching and/or introducing change associated with capacity development; and

- **Domain-specific capabilities relating to respondents' professional area** (72/522, 14%), including expanded technical knowledge or know-how by applying skills in new contexts or ways (41 outcomes), greater professional confidence (15), and establishing new domain-specific contacts/networks (7).

Other learning outcomes that were frequently reported included 'situational or contextual understanding' (11%), most often reported by *Veterans*, and which incorporated greater awareness of global or geopolitical issues, poverty/inequality and Australia's 'footprint' in the region, as well as 'sector-specific knowledge and skills' (9%) relating to participants' understanding of the operations of international aid and/or development.

Of note is that **45% of learning outcomes (239/522) could be classified as contributing directly or indirectly to the program's objective that Australians be more 'globally literate and connected.'**[77] These include outcomes relating to participants' cross-cultural expertise and regional/global socio-political issues, establishing international networks, better understanding of the landscape of international development work, and personal changes relating to increased openness to difference and diversity and/or tolerance.[78] Seven participants (13%) identified one or more of these outcomes as the major impact of their assignment. Of these learning outcomes, just under half occurred outside the workplace in 'non-work' settings (117/239, 49%).[79]

Developing capabilities for a post-COVID world?

Some repatriated participants reported in interviews how their experiences on assignment had been beneficial since their repatriation and forced isolation in Australia. Learning outcomes like 'managing or coping with uncertainty' (3% of all reported outcomes), 'patience' (3%) and 'resilience and persistence' (1%) were identified as valuable. Participant #26 described as her biggest change having '*a level of patience and tolerance that I never thought I would ever have*'; she proffered '*com(ing) from an isolated [location] and learn(ing) to live simply made two weeks of self-isolation bearable*.' Another (#33) agreed that his experience made him more tolerant that '*things go wrong … I might have to accept (unexpected) things*', and that this helped him cope better with his lockdown.

Beyond that, while the implications of COVID-19 on work practice remains largely unknown, it seems feasible that some of the capabilities that participants reported developing during their assignments to date might become more highly valued in post-COVID societies and labour markets, where greater appreciation for national and local interdependence, precariousness of employment, and/or challenges associated with managing work/non-work demands, may become prominent. Post COVID-19, traits such as 'seeing one's work in a wider context' (19 learning outcomes), 'awareness of global and geopolitical issues' (13), 'appreciation of other ways of life' (12), and 'openness to difference' (6) may increase in importance. Resilience- and flexibility-building experiences like pivoting to unfamiliar and/or changing contexts (Section 3.2.1) may also become more valued.

Indeed, while the social and economic fallout of COVID-19 has caused major challenges for some participants, the personal development reported by some (not all) participants may provide strong foundations for their value in post-COVID voluntary and paid employment. We see a potential role for the program in helping participants to articulate and make use of these capabilities at post-assignment debriefs.

4.2.2 Learning situations and approaches

Descriptions of the classifications of learning contexts and approaches can be found in **Attachments 7.2-7.3**.

Learning contexts: The workplace was the context for most of the reported learning outcomes (318/484, 66%), primarily 'role performance and management capabilities' which most commonly occurred while participants were performing 'non-routine' work roles, defined as activities that were outside the participants' usual work role associated with their profession.

Learning approaches: Participants reported engaging in experiential, social and vicarious approaches to their learning. In total, most were experiential involving having to make adjustments to suit local conditions (74/479, or 15% of all learning outcomes), performing 'stretch' roles that involved unfamiliar responsibilities or activities (55/479, 11%), or pressure situations involving conflict, urgency or stress (27/479, 6%). While, 22% (104/479) of learning outcomes involved 'social' approaches to learning through collaborating, discussing or consulting others, the largest proportion 30% emerged vicariously through participants' immersion in the organisational or cultural environment (80/479, 17%), or through observing role models, both positive and negative (29/479, 6%) and observing work practices generally (29/479, 6%).

Figure 2 identifies the main learning outcomes reported by the sample, their contexts, and the main learning approaches used by participants. The dark boxes on the right show the 10 categories of learning outcomes and the percentage of total learning outcomes that each comprised, arranged vertically from those that occurred most often in workplace settings (large grey box at the top) to those occurring most often outside the workplace (large grey box at the bottom). Learning outcomes relating to 'Situational or contextual understanding' fell evenly in work/non-work settings.

Figure 2 also identifies the main learning approaches used by participants for the eight main categories of learning outcomes (white boxes): five that occurred primarily at work (top), two that occurred primarily outside work (bottom), and 'situational and contextual understanding.'

Figure 2: Summary: Main reported learning outcomes, contexts and approaches
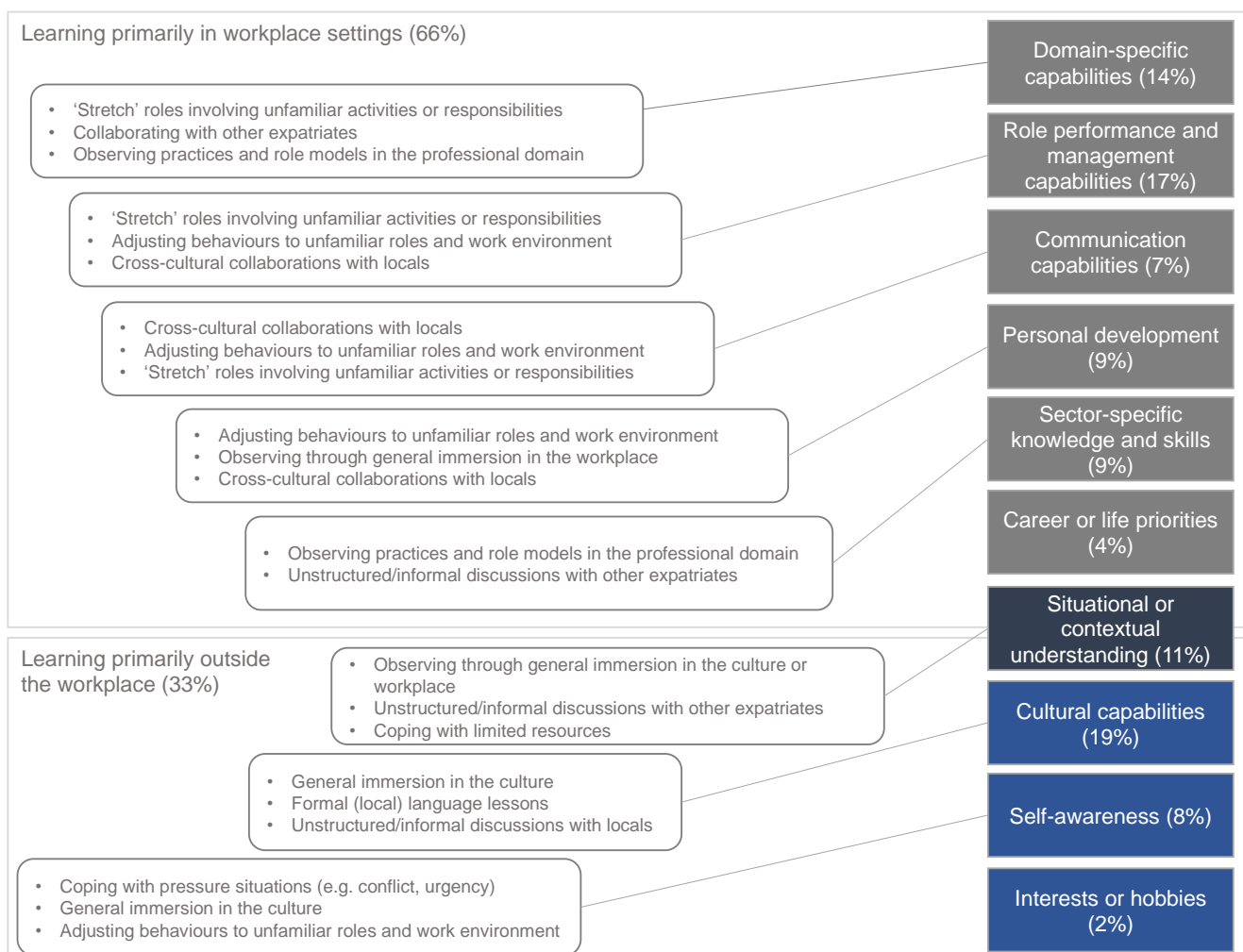
4.2.3 Key features of in-country experience contributing to changes in capabilities

Seeking to understand participants' longer-term changes in light of their experience with the program is the focus of T3 interviews. Nonetheless, the results here offer clues to the types of experiences that might be associated with particular capabilities. While some of these findings are unsurprising (e.g. 'domain-specific capabilities' occurred predominantly in the workplace), others are worth highlighting at this early stage.

i. Personal learning outcomes crossing work and non-work experiences: Reinforcing the work/non-work overlaps identified in Section 3, volunteers' work roles appear to have been fertile sources for developing a variety of highly-portable 'higher order' capabilities whose benefits are not confined to the workplace, including improved resilience, assertiveness and openness to difference ('personal development'). These often emerged as participants negotiated to resolve the scope and nature of their work roles in the early weeks of their assignment (Section 3.2.1). Non-work experiences, including participants' general immersion in a foreign environment and/or social contacts (Section 3.2.4), were prominent platforms for increased 'self-awareness' and improved 'situational or contextual understanding' for volunteers and *Non-working partners* alike.

ii. The contribution of 'non-routine' work activities, including capacity development: Twenty-three percent of all learning (111/484) and 35% of workplace learning (111/318) involved participants performing work that was classified as non-routine; that is, that would not typically be associated with their identified profession. Two categories of outcomes were especially prevalent in non-routine situations. The first, 'role performance and management capabilities' (37) included soft-skills that are associated with capacity development such as 'managing and implementing change' (18) or 'supporting others' learning' (5). Both of these occurred frequently when participants were involved in cross-cultural collaboration activities with host-country nationals (8), or via adjusting normal work practices (8). Such changes included using strategies to nurture locally-led (rather than imposed) changes (#09), explaining advanced '*technical skills in more easily understood ways*' (#31), and the importance of nurturing relationships in introducing change (#45).

The second outcome associated with non-routine learning was 'domain-specific capabilities' (22), including learning related to a 'new professional field' (7) and improved 'task performance' (6). For both these outcomes, performing 'stretch' role was the main mechanism through which the learning occurred. Participant #01, for instance, felt a major change in professional confidence and acumen came from having to '*pick up bits and pieces from all different aspects of your life*' and apply these to a position in which she had no prior experience and that required her to '*get to know*' new tasks and '*make (these) appropriate to the context here.*'

iii. Learning through incidental social activities: Of note is the relatively infrequent use participants made of consulting locals or expatriates (3% of coded responses) in the main changes that they reported. Thus, while some benefited from finding a cultural informant or through networks of volunteers and others in social contexts, learning appears to have emerged more regularly from informal or unstructured discussions (10%) and/or during work-related collaborations (10%) than through proactively seeking informational support. Examples of these learnings can be found in Section 3.2.1.

iv. Mixed responses regarding domain-specific expertise: 'Domain-specific capabilities' were a prominent learning outcome, especially for *Launchers* and *Imposed Transitioners.* At the same time, not evident in Figure 2, is that some participants reported their limited access to other professionals or experts, or a lack of opportunities to apply their technical knowledge and skills, as impediments to their professional development.[80]

This is borne out to some extent in analysis of these learning outcomes. Over a third of domain-specific learning stemmed from participants performing 'stretch' roles (24/71). Just 13% (9/71) came from collaborations or consultations with others, and 4% from being able to observe (positive) role models. In other words, the assignments offered opportunities to undertake domain-specific roles that provided understanding, experience, and in some cases confidence. However, some participants' lack of access to expert collaborators or role models meant that features of their assignment were less developmental than they may have been. Illustrative of this, participant #07's assignment '*gave me lots of new experiences … representing the organisation at a senior level*' but she was '*really craving*' having access to '*leadership that could mentor me*', a feature of her assignment that had a major impact on her future work plans, where this was identified as a priority.

v. The contribution of formal classes to language and cultural understanding: Five percent (24/522) of all learning outcomes – and nearly a quarter of all reported 'cultural capabilities' - related to learning the host-country and/or local language or dialect. Of these, 17 (71%) were attributed to formal learning programs, either via the ICOP or through private language classes that were funded, in part or full, by the program.

At least 21 participants (38%) continued some levels of ongoing effort to improve proficiency in a local language.[81] For some of these, organising formal language training involved considerable effort to track down instructors or attend classes. Twenty-four others (45%)[82] – including three of the five *Non-working Partners* (60%)[83] – appreciated the ICOP training as a starting point but did not continue learning a local language for a range of reasons.[84] Developing fluency in a new language seems to have been the impetus for several participants to report a change in future personal or professional plans. Participant #09, for instance, associated her language skills to deep cultural awareness, a much more locally-oriented perspective on her experience,

and a plan to use her host-country skills in her career. Whereas her professional life prior to the assignment had been embedded in various expatriate communities, she says:

> … to live with the locals (you realise) this is their stuff, it's rude to hang out with just foreigners ... you've got to be more polite and talk to people … I didn't think much about this before

4.3 Changing attitudes and perceptions

- **More than one third of the sample (20/55, 36%) emerged with a different view of Australia or its role in the region, often through a combination of increased gratitude and critical awareness. This was most prevalent among *Transitioners* and *Veterans*, sometimes reflected through participants' interactions with host-country nationals or other expatriates.**

- **Participants reported developing a more complex understanding of the pros and cons of international development in terms of its impacts, practices and professional opportunities. An important part of this was better recognition among some about the potentially distinctive contribution of development volunteering, including its use within the program.**

- **In combination, these reported changes suggest the seeds exist for some participants to more fully engage with international development practice and policy, both directly (e.g. voluntary and/or paid work) and/or indirectly through increased general interest in development issues.[85]**

Participants were asked whether their experiences on the program had changed their attitude towards and/or perceptions of three outcomes of interest to the program: (i) Australia, their sense of being 'Australian' and the country's role in the host region, (ii) international aid and development and the role of development volunteering within this, and (iii) the program. The main reported changes relating to each are summarised in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Reported changes of attitude or perception toward Australia, development, and the program

Major change	Sub-themes	Sample interview extract
1. Changed view of Australia[86]	a. Appreciation of and gratitude toward Australia, mainly lifestyle[87]	*(My experience during the assignment) reinforces how lucky we are in Australia with some of the things we take for granted. And whilst some of the things you always get frustrated with here, whether it's processes or whatever, having seen and lived and talked to people who've experienced some really daily challenges but still seem to be very happy and living the best they can, I guess that kind of puts a different perspective on things (#39)*
	b. Australia's involvement in the regional geopolitics[88] and neighbouring countries[89], and their own role representing 'Australia'[90]	*The things that I do and don't do definitely changes people's perception of Australia because that's how I am viewed (#35)*
	c. An 'outsider's perspective' of Australia	*… having Australia reflected back at me in a way that I didn't necessarily view it myself was, I think, a really positive experience. For me, feeling as though I was a very small part of that was a nice feeling, even though I have my own criticisms of Australia's international development and AVI or the AVP program within that (#07)*
	d. More critical perspective of Australia, mainly relating to societal priorities or attitudes[91]	*I'm so grateful that I live in this country, and have access to the things that I have access to, like healthcare and welfare support, it's super amazing. But also (I'm aware of) the things that this country does that are really not okay, and there're definitely things that we, as a country, can learn from places like […] in terms of how to better do things like population wellbeing (#28)*
2. Changes view of aid and development[92]	a. The distinctive role of development volunteering as an effective form of development[93]	*It made me realise how important (the program) is. I thought, when we were signing up for the program, 'Oh this is cool', but I had the idea that it was wasting money because I didn't really see the impacts. Now that I've done it … (it) is absolutely amazing, it's incredible. I didn't think it'd be like this. It certainly changed my expectations because I thought this big development stuff had to be just throwing money at countries … but actually being there … I think it's amazing and incredible and I'm pretty proud to say that I'm an Australia volunteer (#51)*
	b. The complexity (positive and negative) of aid and development[94]	*There's a lot of little spinning wheels in this system of development and I've got a lot better appreciation now of how that all fits together and particularly how people on the ground deal with that. So totally different – the whole mindset that I didn't know much about, you know you read about it in The Economist magazine perhaps, but I was there in it (#22)*

	c. Career opportunities in the sector[95]	*I think getting that kind of up-close insight into how decisions are made … was really eye-opening. I'm still grappling with where I see my place in international development. It definitely hasn't dampened my passion for it, but I think it's just really sent me on a career trajectory that I know that what I do has to come from a rights-based approach and probably have scope for advocacy. So I'm just figuring out what that looks like still (#07)*
3. Changed view of the program[96]	Program's theory of change, including its contradictions[97]	*I see what I did achieve in nearly a year, I start to understand that it really is a long game (#26)*
		It is a different form of aid that Australia supplies, instead of giving money it's like a two-way system, professionals get experience in another place and the other place also should benefit from their skills' (#27)
	The program's cost-effectiveness in terms of value for money[98]	*I was doing practical stuff that can help [colleagues and local community] … we can do that with next to no cost (#25)*
	The impacts of program management (positive and negative) on volunteers' experiences[99]	*If I could have avoided it and then experienced (the career benefits) in another way I would (have), but I feel like this path is possibly the only necessary way to gain that international development experience that most employees want you (to have) to actually be employed in international development (#35)*

4.3.1 Contributors to attitudinal changes

Many of the changes identified by participants reflect the development of more complex and nuanced views. For instance, several participants who enhanced their appreciation of Australia (Table 2, 1a) reported being simultaneously more favourably disposed toward their life in Australia yet more aware of discrepancies between this and conditions in the host country. This contrast was alluded to in many interviews as a trigger for these changed perspectives.

The attributed causes of these attitudinal changes were complex. Many were experiential, emerging as a direct result of seeing the impacts of their own or others' work, or through exposure to distinct forms of development practice, such as sports and development, rights-based approaches, economic empowerment through social enterprise or the contribution of grassroots NGOs in which some participants worked.[100] Very often, participants' view of Australia and their 'Australian-ness'(Table 2, row 1) arose as they reflected on the way in which host-country nationals or other expatriates saw Australia; insights garnered through conversations with locals or through observing attitudes toward other expatriates.[101]

A number of changes were also triggered when participants were exposed to the activities of intergovernmental agencies and/or high commission staff (e.g. Australia's involvement in the regional geopolitics). These came from participants' work – for instance, opportunities for inter-organisation contact and seeing the '*dynamics*' and '*cooperation*' within the sector (especially among *Launchers*)[102] – and through social circles. On the latter, regular meetings with other volunteers, several of which were facilitated by ICMTs, contributed to volunteers' understanding of the breadth and impact of the program and some sector-related career opportunities through the experiences shared. An important implication of this is the benefits provided by these structured in-country events that go beyond the practicalities of the program.[103]

4.4 Overview (individual stories of continuity and change)

Central to the analysis of participants' personal and professional change in *Phase Two* are the comparisons between participants' responses at T1 and T2 relating to their aims for entering the project, and the way in which their plans for their career and/or paid or voluntary work evolved from T1 to T2.

While analysis of these changing plans and goals are provisional, and likely to be impacted further by COVID-19 restrictions in coming months and years, the accompanying document, '**Individual stories of continuity and change'** summarises the trajectory to date of all 55 participants. It draws on participants' responses from both T1 and T2 relating to their future plans (personal and professional) and the features of the assignment influencing these. These accounts are presented in seven sections, relating to each of the seven volunteer types identified in Section 2.2.2.

Building on these stories of individual change, and the data reported in this section, **Table 3** summarises and compares some of the main learning outcomes and changes reported by each of the seven groups of participants. While not intended to be comprehensive, the table provides a précis of the key patterns of behavioural, capability and attitudinal changes reported at T2 by volunteer type.

Table 3: Features of main changes and learning outcomes by volunteer type

Group name	Key features of changes and learning outcomes
1. Launchers	• Most commonly reported developing capabilities relating to: professional domain (domain-specific capabilities), culture, and role performance and management. • Reported a higher than average proportion of learning outcomes relating to their professional domain (including 'overall professional confidence'), career or life priorities, and communication capabilities. • Strong certainty about their future career plans at T2 (5/8). A large proportion (5/8) believe that the knowledge, skills and experiences gained during the assignment will benefit these; most likely to report better awareness of career opportunities in the sector. • Most likely to have instigated a formal study program in a new domain as a result of their experiences on the program (4/8) • Most likely to (have planned to) extend the current assignment with the PO (4/8). • Future plans were strongly affected by COVID-19.
2. Enhancers	• Most commonly reported developing capabilities relating to: role performance and management, culture, and professional domain. • Reported a higher than average proportion of learning outcomes relating to role performance and management capabilities, notably 'managing or coping with uncertainty' and 'managing and implementing change.' • A large proportion reported a major change in career plans from T1 to T2 (4/7). • Strong certainty about future career plans at T2 (4/7).
3. Transitioners	• Most commonly reported developing capabilities relating to: culture, professional domain, and self-awareness. • Reported a higher than average proportion of learning outcomes relating to cultural capabilities, self-awareness (including 'gratitude toward Australia' and 'awareness of how one views the world'), and their professional domain, including 'overall professional confidence.' • While not reporting major changes from T1 to T2 (1/11), all reported having affirmed or rejected a potential career avenue during the assignment, suggesting the assignment may have been utilised to 'test' a specific trajectory (rather than 'explore'). • Most likely to experience a decline in interest to volunteer again from T1 to T2. • A large proportion (8/11) believe that capabilities and experiences accrued will benefit their future career prospects. • Future plans were strongly affected by COVID-19. • Most likely to report a changed perspective of Australia as a result of the assignment (6/11).
4. Career Breakers	• Most commonly reported developing capabilities relating to: role performance and management, culture, and self-awareness. • Reported a higher than average proportion of learning outcomes relating to self-awareness (including 'gratitude toward Australia'), role performance and management capabilities (e.g. 'leadership and self-management skills'), and personal development. • Least certain about future career direction at T2 (4/5).
5. Imposed Transitioners	• Most commonly reported developing capabilities relating to: professional domain, culture, and role performance and management. • Reported a higher than average proportion of learning outcomes relating to their professional domain (notably 'overall professional confidence'), personal development (including 'overall self-confidence'), and interests and hobbies. • Most likely to report a change in career plans from T1 to T2 (5/7). • Least likely to express interest at T2 in volunteering again in the future (instead, expressing a preference for paid positions).
6. Veterans	• Most commonly reported developing capabilities relating to: culture, role performance and management, and situational or contextual. • Reported a higher than average proportion of learning outcomes relating to cultural capabilities, situational or contextual understanding (especially 'understanding of inequality or poverty' and 'awareness of global and geopolitical issues'), and personal development ('patience' and 'openness to difference'). • More likely than most groups to indicate a willingness or openness to volunteer with the program again (9/12). • Most likely to report preferring short-term volunteer assignments only in the future (4/12). • More likely than most groups to report a changed perspective of Australia as a result of the assignment.
7. Non-working Partners	• Great diversity in terms of the impact of the program on future plans. While most were not able to realise their pre-assignment personal aspirations, most reported developing richer understanding of the local culture and greater awareness of Australia's role in, and relationship with, the region. • Most commonly reported developing capabilities relating to: culture, situational or contextual, and personal development. • Reported a higher than average proportion of learning outcomes relating to cultural capabilities, situational or contextual understanding (dispersed outcomes, including 'seeing connections or similarities between home/host countries' and 'awareness of Australia's footprint in the region'), and interests and hobbies.

5. In-country Contact and Support

This section addresses research questions six and seven:[104]

6. Overall, how did participants perceive their contact with and support from the program and its staff during the assignment?

7. What features of participants' program contact and support contributed positively/negatively to their experience (and in what ways)?

5.1 Overall evaluations (preparation and in-country support)

Taken collectively, participants' perceptions of the overall quality of support provided during their assignments were generally positive[105], with judgments ranging from strongly positive to unfavourable. Fifteen participants (27%) were unambiguously positive.[106] These participants described aspects of their preparation and in-country support with terms like '*extremely good*' (#22), '*fantastic*' (#54) and '*amazing … very, very supportive*' (#37).

In contrast, thirteen participants (24%) were generally negative in their appraisal.[107] Participants in this category summarised the program support as '*on the whole, not great*' (#35), '*off the mark*' (#13), and '*a bit sporadic*' (#29).

The remaining 26 participants were more equivocal, expressing both positive and negative judgments, although these tended toward approving especially in relation to contact with in-country staff.

No relationship existed between participants' evaluation of in-country support collected during T2 and the evaluations of pre-assignment contact with the program reported at *Phase One*[108]; however, tentative relationship were observed between participants' overall evaluations and some antecedents, with gender, age and category of PO associated with attitudes toward program support.[109]

5.2 Volunteer professional learning journey (VPLJ) activities

Participants were asked to reflect on the efficacy of VPLJ activities designed to prepare them for their assignments[110], primarily (i) pre-departure briefings (PDB)[111], and (ii) in-country orientation program (ICOP).[112]

i. Pre-departure briefings: Following their assignment, participants were less positive about the PDBs' efficacy than they had been in their baseline interviews.[113] Some described the PDBs as '*repetitive*' (#01), '*compliance-focused*' (#02), and '*redundant*' (#14). Some could recall no features of the PDB that benefitted them during their assignment.[114] As was the case at pre-departure, the main benefits attributed to PDBs were opportunities to meet, learn from and establish relationships with fellow volunteers, while suggestions for improving PDBs again focused on the need for more country-specific and 'practical' content. As with *Phase One*, repeat volunteers saw less value in PDB content and activities.

ii. In-country orientation programs: On the whole, participants viewed the content of the ICOP to be more helpful for their assignment than the PDB content, particularly novice volunteers.[115] Indicative comments about ICOPs included '*comprehensive and useful*' (#51), '*very valuable*' (#31), '*sufficient*' (#37), '*fine*' (#10), and '*comforting, more than adequate*' (#54). Consistent with suggestions about PDBs during *Phase One*,[116] '*practical stuff*' (#32) was most valued. This included language training ('*the most helpful part*'; #28 '*I love the fact that … they invested so much in that part of the assignment*', #14), logistical information (e.g. how to access services like banking, medical advice or public transport), and information about the host country.

The varying quality of ICOP delivery elicited different responses across host countries, with some finding content repetitive of PDBs[117] or not well organised.

5.2.1 Prominent features of VPLJ activities influencing in-country experience

Two prominent themes emerge from the T2 interviews relating to the formal preparation activities: (a) shaping volunteers' expectations about the program and their assignment, and (b) designing ICOP content.

a. Shaping volunteers' expectations about the program and their assignment

Largely reinforcing responses reported in *Phase One*[118] the data highlight the ways in which structured preparation activities shape volunteers' expectations about the program and their assignment. In general, preparation activities instilled strong expectations about the program's professionalism (and thus the type of

support available), the nature of the experience (and therefore possible challenges), and the PO (and so features of the work environment). This suggests that prior to departure, participants were generally clear about the parameters of program support as well as prepared for what they may encounter once on the ground.

Nevertheless, the data show that numerous participants expressed a **disconnect between these expectations and the reality of their placement**. Post-assignment, various participants perceived the program as seeking to 'manage' their pre-assignment expectations by filtering the information they could access, or by presenting them with a sanitized and overly favourable view of the upcoming assignment that was inconsistent with their lived experiences. For example, one participant (#24) – whose assignment was '*amazing*' – felt that, in relation to volunteers' preparation, the program '*get(s) a little protective. They don't want to hear people's struggles or from past volunteers*.' Others found features of their living arrangements, work environment, PO and/or local culture surprising and/or confronting.[119] While some thrived, at least two attributed premature completion of their assignments to unanticipated challenges associated with these. Yet others felt that more realistic previews could be offered of challenges at different stages of the assignment (#04), including information about the dynamics of cultural adjustment (#10).

Four participants[120] suggested more widespread use of former volunteers at PDBs ('*it should be standard practice*', #14), especially those drawn from their assignment's host-country – a theme that was prominent in our recommendations in *Phase One*.[121] At the same time, some participants subsequently questioned the credibility of these contributions in the light of their own experience, feeling that undiluted '*first-hand*' information from former volunteers – which they valued and desired – had been curated to exclude negative experiences. Participant #47, who cut her assignment short and whose experience was generally negative, contrasted the positive experiences that she heard from former volunteers at the PDB with her own experience on assignment:

> The other volunteers … at my [pre-departure] briefing … were all very happy and they had really good experiences … I didn't expect my experience to be 'everything's 100% great' … (but) I kept thinking, 'How can those people have such a good experience when I didn't?'

Counterbalancing these views, some participants – typically *Veterans* – confirmed that the (perceived) high levels of professionalism, care and support that they experienced in PDBs and ICOPs set high expectations for the support they would later receive on-assignment:

> I appreciate the detail in which they went … it's very comforting … it set me up for the expectations I had around the program and what I could rely on them for and the fact that that was that was more than adequate (#54).

b. Designing ICOP content

ICOPs were valued for providing information specific to the context of the volunteer assignment, such as advice about the culture, host language, and day-to-day living. At the same time, a minority of participants shared perspectives on the orientation process that give rise to three themes.

i. The importance of customising content to specific situations: Multiple ICOPs were perceived to give (excessive) emphasis on placements in the host country's capital city[122] neglecting the specific needs of participants assigned to rural placements. Illustrative of these responses, one participant observed that:

> It was just so (capital city)-focused, it didn't apply to […] … including the language, the dress code … the food … it just didn't have any focus for us at all (#09)

Although opportunities to undertake training in local dialects/languages was noted and appreciated at some ICOPs, more often this was reported as necessary but excluded. One participant felt that this was especially important because of the relatively stronger language burdens on volunteers in rural placements (#30); several in isolated locations highlighted the difficulty of accessing language trainers in situ. Another volunteer, responding to a summary draft of this report, observed that '*particular countries present particular challenges/opportunities (for volunteers) …. whether the assignment is in a city/town or in a remote rural area (also) makes a big difference.*'

Similarly, while addressing nation-level safety and security issues was appreciated, information about events that were location-specific (e.g. areas prone to flooding or earthquakes) was sometimes neglected.[123] Others felt that important context-specific details about the PO (#29) or community was overlooked:

> … it's super conservative where I am. It was never expressed that, for example, everyone's … homophobic. I don't identify as part of LGBTIQ community but if I was … you would feel so unsafe.

These concerns, while reflecting a minority of respondents, are thematically consistent with observations by a broader range of participants about their individual needs or situations being overlooked in their preparations. One repeat volunteer who spoke the host-language fluently was sent to language training despite not needing it (#41). Another (#01) with a pre-existing medical condition felt that her wellbeing was not adequately addressed. Others felt that the accommodation made available through POs did not suit their particular circumstances, and that more should have been done to discuss this before arrival.[124] Two[125] wished they had been advised that a previous volunteer had failed or engaged in '*misconduct*' (#09) because, they felt, this contributed to their negative treatment within the host community ('*AVI didn't tell me the context of it, but … other volunteers told me*').

ii. The value of deep context-specific information: On the whole, participants reported benefitting in multiple ways from exposure to context-specific information (e.g. host-country education, economy, health, values systems) at ICOPs from ICMT staff, guest speakers and experienced volunteers. Several of these insights – e.g. gender norms (#07), the importance of relationship over task (#25) - were helpful in resolving workplace issues that arose on assignment *('They all mentioned relationships, which is something I had to work on, making sure that I went and paid appropriate respect to the managers', #25).*

The insights provided by guest speakers were reported as valuable in two ways. First, at some ICOPs the status and quality of speakers was viewed as a sign of respect (e.g. '*high-profile people … it shows a lot of respect that they'll come and do that for volunteers*', #25) – a noted contrast with how some participants felt they were treated in their workplaces and by some (Australian) expatriates (Section 3.2.2). Second, participants found the insights shared by these speakers helpful to understand the context of, and to enrich their experience in, the host country.[126] By way of example, participants explained in detail how the historical and political overviews provided at ICOPs enriched their understanding of '*current tensions in the community*' (#08*)* or political events that unfolded during assignments ('*it was just an amazing experience',* #38)*.*

iii. The value of reinforcing capacity development principles: Participants reflected favourably on content that was designed to help them perform or better focus their capacity development initiatives. PDB and/or ICOP topics relating to approaches to capacity development (e.g. having voices heard during consultations, #08; the sidekick manifesto, #53) or international development concepts (e.g. the program's position with overarching frameworks such as the SDGs)[127] were beneficial in situations where participants' role involved this. One participant (#02) found the ICOP helped her to '*reframe*' her approach from '*coming here and doing work*' to:

> *Creating something that's sustainable after I've gone; I didn't fully appreciate that … it's a good lesson to learn and I think it's a nice focus … the in-country orientation was good (for) their focus on your counterpart*

5.3 In-country contact with, and support from, program staff

Feedback about the support that participants received from ICMTs was mixed, but most participants were generally satisfied with the quality, timeliness and nature of their contact. Illustrative descriptions included: '*wonderful'* (#49), '*helpful'* (#17, #18, #25), '*very quick to respond'* (#20), '*90% of it was really, really good'* (#42), and '*on the ball … (if) you got a problem, they're going to fix it*' (#55). One reported: '*they actually did a very, very good job in terms of helping us fit into the country; settle down; support us; keep track of how we are going and everything else and even to the point where we got evacuated'* (#17).

This generally favourable view was independent of the amount of contact that individual participants had with the program. Some participants with favourable views had substantial contact with in-country program staff.[128] Others – especially repeat volunteers - reported limited contact during their assignment,[129] preferring greater independence ('*I just wanted to get stuck into it and develop my own contacts and lead my own life. I didn't feel like I wanted to be babysat by the program', #07).* Thus, **levels of satisfaction were, to some extent, associated with a positive sense of staff** *availability.* As one participant explained*: 'I can't say I used them or needed to deal with them much but I guess I just knew that they were there'* (#39).

While the quality of support varied across host countries, a contributor to the goodwill that participants felt toward the program was the relationships they established with ICMT staff. Several reported ongoing contacts with ICMT staff post-assignment and of '*positive professional and personal experience with all of the team*' (#37),[130] findings that add weight to the results of *Phase One* – and from earlier research with the program – of the importance of positive informal rapport between program staff and volunteers.[131]

5.3.1 Prominent features of in-country-support impacting participants

Thematic analysis of the data led to the distillation of five features of in-country support that, according to participants, had the strongest impact on their experience: (a) how participants perceived support in relation to its authentic concern for their wellbeing; (b) the poor alignment between volunteer and PO expectations; (c) the limited program support for volunteers experiencing workplace challenges; (d) volunteers' reluctance to seek program support in some situations, and (e) the role in helping volunteers establish informal support networks.

a. A more genuine and proactive interest in volunteer wellbeing

While participants were generally favourable about the availability and responsiveness of in-country teams to their enquiries ('*they were always happy to talk*', #50), a larger number felt ICMTs could have been more proactive than they were[132], and that the lack of periodic contact or pre-emptive offers of support reflected a lack of genuine interest in their wellbeing. One participant described '*their silence (as) a bit deafening*' (#26). This perceived lack of proactive support may be especially deleterious for isolated volunteers[133] or in situations where health and/or security are concerns, like participant #32, who found the limited contact from the program problematic '*especially if you had mental health issues or health issues or work-related issues.*'

On this point, while a number of participants reported favourably on the support that program staff or external providers like ISOS gave during health or security challenges, others were less positive. The importance of this is emphasised by the large numbers (25, or 45% of participants) who reported using ISOS' services for medical attention, hospitalisation or medevac for a range of illnesses or injuries.[134] Five participants reported using the services of *Response Psychological* at some stage during their assignments[135]; several others considered doing so. Some participants reported receiving, in their eyes, inadequate empathy or support from program staff for a range of psychologically or physically challenging circumstances relating to pre-existing health complaints, workplace conflicts, experiencing distressing events, and their security circumstances.[136]

The desire for more proactive contact was often associated with a (perceived) lack of genuine concern for participants' wellbeing[137] a view that some participants contrasted with the '*claustrophobic*' (#26) formal strictures on volunteers to ensure compliance with formal safety/security plans.[138] One participant saw this as the program '*lik(ing) to have processes for the sake of processes*' (#52). Others reported feeling constrained by public diplomacy demands that limited what, and to whom, they could communicate their views.[139] Some participants noted contradictions in the '*formal*' care procedures ('*telling us what we can and can't do*', #09) and the actual concern that they perceived on a day-to-day basis. By way of example, one found the travel compliance requirements '*very controlling*' and '*a bit hypocritical in a lot of ways*' (#43).

Reinforcing this point, several participants reported favourably on circumstances where proactive contact and/or support *was* provided. Participant #19 observed: '*They'd always check, they'd give you a call maybe once a month.*' Another described feeling reassured that '*When someone was in (the host city) they'd just check in with us.*' A *Non-working Partner* (#18) spoke favourably of efforts made by the ICMT to help set up a small voluntary program that involved sharing skills and building relationships within the local community ('*they were visiting a lot … not once but two or three times. They were very helpful … they looked after us very, very well*').

In short, while not reflecting the views of all participants, support patterns used by ICMT viewed most negatively by volunteers were those that were perceived as responsive and compliance-oriented rather than proactive and reflecting a genuine concern for volunteers' wellbeing.

b. Better alignment between volunteers and partner organisation expectations

The feedback reported by participants reflects a disconnect between their expectations of their assignment and their experience in their PO. This concerned not only **the work roles** some participants were asked to do, but also the **assignment's objectives** and **how to work** within the organisation's practices and work culture.

Most prominently, 30 participants (60%)[140] reported substantial differences between the position they had applied and been deployed for, and the one that they found on arrival. In some cases, the discrepancy was vast. One described it as '*very different to what I thought it would be or how it was advertised*' (#03), another as '*not what I signed up for*' (#36). A marketing manager with 26 years of experience reported that she was expected to '*teach people English*', which she was unwilling to do:

> *… I said, I'm not an English teacher, I'm actually not comfortable teaching English. I'm happy to work one on one with people … but I'm not going to do English classes with everybody in the office, I'm not here for that (#26)*

Participants advanced a number of views about why position descriptions were not aligned with their expectations. Six felt that the position description may have been written by someone without a strong understanding of the POs' interests or needs.[141] Another questioned whether the assignments were '*written to appeal to Australians*' rather than scoping '*what the people in-country were requesting help with*' (#43). Four attributed poorly formulated position descriptions to a lack of appropriate analysis of the organisations' requirements.[142] Two[143] recommended hiring qualified volunteers to assist program staff and POs to scope volunteer positions that more accurately reflect the POs' needs and objectives.[144]

By contrast, 11 participants (22%) reported position descriptions that were generally reflective of their assignments.[145] Three were referred candidates who had been involved in creating their own position descriptions while another found the role accurate, but because the staff were unavailable to do the work, several outcomes unachievable.

Misunderstandings also occurred about how the work would be carried out. These extended to issues such as volunteers' autonomy in the workplace (#09), reporting lines (#24) and living arrangements (#43). While capacity development was the core purpose of the program, several participants reported that was not understood in the same way by the PO:[146]

> *… considering the emphasis that AVP put on professional development … I feel like that message maybe wasn't conveyed as effectively or considered as thoroughly as it should have by the organisation (#54)*

One reported a fundamental gap between her and the PO's understanding of the duration of her assignment:

> *My assignment was always a 6-month contract. I confirmed with everyone at every stage of my recruitment, every interview … as soon as I got here, 'We expect you to stay for 1 year.' Every single time I speak to them, 'You're not leaving – I can't believe you're leaving early', 'I'm not leaving early, it was a 6-month contract' (#43)*

Several participants felt that POs were inadequately prepared for – or insufficiently interested in – managing a volunteer productively.[147] This may have been most acute in rural placements (#30). It sometimes related to extraneous situations – for instance, multiple participants arrived to organisations experiencing a funding 'crisis' and two[148] underwent major changes to their assignments (e.g. having to work alone from home) because their POs could not meet operating costs. Nonetheless, at least five[149] reported being grossly underutilized for large parts of the assignment. Some participants questioned the extent to which POs were screened to host volunteers.[150] Others felt the PO was unable to distinguish skilled program volunteers from '*a work experience kid*' (#41) and so utilise the volunteers' expertise in meaningful ways.

Participants attributed insufficient preparation of, or support for, POs as a main reason for poorly scoped position descriptions, linking these to turnover of crucial staff, insufficient resources, inadequate skills and, notably, the unavailability of appropriate staff (including counterparts) with whom volunteers could collaborate.

The consequences of such misalignment manifest in several ways, including:

- Most participants viewing the unexpected position description negatively.
- Some participants reporting giving consideration – and in at least three cases actually deciding[151] – to leave the assignment prematurely because of conflicting expectations attached to the role.
- Some participants reporting limited opportunities to apply the skills (they believed) they had been hired for, a potential factor in some *Transitioners* being less willing to consider future assignments.[152]
- Some participants[153] believing greater accountability on POs to design, manage and support appropriate assignments was warranted, while others believed ICMTs needed to:

  … do a lot more when volunteers first arrive to their partner organisations, to work, to get volunteers and partner organisations working together well, very quickly, and overcoming some of those differences of what do they expect (#26)

- Some participants perceiving they were used as an additional 'resource' rather than for any strategic contribution or capacity development, and others feeling that PO staff were unwilling to discipline volunteers because they viewed them primarily as '*program volunteers*' rather than '*staff*':

  'I think they don't see my accountability directly as an equal member of staff like the others, it's a bit external … they feel less right to complain [about volunteers]' (#04).[154]

c. More program support during conflict with partner organisations

One area where support from the in-country team was most criticised was when conflicts and disagreements emerged between volunteers and POs.[155] For example, when participant #09 sought help to manage a disagreement about her role early in her assignment, she '*just felt like (program staff) didn't really want to deal with it … (they) kept brushing it under the rug.*' Participant #24 had a dispute with a PO that '*came to a bit of a head and AVI got involved*', but found the assistance '*wishy-washy … (they) just said, 'Oh well [the organisation] shouldn't be doing that.*' Another (#05) reported a second-hand account of a former volunteer exiting an assignment because the program reportedly provided insufficient support to deal with a case of workplace bullying.

In a small number of cases, participants believed that these conflict situations were recurring issues experienced by former volunteers in the PO. In one case (#02), a repeated dispute with the PO was not adequately addressed in spite of the involvement of ICMT staff ('*There's been a lot of previous volunteers [at the same PO] that have had similar experiences*').

Again, these instances had consequences for the volunteers and the success of the assignments:

- Of the six participants who discontinued their assignments prior to the scheduled end date, disagreements with management – and, in one case, an accusation of bullying – were common.
- Three other volunteers who experienced uncomfortable workplace relationships also reported considering premature ends to their assignment at the time of COVID-19 repatriations.[156]

d. Making program support available for sensitive issues or situations

Participants in a range of situations reported incidents that they were reluctant to share with, or to seek advice from, the ICMT. These reports came from participants in multiple countries, relating to a variety issues, and for different reasons that included concerns about the potential impact on POs' reputation, POs' ability to access future volunteers, or the complications that reporting it might create for local staff:[157]

Anytime you'd say something, you were damaging the relationship between the organisation and AVP…. I don't want them to compromise their ability to get volunteers in the future or find other opportunities (#29)

Participants also noted the difficulty experienced by female volunteers discussing gender-sensitive issues – including sexual harassment – with (male) ICMT staff[158] and concerns regarding confidentiality breaches in their dealings with program staff.[159] Another chose to consult volunteers rather than ICMT on issues relating to gender discrimination in her workplace ('*the younger women especially; I think there was three or four of us*

(who) had the same issues, so we were able to support each other', #30). In another case it was the strong local networks of the ICMT that led to a reluctance to report an issue:

> *… a lot of [volunteers] felt like … they couldn't express our worries or concerns to the AVP [staff] … so we all kind of felt well if we have a problem … then they might actually hamper your ability to come back and work in the [host country] … and because it's such a small country if you do a particular thing you generally can't hide that (#35)*

e. Nurturing informal volunteer support networks

Participants drew tangible in-country benefits from the informal networks that began forming at PDBs[160] and that were forged at ICOPs ('*the bonding really is the main thing from those (ICOP) sessions*', #24; '*it was a good time to get to know the other volunteers which I think was really, really important*', #09). Periodic *'get togethers'* and events coordinated by in-country staff were also valuable platforms for reinforcing these networks. While some participants were ambivalent about their purpose ('*They were fine … I'm not sure really it made a difference'* #39), the majority who attended events found them '*excellent*' (#31).

Benefits included establishing or strengthening relationships with a diverse group of volunteers and hearing about other volunteers' challenges ('*everybody shares their experiences and talks about challenges and opportunities and that was incredible for us to hear challenges that other people are facing*', #31)[161], as well as practical benefits such as social, logistic, and/or emotional sustenance.[162] One (#32) described having:

> *… a WhatsApp, there were always things on … 'I might go to this movie' or, 'We might go away this weekend, anyone want to go?' … you never felt lost … someone might put up on the WhatsApp, 'I need some glasses, can anyone recommend where could go?'*

Of note is the large number of participants making reference to *International Volunteer Day* events,[163] discussing their own (sometimes prominent) roles in these, opportunities to share, learn and network, and the motivations that these provided for their volunteering efforts.

These periodic events seemed to be especially beneficial for participants working in rural and regional locations, for the '*break*' that visiting more populated areas provides, and for the opportunity to network with volunteers, a point that city-based volunteers, some of whom tended to take the events for granted, may not have fully appreciated. Importantly, these program-facilitated activities provided a firm bedrock upon which volunteers' support and social relationships were founded (Section 3.2.4).

5.4 Managing COVID-19 repatriations

Most of the 38 participants repatriated between February and April 2020[164] expressed disappointment with the decision, particularly at a time when they felt their work output was beginning to be more productive:

> *I do feel deflated … because I'm stressed that they're missing out on what we had started (#49)*
>
> *… disappointed to be leaving. … (I'm safely here (in Australia) but I'm more disappointed that I had to finish my assignment [prematurely] (#37)*

Notwithstanding these feelings, **participants were overwhelmingly positive in their evaluations of the way that the program and ICMT oversaw their rapid repatriation**.[165] This positive appraisal extended to the planning, communication and mobilization procedures, as well as the empathy and support shown by program staff. Illustrative of this was one participants' summary that:

> *… (the staff) were amazing … AVP looked after us so well … getting us out safely, changes to flights, people were dealing with such stressful situations. And AVP just took that all out of our hands (#23)*

Most participants were conscious of the scale of the program's workload ('*I feel for them, because I think there's about 400 volunteers they had to repatriate back in a short time*', #33) and the changing nature of the timeframe:

> *They all did a very good job with the situation. It was a very stressful time, to be honest, the situation was changing so rapidly – every hour. The country team was only getting information a few minutes before we were getting it, so they were also waiting. I think the country team did the best that they could with a bad situation (#37)*

While isolated incidents of dissatisfaction were reported (see box below), in general participants were satisfied with, appreciative of, and comforted by the quality and frequency of communication/information and the effort that went into this. Of note is that similarly favourable views were expressed regarding the program's information and support during other temporary regional 'evacuations' pre-COVID[166] including incidents requiring the provision of safety equipment to volunteers (#48). Pertinently, participants whose contact with the program was mixed were equally favourable in their appraisal of the program's management of the repatriation: '*Look they've done a really good job during the evacuation and I have to clap them for that*' (#13).

At least three participants[167] were disappointed that their request to remain in-country was not supported; however, these grievances were generally not attributed to the program. As one typical response observed, '*It's not the program's fault; it's just the nature of things*' (#30). Another, who had requested – via her PO - to remain on assignment rather than be repatriated, observed that she and her colleagues:

> *… all got personal responses from each of them. You know I got a personal response from [identified in-country staff] …. […] responded to my partner organisation, so you know during that process we never really felt neglected or anything like that, they were very, very thorough, so they managed that really well (#46)*

Most participants found the quantity and timeliness of information available to volunteers during the repatriation adequate; some wanted more while others wanted less ('*There was a lot of emails that we probably didn't need*', #37). Others appreciated being able to opt in to discussions ('*To have the regional director have the daily Q & A sessions was really, really useful*', #37).

COVID-19 repatriations: Participants' suggestions

Just two participants reported major dissatisfactions with the repatriation process. Participant #30, with an assignment based in a rural setting described the repatriation as '*a big drama*' because of changing transport policies which:

> *… made me even more isolated … so we ended up having to book a car to drive … and try to get there before the roads were blocked and they cancelled domestic flights … a little bit stressful but at the same time, I know it wasn't the program's fault … we did help each other as volunteers*

Participant #21, who had been in the host country for several years at the time of the repatriation, found it unfair that '*they treated everyone exactly the same*' without considering that:

> *… we had years worth of stuff that we essentially just had to leave. It was like leaving a war zone. We could have sold quite a bit of that stuff and the financial burden wouldn't have been so bad … I think that there should be some availability of a fund or some sort of appeal where you can say, 'Is there any way of getting compensated for any of my possessions in life that I've had to leave there?'*

Another volunteer (#26), also in a remote location, and who reported generally unfavourable overall support from the program, felt that the concerns of POs were prioritised over those of volunteers during repatriation, noting:

> *I just found that to be quite cold. There was a lot of care expressed to the partner organisations in that, oh, you know, it'll be about your needs and all this sort of stuff, but very little to me, very little at all (#26)*

A small number of participants suggested better communication with POs. One (#17) reported PO staff being unaware of the volunteers' imminent repatriation on the day of their departure, while another had to explain their departure to local colleagues in the host-country language that she had started learning 6 months earlier (#30).

While the bulk of participants' feedback on their post-repatriation support related to the allowance, one was dissatisfied with the limited information made available to assist repatriated volunteers after their return– specifically, procedures to register for government financial support (#13):

> *When I was doing my MyGov situation, where does the volunteering fit? Was it a full-time gig or is it a sub-contract gig … they did an FAQ about it but they didn't go into the specifics.*

5.4.1 Repatriation allowance as a support

The post-repatriation allowance was seen as helpful and sufficient,[168] and offered different benefits. For some, it provided '*peace of mind (to) be more flexible*' *(#25)* at an uncertain period of isolation during which:

> *[My future work] is a bit up in the air … I am doing okay because we still get our three-month allowance, so it does set me up for some time (#30)*

The allowance also helped motivate and enable participants to continue providing voluntary support to POs after their return to Australia (see Section 4.1.2).[169]

In this, the repatriation allowance – along with volunteer grants awarded in-country[170] – seems to have been an important investment in participants' on-going contributions to POs. This issue is discussed further in the recommendations that follow.

5.5 Recommendations for improving program support

Drawing primarily on the data reported in Section 5, we summarise some key lessons emerging from participants' descriptions of their in-country experiences, and in particular the support that they received from the program. We present these as a series of seven tentative recommendations intended to improve the in-country experiences of volunteers and non-working partners.

5.5.1 Supporting volunteers' preparation for their assignment

i. Providing realistic assignment previews. When combined with the findings of *Phase One*, participants' responses highlight tensions associated with preparing volunteers appropriately to support productive assignments (i.e. positive experiences and contributions for volunteers, and responsiveness to POs needs and priorities). While the importance of being 'open to the unexpected' was reiterated at PDBs and noted by several participants before commencing their assignment[171], it was clear that some felt there were discrepancies between the 'image' of the in-country experience that was presented at PDBs (e.g. the assignment challenges, support and information made available) and that which they experienced (Section 5.2.1).

Focusing on certain types of pre-deployment information at different stages of preparation and deployment may be beneficial in limiting information overload and mitigating some of the anticipatory anxieties reported in *Phase One*.[172] On balance, however, participants' responses suggest that greater efforts to provide volunteers with a less filtered and more realistic preview of their assignment would be preferred. This may be especially helpful for volunteers undergoing major transitions in the role they perform (e.g. position, sector), the PO in which they work (organisation type, culture) and/or the host destination (e.g. cultural differences, living arrangements, isolation).[173]

While these transitions will be more salient for particular volunteers, participants' responses point to potential benefits from active efforts to expose them to the direct and diverse realities of their assignments as a central objective of their VPLJ. Ways that the program might help volunteers develop more realistic assignment expectations include synchronous or asynchronous contact with POs, current and/or former ICMT staff and/or experienced volunteers (in-country or returned). In particular, it is likely that opportunities for contact with a variety of future PO colleagues may be especially valuable to clarify roles and contexts – and, potentially, elicit more positive perceptions of program support (Section 5.1).

In general, while direct forms of interaction are likely to be most beneficial for volunteers, video 'postcards' created by PO staff (or current volunteers or ICMTs) may provide insights into living and working conditions[174] as well as give PO staff an early stake in the volunteers' in-country contribution. Similarly, volunteers may derive beneficial local perspectives from the ICMT recording workshops with PO staff or other locals, or making written insights and outcomes available to volunteers prior to their departure.

To support these initiatives, feedback from participants about the efficacy of their preparation during the assignment is likely to be a useful basis for ongoing improvements to ensure expectations are met.

> **Recommendation 1a:** That the program seek to focus (some) Volunteer Professional Learning Journey activities on providing volunteers with direct access to POs, ICMTs, and/or returned volunteers that can help clarify for each volunteer the context they are entering with: (i) the volunteer role, (ii) the PO environment, (iii) the living conditions in the host city/country/region, and/or (iv) support available from the program. The aim of such activities would be to enhance how volunteers prepare psychologically and practically for their assignment, and to have sufficient resources (skills and support mechanisms) to enable them to take advantage of their assignments' opportunities and to mitigate or prevent excessive challenges.

> **Recommendation 1b:** That the program consider introducing greater transparency measures about the engagement between ICMT and POs in defining the assignment description, with particular efforts to help volunteers understand this process and its position as part of the cross-institution partnership.

ii. Balancing efficiencies and specificity in VPLJ content (including for remote participants). Curating a suite of preparation activities that are relevant and appreciated by diverse participants is a challenge and may not be efficient. Nonetheless, efforts to tailor ICOP content more closely to the diversity of volunteers' needs within each country may help reduce the gap between initial expectations and the reality of their assignment. This may be particularly important for volunteers deployed to areas outside the capital city, who have specific needs in terms of preparation (e.g. language, culture) and support (Section 5.2.1). In situations where one or a few program volunteers are deployed to isolated areas, consideration may be given to fostering PO collaborations or partnerships with other IVCOs hosting volunteers in these regions to supplement program preparation content with more location-specific support (including language training).

Further, while participants tended to value country- or locality-specific content from the ICOP most strongly, some participants felt that ICOPs would benefit from ICMTs receiving stronger support and coordination from the program's head office. On this, it is feasible that efforts to encourage greater sharing of information and ideas across ICMTs may also help overcome some of the unevenness in quality reported across destinations. The data suggests that similar approaches for sharing support features may also be beneficial.

POs are well placed to support here if appropriately encouraged and supported by the program.

> **Recommendation 2:** That the program support ICMTs to review ICOP contents and/or activities to ensure they are inclusive of the diversity of volunteers' needs, including those of volunteers deployed to remote areas. In doing this, the program may consider opportunities to include (and encourage) POs in supporting each other as part of their program 'partnership plans' to help individually and collectively prepare, orient and support volunteers for specific features of the destination, role, organisation, and/or culture as well as capacity development interests.

iii. Sustaining a focus on locally-led capacity development strategies appropriate to the assignment. We reported in *Phase One* that some participants with limited exposure to development practices had appreciated being introduced at PDBs to practices and values associated with capacity development.[175] While this helps, the data here indicate discrepancies between how some volunteers and POs understood the needs and methods of locally-led capacity development (Section 3.2.1). This adds weight to the value of ensuring volunteers receive ongoing orientation to principles and practices associated with locally-led capacity development in conjunction with other stakeholders like program staff, POs, and DFAT.

> **Recommendation 3:** That the program review how the theory and practice of locally-led capacity development is addressed and supported throughout the volunteer assignment. This could start at PDBs and be consolidated at different points in the assignments during in-country meetings such as ICOPs, annual meetings, or ad-hoc workshops or functions. Ensuring that the PO is a core participant in such discussions, which may need to be facilitated by program staff in some instances, could build mutual understanding about the volunteers' function and accountability to POs, drawing on local context knowledge as well as partnership plans and priorities agreed between the program and POs.

5.5.2 In-country support

i. Proactively supporting volunteers' wellbeing. Many participants were positive about in-country program support and care, and the data indicated that the program and ICMT were highly proficient in supporting volunteers through a range of challenging situations and emergencies.

Nonetheless, some participants expressed concerns that day-to-day in-country support provided by the program fell short of supporting their wellbeing in a holistic sense: notably managing their health, safety and security. Similarly, where conflicts between volunteer(s) and their PO arose we find examples of volunteers who did not find the support satisfactory (Section 5.3.1). Instances also existed where volunteers found it not appropriate to seek support from ICMT (Section 5.3.1). These can be complex areas and the data did not allow us to draw general conclusions about why.

Perceptions of a lack of genuine care and support can contribute to a range of negative consequences for the program (Section 5.3.1).[176] Perceived reasons for staff not providing what was seen as authentic support included under-resourced ICMTs, insufficient skills to prepare POs for the volunteer's arrival, concerns about whether confidentiality would be maintained, and a focus on procedural compliance. In this context, some volunteers preferred to engage less with program staff and relied more on their informal network(s) for support or, in an extreme case, disengaging from taking the role seriously. This highlights the need for greater ongoing support and interaction between the ICMT and POs as well as volunteers.

We are aware that volunteers are considered employees of the PO[177] and the commitment of ICMT to volunteers' interests is counter-balanced by the comparatively long-term relationships that they (aim to) nurture with POs as part of program partnership plans and objectives.[178] This opens issues of trust or confidence. It also emphasises complexities associated with the triangular relationship between program, PO and volunteer, and the importance of helping POs articulate their needs and priorities. A holistic approach to these issues may help the program manage their relationship with volunteers productively.

> **Recommendation 4a:** That the program review how the relationships between ICMT, volunteers and POs can be framed to enhance mutual understanding of each other's roles, including how to address conflicts. Creating fora where volunteers and POs can be brought together in open, supportive and non-threatening environments may help to nurture constructive relationships and understanding.
>
> **Recommendation 4b:** That the program instigate consultations with ICMT, and provide sufficient support where needed, to enable them to: (i) provide more regular, informal and proactive contact with volunteers during their assignments to allow issues of wellbeing, comfort or satisfaction to be raised, and (ii) review how procedures for handling issues of sensitivity are understood and implemented, and to ensure that these are made clear and accessible to volunteers. Opportunities for ICMT to exchange and/or benchmark approaches may be a beneficial part of this (as per recommendation 2).

ii. Closing the gap between volunteer and PO expectations. Interviews did not directly address what information, if any, participants were given about the relationship between the program and the POs. Moreover, the program's responsibility for aligning expectations and agreements between the three actors – program (including ICMT), volunteer, and PO – is not clear from the data available.

Nonetheless, reducing the apparent gap in expectations (Section 5.3.1) may be assisted by more clarity and transparency about the partnership plan and objectives agreed between the program and POs. The partnership plan could provide the context for volunteers to contribute to any locally-led capacity development goals, and provide the basis for an agreed framework for review in the first two months of the assignment, between volunteer and PO, of the assignment description that 'make any necessary amendments to better reflect the partner organisation's current priorities.'[179] Given the room for unsatisfactory outcomes – not only for volunteers, but also POs and the program – this may be an area that provides a tangible and clearer framework for how volunteers fit in to the long-term partnership objectives of the program and the PO.

> **Recommendation 5:** That the program consider how to better align the expectations of POs and volunteers and ensure that supporting documents, such as the Australian Volunteers Guidebook, assignment descriptions, and details of volunteer living and working conditions, minimise the scope for unmatched expectations.

iii. Nurturing informal volunteer networks or communities of practice. The data reinforce findings from *Phase One*[180] of the value of interactive and social components of PDBs and ICOPs as springboards for

volunteers to establish and foster what could be seen as emerging communities of practice (CoPs). CoPs are networks of individuals based around similar experiences, interests or purpose in which knowledge is shared and meaning jointly created, and in which participants learn through a process of increasingly complex involvement in the community.[181] **Attachment 9** summarises some features of CoPs in more detail.

The interview data suggest that these informal communities can be important mechanisms through which volunteers collectively construct and share understandings of the program, the volunteering experience, and their assignments. Of particular interest is the ways in which such networks may help sustain volunteers during assignments by exposing them to a support network that includes experienced volunteers and/or other development practitioners. The support of these networks may be especially beneficial to *Non-working partners* and/or isolated volunteers. The data suggest that the program's continued support for the social aspects of VPLJ and in-country events facilitated by ICMTs – including compensating volunteers' attendance and involvement – seems appropriate, although the extent and efficacy of these did differ across country.

Informal CoPs, fostered through these events, may be platforms for ongoing engagement with the program and its philosophies (Section 4.2), and so provide an important connection between volunteers' involvement with the program pre-, during and post-assignment. At the same time, we see benefits in the program considering ways to help volunteers to nurture more diversified in-country support networks and ongoing interactions with diverse stakeholders. Program-sponsored events or social functions that include, for example, host-country nationals - including PO staff - and/or international aid/development practitioners, may be especially valued by some volunteers (e.g. those interested in sector-focused careers) and may help ensure positive in-country and subsequent experiences. The best example of this reported by participants was *International Volunteer Day* (or week) activities, where events brought together volunteers and diverse stakeholders (including from POs). These sorts of volunteer-focused activities could be complemented by other activities that, for example, help different POs showcase their partnerships with the program and include ways of working with volunteers and other stakeholders. Such events could be focused socially or on specific relevant topics related, for example, to locally-led capacity development or country priorities, challenges and innovations.

> **Recommendation 6:** That the program consider ways to actively promote and support inclusive and continuous learning and informal networking opportunities across volunteers, POs and communities in which volunteers operate through connections locally, nationally or regionally.

5.5.3 Post-assignment support

i. Supporting volunteers to continue contributing to partner organisations after their assignment. On the whole, the data indicate that the program was able to use highly effective practices in the lead up to, and during, repatriations.

Of note is the apparently high levels of post-assignment support that volunteers provided POs after their repatriation (Section 4.1.2) and the influence that post-assignment allowances played in facilitating this (Section 5.4.1). While it was not raised directly in interviews, no participants indicated that they had contacted or advised program staff about this ongoing civic engagement or 'residual volunteering', suggesting that important post-assignment contributions to POs may yet to be fully accounted for. It seems feasible that considering a broader suite of post-repatriation support and/or guidance for returning volunteers may help facilitate ongoing volunteering and/or connections with POs that can make important contribution to the program's objectives. In such circumstances, efforts to document and/or measure the nature and outcomes of these contributions are likely to expand understanding the breadth and depth of the program's impact.

> **Recommendation 7a:** That the program continues to extend a repatriation allowance to volunteers in situations where assignments are discontinued owing to natural or health disasters, particularly when there is an opportunity to finalise outstanding objectives.

> **Recommendation 7b:** Where feasible and consistent with the program's employment relationships with volunteers, that the program consider providing optional post-repatriation support for volunteers and/or POs to facilitate volunteers' longer-term engagement with the assignment or partnership objectives. These could be discussed and agreed prior to departure and could potentially involve ongoing support to POs (and data collection on the impact of this), as well as mentoring new volunteers in-country with the same PO. Such an approach could feasibly be linked to the program's emerging mentor initiative.

6. Next steps

Building on the results reported here and the study's overarching objectives identified in Section 2.1, the primary objectives identified for participants' post-assignment interview (interview T3) are to:

1. Explicate the nature of personal and professional changes in participants across the study period that are of relevance to the program;

2. Offer explanations for these changes, drawing on participants' experiences to date with the program (pre-, during and post-assignment) and their reflections on their experiences with the program;

3. Present a critical review of participants' contact with the program since the completion of their assignment, excluding their repatriation.

The following steps are planned for the remainder of *Phase Two*:

- Interviews are proposed to take place between December 2020 and July 2021. **Attachment 10** provides an abbreviated interview schedule, approved by UTS human research ethics committee, and a summarised timetable for interviews. Consistent with the study's design, the interview schedule addresses both time-specific themes (post-assignment program contact) and replicable themes, allowing for the option of additional waves of data collection to be considered beyond 2021.

- Analysis of interview T3 will again incorporate both cross-sectional (i.e. summarising and comparing participants' post-assignment experiences) and longitudinal elements (examining plausible relationships between T1, T2 and T3 responses). This includes addressing 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 and engagement mechanisms provided by the program. As indicated in *Phase One*, 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).

- **Table 4** summarises the main activities for the remainder of *Phase Two*. It includes provisions for two activities that are incorporated in the current sub-contractor agreement and intended to improve the study's reliability and integration with the program's broader objectives. These activities, marked in the table with asterisks, involve a RAVN team workshop and focus group discussions with returned volunteers (including but not confined to LSAV participants). Both activities are included pending easing of restrictions due to COVID-19. We propose discussions with program staff in early 2021 to confirm details and scheduling of these.

Table 4: Overview of project timeline and main deliverables for T3

Stage	Main activities	Timeframe (2020-22)	Main deliverables
Data collection (T3)	- Participant contact and interviews - Transcriptions - Data management	December 2020 to July 2021	- Participant overview (T3) - Participant case files
Data analysis (T3)	- Individual Case Files - Cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis - Critical analysis of post-assignment experience (e.g. contact with RAVN) - Workshop with RAVN team to integrate findings* - Interpretive discussions of outcomes with participants (focus groups)* - Draft final report (Phase Two)	May 2021 to January 2022	- RAVN team workshop* 2 x participant focus groups* - Draft final report
Sensemaking and reporting	- Consultation on draft report - Sensemaking workshop - Final report	February 2022	- Sensemaking workshop - Final report
Ongoing participant engagement	- Project website - Participant outreach and updates	Ongoing throughout project	- Updated program website - Project infographics and summaries

Endnotes

[1] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Final Report (October 2019).

[2] Changes to interview schedules were approved by Mr Jake Phelan, Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Manager, and Mr Farooq Dar, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Advisor, (emails 27 March and 1 April 2020), and by the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee (27 March 2020).

[3] Attachment 16, Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final Report October 2019.

[4] Fifty-four of the 55 interviews were completed by May 2020. When approached in April, one participant (#21) requested deferring the interview until a later date. This interview was conducted on 14 August 2020.

[5] These mitigation strategies were approved by Mr Jake Phelan (Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Manager) and Mr Farooq Dar (Evaluation and Learning Advisor) in April 2020.

[6] Menard, S. (1991). *Longitudinal Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

[7] Systematic differences between groups of participants has the potential to distort subsequent analysis if participants with extreme features on some variables of interest are disproportionately represented in one group experiencing different assignments to others (de Vaus, D. A. 2002, *Surveys in Social Research, 5th Edition.* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin).

[8] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase Two Progress Report (April 2020).

[9] Based on between group comparison using the non-parametric tests: Krushkal-Wallis (mean age at pre-departure) and Pearson's chi-square (continuing formal study, career stage). Results available upon request.

[10] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers: Phase One Inception Report (April 2019), Section 4.2.

[11] 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?"

[12] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final Report October 2019, section 4.1.3.

[13] Participants #01, #03, #04, #12, #17, #19, #20, #24, #25, #26, #27, #28, #33, #37, #38, #39, #40, #45, #48, #51, #53 and #54.

[14] Participants #02, #05, #06, #07, #08, #09, #10, #11, #13, #15, #16, #18, #20, #23, #29, #31, #32, #34, #35, #42, #43, #44, #46, #49, #52 and #55.

[15] Participants #14, #21, #30, #36, #41, #47 and #50.

[16] Forty-seven percent of participants who had volunteered with the program previously (9/19) reported an overall positive experience. For first-time volunteers, this was 36% (13/36). For age bands under 25, 26-35 and 55 plus, the level of positive experience is fairly similar between 35% and 37.5%. All five participants in the 46-55 age band reported a positive experience. Fifty percent of volunteers aged 46 and over reported a positive experience. Four of the seven negative experiences were reported by volunteers aged 26-35.

[17] Assignments in 'East Asia' accounts for 45% of all positive reports but just 35% of participants, while 28% of participants in 'South Asia and Africa' reported negative experiences (compared with 13% of all participants). Experiences of participants in 'Asia Archipelago' were most likely to be mixed.

[18] Data provided by Mr Jake Phelan (Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Manager) via email on 02 April 2020 suggest approximately 10% of program assignments result in premature return.

[19] Smith, F.M. et al. (2010), 'Enlivened Geographies of Volunteering: Situated, Embodied and Emotional Practices of Voluntary Action', *Scottish Geographical Journal* 126(4), pp. 258-274.

[20] Australian Volunteer Program Global Program Strategy 2018-2022 p.6.

[21] 2020 AVP Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, p. 4.

[22] "Prior to departure, you will have received an Assignment Description outlining the main focus of your assignment and what it aims to achieve. Once you commence your assignment, you and your partner organisation are expected to review the Assignment Description together, and make any necessary amendments to better reflect the partner organisation's current priorities" p.24 (AVP Volunteers Guidebook, 2019 edition).

[23] Schech, S., et al. (2020), 'International Volunteerism and Capacity Development in Nonprofit Organizations of the Global South', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 49(2): 252-271.

[24] Previous studies have indicated that volunteers may be categorised differently to other 'outsider' development practitioners, in part because of the goodwill associated with their roles as volunteers. McWha, I. (2011), 'The roles of, and relationships between, expatriates, volunteers, and local development workers', *Development in Practice*, 21(1), 29–40.

[25] Australian Volunteer Program Global Program Strategy (2018-2022).

[26] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.3.2.

[27] Meneghini, A.M. (2016), 'A meaningful break in a flat life: The motivations behind overseas volunteering', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(6), pp. 1214-1233.

[28] Australian Volunteer Program Global Program Strategy (2018-2022), p.6.

[29] Example participants #15, #16 and #53.

[30] Participants #04 and #48.

[31] Participants #24, #29 and #47.

[32] Participants #08, #15, #43 and #55.

[33] Participants #03, #15 and #16.

[34] Participants #49, #48 and #55.

[35] Example participants #23 and #37.

[36] Participants #14, #21 and #50.

[37] Smith, F.M. et al. (2010), 'Enlivened Geographies of Volunteering: Situated, Embodied and Emotional Practices of Voluntary Action', *Scottish Geographical Journal* 126(4), pp. 258-274.

[38] Data were drawn primarily from sections of interviews devoted to participants' future at both T1 and T2 although participants proffered relevant details at other points of the interview, including discussions about the program, their in-country experiences, and (where applicable) their repatriation. Exemplar questions relating to participants' future plans included: 'Where do you see yourself in five years?', 'What plans do you have for the future?' Specific details were sought about participants' intentions to volunteer overseas again, their intentions to engage with the aid and development sector, as well as their future involvement with the PO, the program, and with initiatives like public diplomacy.

[39] Includes changes to post-retirement plans for those participants not planning to continue paid employment or work after the assignment (mainly *Veterans*). Some participants reported both a major change to their direction as well as greater clarity in affirming and/or rejecting a direction. The final figure includes the following participants: #01, #02, #03, #04, #06, #07, #08, #09, #11, #12, #14, #18, #19, #20, #21, #22, #23, #24, #26, #28, #29, #30, #33, #35, #37, #38, #39, #40, #47 #43, #46, #49, #51, #52 #53 and #54.

[40] Participants: #01, #02, #03, #06, #09, #11, #14, #18, #20, #23, #33, #40, #43, #46 and #49.

[41] In this context, meaningful change refers to changes to reported future plans relating to (i) direction (e.g. returning to study rather than work), (ii) location (e.g. from international to domestic, or from 'global' to one particular country), (iii) sector (e.g. from humanitarian aid to social enterprise), or (iv) profession (e.g. from teaching to policy adviser).

[42] Analysis here draws on both comparisons between responses provided at T1 and T2, as well as participants' stated claims of change. In most cases, these aspects of participants' future were spoken about as their work, study and/or career plans; that is, intentions to use their professional expertise as a vocation in paid or voluntary positions in the future For *Non-Working Partners* and *Veterans*, these future plans relate to the application of their professional training and/or past career experiences to post-retirement paid and/or voluntary activities; for other participants, it typically involved them discussing a professional 'career.'

[43] *Imposed Transitioners*: #01, #23, #40. *Enhancers*: #02, #03, #09 and #14.

[44] Participants #01, #04, #06, #07, #12, #19, #22, #23, #24, #26, #28, #29, #37, #51, #52 and #54.

[45] Participants #08, #20, #21, #24, #30, #35, #38, #39, #47 and #53. Participant #24 reported both reaffirming and rejecting.

[46] Participants #01, #02, #03, #06, #07, #08, #09, #12, #18, #19, #20, #22, #23, #24, #28, #29, #33, #37, #38, #40, #43, #46, #49, #51, #52 and #54.

[47] Participants #11, #13, #14, #35 and #42.

[48] Participants: #01, #07, #08, #09, #12, #13, #14, #19, #20, #21, #23, #24, #26, #27, #29, #37, #39, #40, #43, #45, #51, #52 and #54.

[49] Participants #12, #20, #23, #39 and #43.

[50] Excluded cases where this was attributed to COVID-19.

[51] Participants #12, #20 and #43.

[52] Participants # 43 (homesickness) and #12 (working partner).

[53] Participants #23 and #39.

[54] Participants: #04, #08, #29 and #54.

[55] Participants: #03, #11, #18, #20, #23, #28, #33, #43, #46, #51. Of note is that these decisions were not always strategic. One participant enrolled in (and commenced) a new study program in order to fill time on assignment; a retired Veteran wanted to refine skills in an extra-role activity that he (unexpectedly) performed as part of his assignment. He believes there may be opportunities to use these skills volunteering domestically in the future.

[56] Participants whose study plans reflect a distinctive features of the local culture: #43 and #45; participants whose planned studies involve the cross-cultural application of their professional training or backgrounds: #08 and #33.

[57] Participants: #55, #18, #02, #09, #14, #31, #43, #51, #46, #37, #20, #40, #01, #07, #06, #08, #12 and #29.

[58] Participants: #45, #31, #04, #30, #44, #47, #27, #42, #36, #39, #41 and #52.

[59] These figures include only those respondents making explicit statements about the clarity of their future direction (e.g. 'I really have no idea'). It excludes responses where these views were COVID-19 related.

[60] Participants intending to or extending their assignment: #03, #04, #13, #19, #21, #24, #27, #37, #44, #49 and #52. Two of these (#04 and #37) had already extended at the time of interviews; others were repatriated before the extension was activated. Percentage excludes five *Non-working Partners*.

[61] Example participants #01, #42 and #55.

[62] Participants who expressed openness or intention to volunteer with the program again in the future: #03, #04, #06, #09, #10, #11, #12, #16, #17, #18, #20, #22, #23, #24, #25, #26, #28, #30, #33, #36, #37, #40, #42, #43, #48, #49, #51, #54 and #55.

[63] Participants: #01, #07, #14, #35, #39, #41, #47 and #50.

[64] Excludes cases where this was attributed to COVID-19 restrictions.

[65] Participants: #16, #33 and #49.

[66] Participants: #10, #17, #22 and #48.

[67] Example participants #01, #26, #35 and #39.

[68] Participants who contributed to provide support and 'service' to POs after the completion of their assignment: #02, #03, #05, #07, #08, #09, #10, #14, #15, #17, #20, #22, #23, #24, #25, #26, #27, #28, #33, #35, #36, #37, #45, #46, #49, #51, #54 and #55. An additional 2 participants (#13, #16) had offered to provide ongoing support but had not, at the time of the interview, performed any activities.

[69] Figures exclude five *Non-working Partners*, all of whom were repatriated.

[70] While none of the five Career Breakers reported ongoing support for the POs at the time of their interview T2, their average assignment duration was significantly shorter than other groups, and thus just one of this group (#30) was repatriated.

[71] Participants #18 and #38.

[72] Participants: expressing an interest in engaging in RAVN: #01, #03, #04, #05, #06, #10, #11, #14, #15, #16, #17, #20, #23, #24, #25, #27, #29, #30, #31, #33, #34, #35, #36, #37, #38, #41, #42, #45, #46, #48, #49, #50, #53, #54 and #55.

[73] At least three participants reported ongoing involvement as an Innovation Associate: #14, #16 and #29.

[74] Participants #01, #07, #26, #43, #47 and #51.

[75] Participants #02, #04, #05, #06, #07, #11, #14, #15, #20, #22, #26, #27, #29, #30, #37, #43, #50, #51, #53, #54 and #55.

[76] Participants #01, #03 and #32.

[77] Australian Volunteers Program (2019) Terms of Reference: Request for Quote (RfQ) – Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers.

[78] Learning outcomes associated with 'globally literature and connected' include the following outcomes: cultural capabilities (5.1 to 5.5), communication capabilities (4.2 to 4.4), self-awareness (6.3), situational or contextual awareness (7.1 to 7.5), sector-specific knowledge and skills (8.1 to 8.3), personal development (1.4) and interests and hobbies (1.2).

[79] This figure is elevated by the relatively large number of reported learnings stemming from formal language training associated with the program VPLJ activities (17 responses). Nonetheless, excluding these, the total proportion of these occurring outside the workplace is 46% (100/222).

[80] Example participants: #11, #13, #14, #26, #29, #30, #31, #34, #35 and #41.

[81] The 21 participants who reported continuing some form of ongoing formal language classes after their ICOP were: participants #01, #08, #09, #14, #17, #18, #19, #22, #23, #24, #26, #28, #30, #31, #35, #37, #39, #44, #46, #49 and #51. Eleven respondents did not raise language learning as a topic of relevance.

[82] Participants who did not continue learning a local language after ICOP: #02, #03, #06, #07, #10, #12, #13, #20, #21, #25, #29, #32, #33, #34, #36, #41, #42, #43, #45, #48, #50, #54 and #55. A range of reasons were provided for not continuing to study a language, including already speaking the host-country language (#12, #41, #45), unable to find a suitable teacher (#13), the assignment's limited duration (#10, #34), having to attend to learning other things for one's role (#02, #43), and limited contact with host-country nationals at work or socially (#06, #07, #20).

[83] Participants #21, #32 and #50.

[84] Among the reasons given for not continuing formal language classes were: (i) already spoke the host language, (ii) could find no suitable trainer, especially in rural contexts, (iii) had assignments of limited duration, (iv) had to learn other things relating to their role, and (v) had limited contact with host-country nationals at work or socially.

[85] The timing of and conditions associated with T2 interviews (i.e. during assignments or during COVID-19 quarantine period) meant that changes in behaviours relating to these outcomes at T2 were limited.

[86] Participants: #04, #05, #06, #07, #08, #10, #12, #19, #23, #25, #27, #28, #29, #33, #35, #37, #38, #39, #45 and #55.

[87] Example participants include #06, #10, #15, #25, #33, #36, #39, #43 and #47.

[88] Example participants include #05, #22, #23, #27 and #37.

[89] Example participants include #08, #20 and #29.

[90] Example participants include #35 and #39.

[91] Examples include: overly-materialistic values (#55), xenophobia (#37, #45), foreign aid decisions (#04, #39 and #49).

[92] A large number of participants reported that their involvement with the program changed their view about international aid or development as a sector. 'Sector-specific knowledge and skills' accounted for 9% of learning outcomes (45/522), primarily among *Transitioners*, *Veterans* and *Enhancers*. For nine participants, the experience confirmed pre-existing favourable views about Australia's commitment to aid and development in the region (Participants #10, #11, #15, #17, #18, #33, #44, #50 and #51). For a smaller number of others (participants #06, #14, #41 and #50) it reinforced sceptical views about the value of foreign aid, with participants observing examples that they felt reflected bureaucracy ('*box-ticking*', #14), and myopic (#20) or ineffectual impacts (#41 and #47).

[93] This included a renewed understanding of the long-term development benefits of skill sharing (participants #17 and #50) and interpersonal connections and relationships - in contrast to '*giving money*' (participants #17, #19, #20, #25, #26, #28, #36 and #50.)

[94] Participants – including *Non-working Partners* – reported developing a more informed and nuanced appreciation of the complexities, both '*positive and negative*' (#30), of the development landscape in terms of actors, actions, and outcomes (participants #04, #10, #13, #20, #24, #28, #30, #32, #38, #39, #40, #51 and #54).

[95] Participants #22, #30, #31, #35, #37 and #45.

[96] Participants #04, #09, #10, #14, #26, #28, #29, #30, #32, #37, #48 and #51.

[97] Participants #04, #09, #10, #14, #17, #22, #26, #28, #29, #30, #31, #32, #37, #48 and #51.

[98] Participants #20, #25 and #30.

[99] Participants #07, #35, #41, #43, #47 and #52.

[100] Example participants reporting these outcomes include: # 39 (experiencing the impacts that participants were a part of), #27 (sports and development), #07 and #19 (rights-based approaches, #09 (economic empowerment through social enterprise), and #08 (the contribution of grassroots NGOs in which participants worked).

[101] Example participants include #07, #14, #37, #49 and #51.

[102] Participants #13, #20, #27, #37 and #51.

[103] Example participants linking this outcome to these events include #11, #14 and #51.

[104] All 55 transcripts were reviewed in full for sections relating to contact with, support from, or attitudes toward the program and its staff. The bulk of responses came from a section of the interview devoted to issues of program contact and support (see interview schedule, **Attachment 1**). Additionally, extracts of transcripts relevant to programming were drawn from other parts of the interviews where participants discussed specific in-country events, future plans, and (where applicable) repatriation.

[105] Based on judgments volunteered by participants at various points during the interview and their response to the interview question "Overall, how did you find your contact with and support from AVP during the assignment?"

[106] Participants whose judgments were unambiguously positive: #04, #17, #18, #19 #22, #25, #32, #33, #36, #37, #40, #50, #51, #54 and #55.

[107] Participants whose judgments were unambiguously negative: #01, #05, #07, #09, #13, #26, #27, #29, #35, #43 and #47.

[108] Comparisons were made between participants' overall evaluation with their contact with the program at pre-departure (phase one interviews) with their evaluation of in-country support provided (phase two). While those reporting favourably on their in-country support (n = 15) were similarly positive in their evaluations of pre-departure contact with the program (10/15), just 2/13 of those who were more negative in their evaluation of their in-country support also reported negative views of their pre-assignment contact.

[109] Age: Volunteers reporting positive sentiment tended to be older (mean age = 50.08 years, range 23-63) than those reporting negative sentiments (mean age = 36.2 years, range 23-72 years) or mixed views (mean age = 42.58, range 22-71 years). A similar pattern is observed in relation to years of professional experience. Gender: While 42% of participants identifying as male (8/19) reported overall 'positive' evaluations, only 20% of women (7/35) did. In contrast, 11/13 (85%) of the group with 'negative' sentiments identified as women – equating to 31% of all women - while just 2/13 men did (11% of men). The gender mix of those with mixed sentiments was more balanced (46% of female participants and 47% of male participants). Partner organisation: Ten of the 13 volunteers reporting negative sentiments were hosted by government agencies (77%). This compares with just 3/15 (20%) reporting positive sentiments and 35% of the 'mixed' group (9/26).

[110] While participants' provided contemporaneous feedback about online learning resources and PDBs during interviews in phase one, data in this section is drawn from responses to a variety of questions that related directly and indirectly to their reflections (in hindsight) on the efficacy of these activities as preparation for the assignment (e.g. "Overall, how well prepared did you feel for the assignment?", "In hindsight, how helpful was the pre-departure preparation activities in preparing you?", "Were there particular things that you recall that you were able to apply during your assignment?").

[111] While participants were asked about all pre-arrival preparation activities, no participants chose to comment on the online learning activities they had completed before deployment.

[112] Structured optional in-country meetings and other events arranged for the program are discussed in section 3.2.

[113] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.3.2.

[114] For example, participants #01, #02, #09 and #53. Additionally, some T2 respondents said the PDBs compared unfavourably with more elaborate preparation programs which (they reported) were available to volunteers in other (international volunteer) programs (#13).

[115] Repeat volunteers generally perceived the ICOPs less beneficial.

[116] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.3.2.

[117] Participants #28 and #30.

[118] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.2.4.

[119] Participants #08, #11, #25, #32, #36 and #46.

[120] Participants #14, #26, #31 and #48.

[121] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.4, recommendation 1.

[122] Example participants: #09, #13, #20, #26 and #30.

[123] Participants #04, #14 and #20.

[124] Example participants: #36 and #43.

[125] For example, participants #09 and #43.

[126] Example participants: #07, #08, #09 and #38.

[127] Participants #02, #08 and #54.

[128] Example participants: #02, #31 and #55.

[129] Example participants #01, #04, #07, #10, #12, #26, #28, #45, #46, #49 and #50.

[130] Example participants: #18, #22 and #37.

[131] See Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.3.2, 'Personal contact with program staff.' Also see: Fee, A. & Gray, S.J. 2020, 'Perceived organisational support and performance: The case of expatriate development volunteers in complex multi-stakeholder employment relationships', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*. Published online 07 April. DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2020.1745864

[132] Example participants: e.g. #02, #06, #07, #28, #32, #35 and #36.

[133] Example participants #32 and #36.

134 Participants reporting major medical issues: #01, #06, #07, #10, #13, #14, #22, #23, #25, #26, #27, #28, #29, #32, #33, #36, #38, #40, #41, #42, #43, #45, #47 and #49.

135 Participants: #08, #14, #29, #42 and #47.

136 Participants #01, #13, #35 and #47.

137 Example participants: #09, #13, #26, #41, #43 and #52.

138 As outlined in the Personal Security Plan and Accommodation Security Plan/Form.

139 Example participants #01, #04 and #43.

140 Participants reporting inaccurate position descriptions included: #01, #03, #05, #06, #08, #10, #11, #13, #14, #16, #19, #20, #23, #24, #26, #27, #28, #29, #30, #31, #33, #34, #35, #36, #39, #40, #44, #48, #49 and #55. Percentage excludes five *Non-working Partners*.

141 Participants #06, #29, #31, #35, #47 and #54.

142 Example participants #10, #22, #36 and #54.

143 Participants #22 and #36.

144 At the same time, one participant – commenting on a summary draft of this report – pointed out similar gaps between 'the role description and the actual role' in domestic organisations.

145 Participants reporting generally accurate position descriptions included: #07, #12, #17, #22, #41, #45, #46, #51, #53 and #54. Percentage excludes five *Non-working Partners*.

146 Example participants #05, #29, #30, #31, #35, #40 and #54.

147 Participants #09, #11, #13, #26, #30, #32, #35, #41, #43 and #49.

148 Participants #08 and #46.

149 Participants #09, #11, #14, #29 and #35.

150 Example participants #13, #14, #30, #32, #41 and #46.

151 Participants #09, #14 and #30.

152 *Transitioners* (n = 11) were the group least likely to indicate openness to undertake a future assignment, and only group reporting fewer than half being open to a future volunteer assignment.

153 Participants #04, #09, #10, #11 and #13.

154 Participants shared several second-hand accounts of volunteers (not part of this study) whom, participants believed, were taking advantage of this by spending excessive time away from the PO and/or their designated role.

155 Example participants #08, #09, #24 and #43.

156 Participants #11, #15 and #30.

157 Example participants include #02, #04, #29 and #46.

158 Participants #13 and #35.

159 Participants #08 and #35.

160 Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.3.2.

161 Example pparticipants #24, #31, #32 and #54.

162 Claus, L., Maletz, S., Casoinic, D., & Pierson, K. 2015, 'Social capital and cultural adjustment of international assignees in NGOs: Do support networks really matter?', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *26*(20), pp. 2523-2542.

163 Example participants #22, #24, #25, #27, #31 and #53.

164 This section reports the experiences of the 38 participants – including five *Non-working Partners* - who were repatriated between February and April 2020, focusing on information received from, and support provided by, the program in the lead up to, during, and immediately following the repatriation. The section was introduced as part of changes to the research design in response to the repatriations that were discussed with, and approved by, program staff (emails with Mr Jake Phelan and Mr Farooq Dar, 27 March and 1 April 2020). Changes to the data collection protocols were also approved by UTS Human Research Ethics Committee (27 March 2020).

165 As an example of these, unambiguously favourable experiences were reported by participants: #11, #13, #17, #18, #23, #32, #33, #34, #37, #38, #40, #46 and #50.

166 Participants #17, #18 and #34.

167 Participants #30, #46 and #51.

168 Example participants #25, #30 and #45.

169 Several participants also noted the compulsory two-week quarantine period after returning to Australia as a factor in their willingness to continue supporting POs.

170 At least three participants (#03, #14, 24) reported their ongoing involvement with POs revolved around ongoing work with grants awarded under the Australian Volunteer Grants program.

171 Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.3.2, '*Transferral of attitudes from PDBs?*'

172 Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.2.4.

[173] Disruptive transitions like a volunteer assignment can generate stress and, in the absence of first-hand knowledge, activate expectations about the new environment based on volunteers' assumptions, past experiences and/or hopes (Louis 1980). As the Phase One report suggested, information made available (or absent) at pre-departure preparation activities shapes these views. These expectations provide the basis against which volunteers make sense of what happens, trying to understand discrepancies between their anticipated and actual experience. Situations where strongly held expectations – formed partly during pre-departure activities - are disconfirmed can lead to a sense of frustration, dissonance or failure (Lewin 1951). These can strongly influence how people experience their assignments. Having an accurate preview of the assignment (e.g. culture, role, PO, living arrangements) is likely an important factor in helping volunteers establish realistic expectations – both favourable and unfavourable – and so buffer the negative consequences that may come from their expectations being challenged (Fee & Gray 2020).

[174] Examples include those shared on social media by some United States Peace Corps volunteers ('Peace Corps Cribs').

[175] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.3.2.

[176] Also see: Fee, A. & Gray, S.J. 2020, 'Perceived organisational support and performance: The case of expatriate development volunteers in complex multi-stakeholder employment relationships', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*. Published online 07 April. DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2020.1745864

[177] Australian Volunteers Guidebook, 2019.

[178] Australian Volunteer Program Global Program Strategy (2018-2022).

[179] Australian Volunteers Guidebook, 2019.

[180] Longitudinal Study of Australian Volunteers (Phase One): Final report October 2019, section 5.3.2.

[181] Wenger, E. 2000, 'Communities of practice and social learning systems', *Organization*, 7, pp. 225-246.

7. List of Attachments

Number	Attachment	Report section
1	Sample chronological interview schedule (abbreviated)	2.2.1
2	Overview of strategies used to mitigate bias due to forced repatriation of participants	2.3.2
3	Overview of treatment of data during analysis (Attachments 3.1 and 3.2)	2.4
4	Participant feedback on draft research summary (Oct-Nov 2020)	2.4
5	Participant profiles	2.5
6	Key features of in-country experience	3.2
7	Classifications of learning outcomes, learning contexts and learning approaches (Attachments 7.1 to 7.3)	4.2.1 and 4.2.2
8	Learning outcomes by volunteer type (Attachments 8.1 to 8.2)	4.2.1
9	Communities of practice and volunteers' sensemaking and learning	5.5.2
10	Proposed interview schedule and timetable (T3)	6

Sample chronological interview schedule (abbreviated)

Section	Sample topics & example questions	Indicative time
1. Introduction	• Introductions, overview and permissions	5 minutes
2. Overall in-country experience	• How have you found your assignment personally & professionally? (major challenges? Opportunities?) ○ Prompts: How did you find: the role? The partner organisation? Living in the host country? (expected vs realised experiences? challenges/differences?)	30 minutes

3. Individual changes	• Do you think the experience changed you? In what ways? What's the biggest change that you think you've undergone?
	   ○ Prompts: examples of changes, what is (or do) different now, current skill/knowledge levels, perspective on: development volunteering/international aid, career, profession.
	• What features of the assignment have had the biggest impact on you (and how have these changed you)?
	   ○ Prompts: role activities & nature (e.g. capacity development activities), international context, access to resources, work context/sector, formal training/learning opportunities
		25 minutes

4. Contact with the program	• How has your contact been with the program been throughout your time in-country? • Prompts: how well prepared for the assignment? in-country contact and support, suggestions for improving preparation and support	5 minutes
5. Future plans	• What does the future hold for you? [where do you see yourself in five years?] • Prompts: influence of program experiences on plans, continued contact with partner organisation/social contacts, future volunteer assignments, future RAVN contact, impact of early repatriation	10 minutes
6. Conclusion	• Key features or omissions of discussion • What happens next	5 minutes

Overview of strategies used to mitigate bias due to forced repatriation of participants

Risk to study	Mitigating approaches used
a. Attrition due to lack of interest: Participants perceiving that their forced repatriation renders their (reduced) volunteer experiences somehow less relevant to them or to the study, and so may lack motivation to continue participation.	• Made contact with participants as soon as practical after repatriation to reiterate the study's continuation and its support from the program, and to reassure them of the value of their contributions (including of their perceptions of the repatriation process). • Updated LSAV website at UTS to reinforce the continuation & value of the study. • Where necessary, used multiple points of contact (e.g. Skype, text, email).

b. Different interview contexts: Interviews conducted post-repatriation, rather than in-country may be biased by the repatriation experience (e.g. overlooking key features of the assignment, post-hoc re-evaluation of experiences).	• Modified T2 interview schedules by:
	  o Devoting a brief section to the forced repatriation & clearly delineating this from other topics (e.g. 'Can we go back to the months before you left & talk about your time on a day-to-day basis in …?')
	  o Structuring questions to help participants 'locate' themselves when answering questions (e.g. 'I'd like you to take you mind back to the office environment. What was it like?')
	  o More regularly seeking specific examples to validate responses.
	  o Where appropriate, probing to clarify temporal aspects of responses (e.g. 'Is that something you felt during your time in country or has that realisation emerged since you've been home?')
	  o Directly addressing the impact of the forced repatriation on responses where appropriate (e.g. 'Do you think those views have been influenced by you returning before the end of the assignment?')

c. Reduced depth of in-country experience: Volunteers' reduced time in-country may limit the extent of (noticeable) personal or professional change across the study period.	• Devised a schedule to retain the proposed timing of interview T3, to allow for the longest possible post-assignment periods for individual changes to manifest or be realised (i.e. not adjusting further the scheduled data collection activities due to the repatriations). • Included the specific question in interview T2 (e.g. 'In what ways do you think the early return influenced your overall time in country?'). This will be reported separately in the mid-contract report (October 2020) and, where appropriate, will be considered in analysis of interview T3. • Compared responses of those participants who were forced to repatriate (n = 39) with those whose T2 interviews were completed prior to the closure of the program (n = 16).
d. Disruption to post-assignment intentions: The discontinuity created by the repatriation & subsequent economic & social impacts (post-assignment) are expected to have substantial consequences for participants' personal and professional activities, especially those whose assignments were linked to specific career objectives.	• For repatriated participants, devoted a segment of interviews to address this experience & its (perceived) personal & professional influence. While this will provide useful insights for the program in relation to participants' lived experiences, it also allows comparison of participants' reported experiences with outcomes/responses reported at subsequent interviews (interview T3). • Maintained awareness of the potential impact of this experience on participants' other responses during interviews and probed this where appropriate (e.g. 'Do you think returning early influenced that in any way?') • Directly addressed the repatriation via the following additional interview questions: - e.g. 'In what ways do you think the repatriation will influence the next stage of your life?' (interview T2), and e.g. 'In hindsight, (how) do you think the experience of being repatriated early might have influenced …?' (interview T3). • Compared responses of those participants who were forced to repatriate prematurely (n = 39) with those whose interviews were completed prior to the closure of the program (n = 16).

Summary overview of treatment of data during analysis

Research questions	Data analysis (level 1)	Data analysis (level 2)
In-country experiences 1. Overall, how did participants experience their assignments (personally & professional)? 2. What features of the assignment had the major influences on these experiences (and in what ways)?	Identify & thematically organise the main features of volunteers' in-country experiences as perceived by participants (work & non-work) relating to, for example, their work role, partner organisation, host country/community, & non-work activities Identify & explain key challenges & opportunities experienced & the influence of these on participants during the assignment, as described by participants	• Cross-group analysis: Compare & explain patterns of responses from pertinent sub-groups of participants (e.g. compare & contrast responses between groups based on career stage, gender, host location, past experience, profession) • Longitudinal analysis: Identify pertinent differences between realised & expected experiences (i.e. compare reported 'expectations' in T1 interviews and realised experiences in T2) • Create brief illustrative case-studies of in-country experiences relating to main themes (favourable and unfavourable) • Identify & discuss implications of responses & analysis in light on the ongoing LSAV (can be linked with topics 2 & 3 where appropriate)
Personal & professional changes 3. What are the main changes that participants reported arising from their involvement with the program to date? 4. What features of their in-country experiences (appear to) have the strongest impact on participants' reported personal & professional changes? 5. In what ways do participants' expressed future plans reflect changes than might be associated with their participation in the program?	Identify & thematically organise main personal & professional changes reported by participants, as perceived by participants For changes identified in 2c, identify & thematically organise main reasons provided (as attributed by participants); where appropriate link these attributed changes to participants broader experiences Identify & thematically organise the main future plans expressed by participants (e.g. by type – career, personal) For each, where appropriate indicate a qualitative indicator of (i) certainty of plans, and (ii) extent to which plans are explicitly linked to assignment and/or COVID-19.	• Number and thematically map main reported learning incidents and changes using procedures outlined in **Attachment 3.2** on the following page. This includes developing the classification of learning outcomes, learning contexts, and learning approach summarised in **Attachment 7.1-7.3** • Outline (and explain) a tentative & overarching causal map linking the main assignment features contributing to participants' (reported) changes based on: (i) attributions by participants, and (ii) participants' broader in-country experiences (drawing on academic literature available about the personal & professional impacts of volunteer assignments) • Cross-group analysis: Compare patterns of responses from pertinent sub-groups of participants (e.g. career stage, gender, location, past experience, profession) • Longitudinal analysis: Compare & tentatively explain expressed differences by participants between T1 & T2 relating to future plans • Create brief illustrative case-studies highlighting & explaining individual changes associated with the program & the main attributed reasons for this • Identify & discuss implications of observed differences & changes in light on the ongoing LSAV
Program contact & support 6. Overall, how did participants perceive their contact with & support from the program & its staff during the assignment? 7. What features of participants' program contact & support contributed positively/negatively to their experience (and in what ways)? 8. Based on participants' in-country experiences, how can the program improve the way it interacts with & supports its volunteers during assignments?	Identify & thematically organise key features of participants' contact/support viewed as favourable/unfavourable, and the impact of these on participants' in-country experiences Identify & thematically organise recommendations for program improvement arising directly or indirectly from participants' responses	• Broadly evaluate (favourability) of participants' perceptions of contact/support received from the program & the main reasons for this; where appropriate link these to key features of the volunteer experience and/or main changes reported (RQs 1-5) • Cross-group analysis: Compare & explain patterns of responses from pertinent sub-groups of participants (e.g. career stage, gender, location, past experience, profession) • Where appropriate, incorporate analysis of T1 results & consider these in light of T2 responses (e.g. role of PDB in influencing accuracy of expectations and/or participants' preparation for the culture/role) • Present summary recommendations for program to improve contact with & support for volunteers during assignments (and rationale for each) • Where appropriate, link specific recommendations to pertinent sub-groups of participants

Summary overview of treatment of data during analysis

Analysis of volunteers' learning outcomes and their causes (Section 4.2)

Participants were asked about the impacts that they felt their involvement with the program – and in particular, their time in the host country – had had on them (sections 2 and 3 of interview schedule, **Attachment 1**). Where time allowed, these learning and change experiences were explored during the interviews to understand their underlying elements, and the factors that (participants felt) had contributed most strongly to these.

The 55 transcripts rendered 522 identifiable personal and/or professional learning outcomes or changes across the sample (average 9.49 per participant). These were allocated unique codes (#001-#522) and, where the data allowed, classified according to (i) the type of learning outcome or change reported, (ii) the context in which this occurred (i.e. the situation/s that participants felt contributed most strongly to the learning/change), and (iii) the ways in which participants made sense of the learning/change (i.e. the 'learning approach' that contributed to the learning).

In some cases, insufficient detail prevented coding of a context and/or approach. In other cases, multiple contexts or approaches were reported for single outcomes. This resulted in a sample of 479 complete descriptions of learning/change events for analysis (mean 8.7; range 2 to 14). On average, *Imposed Transitioners* reported the largest number of learning outcomes each (11.4); *Non-working Partners* reported the least (4.6).

Classifications of learning outcomes, contexts and approaches drew on coding protocols based on a combination of prior research (e.g. Eraut 2004; Fee & Gray 2011, 2020) and a review of respondents' verbatim descriptions. Details of these classifications can be found at **Attachments 7.1 to 7.3**.

Important considerations when interpreting results in this section

- The collated learning outcomes represent just a sample identified by participants during T2 interviews as pertinent, rather than a comprehensive account of *all* perceived learning/change that participants experienced.

- The collated learning outcomes represent self-report accounts of learning and change that participants attributed to their time in-country. They therefore represent perceived learning and change – and the reasons that participants attribute for these – as described at the end of their assignments. Latent and/or other changes may emerge in future waves of data collection.

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Participant feedback on draft research summary (Oct-Nov2020)

	Feedback*
1.	I just wanted to say this report is amazing! I appreciate how much time and effort goes into interviewing, transcribing, thematically analysing and presenting this type of data. It is a really rich picture of the volunteer experience and I think an accurate representation of the depth and breadth of volunteering. I hope that the feedback from an organisational perspective is equally as positive and they are open to taking on the feedback from volunteers on board to support future volunteering. I'd be interested to know which participant profile I sat in, as I feel like identify with multiple. I'd also like to just say that I'm grateful for the opportunity to participate! Have a great day, …
2.	Thanks for the report. I have provided some feedback FYI. The report is interesting, and provides a broad perspective - beyond one's own volunteer assignment and experience. A short exec summary would be helpful - summarising the key points in the report. It would be interesting to know where I am categorised (on the various aspects of the report) - i.e. how is the feedback I provided interpreted by the study? The various concerns expressed by different volunteers may stem from the following factors (these are my perspectives) • Expectations of the role/assignment being different from what transpires on the ground. (It was actually highlighted by the CEO of AVI, at our PDB that the assignment description is only a guide. This was a key point that he made). This is not different from any other job - there are always differences between the role description and the actual role (the "formal" vs "informal"). The role description may be written by someone that has no understanding of the role requirement, and this may create the mismatches. • Lack of sufficient work experience before one sets out on a volunteer assignment - "launchers" group. This creates a double whammy - the lack of experience compounded by the difference in cultures and work environments. As in the point above, the reality of work will be different from the role description. For example, if the PO realises that the volunteer has certain capabilities beyond the role, they may want to take advantage of that capability. • Expectations of how the 3-way relationship may be managed (between Volunteer, PO and AVI/ICMT) - and understanding of the roles of the individual entities • Ability/inability of the PO to manage the volunteer. This is a common issue and stems from the lack of experience, capabilities, resources within the PO. If the volunteer is not self-managing, this issue is accentuated. • Issues of sexual and other harassment were indicated - this is not acceptable under any circumstances - and needs AVI/ICMT to take action. If you want any clarifications, I am happy to discuss further. Regards and best wishes, …
3.	Thanks for compiling! I love the bit about capacity development taking many forms. I think as volunteers we may get frustrated that capacity isn't being developed in a clear cut way, but sometimes turning on those lightbulbs in our colleagues (and them switching on ours too!) happens in unexpected ways. Thank you for noting this. Its not a clear cut process.
4.	Great to read the report. It was really fascinating to hear how others' experiences compared to my own. I understand that this may not be possible because of the requirement for anonymity but I thought it might be interesting to hear some examples/anecdotes that relate to your findings. Best wishes for the rest of your work! …
5.	Looks good to me.
6.	Hi … - finally got around to reading this summary report - fantastic! It is so good to read something about AVI and the volunteering experience that hasn't been completely whitewashed, and includes such a variety of details and responses. I think any ex-volunteer would find something in here to relate to, or that they recognise, whether being positive or negative. I also see it as being a really great resource for building CVs/Portfolios, as well as for personal recognition, as it introduces appropriate language, terms, perspectives, qualities and outcomes that are sometimes difficult for one to recognise and include as beneficial outcomes. Just a couple of notes as I was reading through - Access to discretionary funds (own savings) is not noted, but I do believe it makes a big difference to people's experiences. Relating to the ability to enjoy self or shared travel, trips to resorts, diving etc - if one is solely relying on volunteer income it is very difficult to be able to participate which impacts on building relationships with other expats or volunteers - creating a bit of a social gap at time, or exacerbating existing 'gaps'. Ability to buy and run a car, better accommodation also relates to building friendships with locals - either the wide disparities relating to disposable wealth, or an excessive generosity that was only available to those with the means, contributed to building expectations of white expatriates all being wealthy, exacerbating cargo cult mentality or unrealistic expectations. Hence widening gaps... (mind you the rise in allowances towards the end of my placement did change that somewhat). The allowances themselves are another element not included, as I know that depending on where you are located, allowances and buying power vary tremendously, and hence, 'quality of life', or 'just making do'. Different stages of the experience, pre, during, post - this data over time will be so valuable for that, especially recognising the different 'types' of volunteering rationales. Experienced volunteers may have certain knowledge but new volunteers are often not ready or willing to hear their contributions. A publication that outlines the content volunteers are most requiring (ready or willing to pay attention to) at different stages of their experience would be a great resource. Anyway, just my thoughts. I'm now even more looking forward to our final interview, and all that has happened over this horrendous year! (Spoiler ... not all bad!) And to the final report. All the best, …

7. Hi …, apologies for late response. I am a 'veteran' second time volunteer, both assignments being in Solomon Islands. I think the summary report pretty much captures the diversity of volunteer experiences and provides a comprehensive overview. One thought I do have is that although there are clearly commonalities across countries, particular countries present particular challenges/opportunities and maybe this could be highlighted? Also, from my talking with expats in Solomons, whether the assignment is in a city/town or in a remote rural area makes a big difference. The profiling carried out by AVI should make sure that people who end up in very remote areas, are psychologically suited to the task.

I don't know how many people have had the same situation as me - but your summary does not really discuss experiential differences between first and second [and ongoing] assignments. Because of their previous experience, are 2nd time volunteers different in a) how much support they need? and, b) their capacity to adapt and therefore perform better in terms of meeting the assignment's objectives?

What I surprisingly found is that during my second assignment, I linked up quite quickly with my previous PO and was able to assist them in a few different ways. It also helped me settle back into the country. It also made me realise that for me, working with an NGO was preferable on all levels to working in a Solomon Island government department. Hope this helps …

8. I have had a couple of reads of your interim report and it reflects many opinions. Without being specific and pushing my line of thinking I believe the very start of the report on capacity development is at the crux of all assignments. Pivoting and flexibility were the key to all my assignments. We start an assignment hoping we will develop capacity for our PO to the highest limit in accordance with our assignment description. This will not be the case because Capacity in an assignment situation will vary with every PO. Any development even outside the assignment aims should be seen to be a success. Some first timers I have encountered were frustrated and sensed failure because they weren't doing what the assignment objectives stated. They were however developing capacity in other areas and this in itself is success. They were also developing their own capacity. As an example one volunteer had a specific scientific assignment. As happens there were problems arranging training and then finding that a group of her participants were being made redundant she felt she had failed. She began helping the participants write CV's and apply for work. When it was pointed out that this was a true example of capacity development she was more content and saw she was making a difference. Through no fault of her own she moved outside the assignment guidelines. Many PO's are not sure of what they really want and they are not sure of the capacity of their volunteer. Use your experience, don't be afraid to offer advice and Pivot. There should be more input from veterans in the induction process not only on country specifics but on the pitfalls each assignment will throw up and suggestions to overcome them. Instil confidence in the volunteers, particularly first timers and show them what they can expect. Confidence in your ability and flexibility tempered with patience and understanding will help most assignments. I hope this helps ...

9. Just a quick response to let you know that I have perused the document sent. I don't think I would have much to add or comments to make. Looks good to me, very comprehensive.

* All responses are reported verbatim as received via email or via an anonymous online form.

Participant profiles (career stage and motivations)

Group name	Brief description	n (% total)[a]
1. Launchers	**Integrating values into a meaningful career:** A volunteer assignment as a stepping-stone to launch a career in a sector or profession that allows individuals to express their values (typically international humanitarian aid and/or development). A dominant theme in this category is a volunteer assignment as a first step from 'university-to-work', typically with a strong international focus. Among the benefits that this group reports hoping to derive from the assignment are: professional and/or international experience ('CV building'), networks, and practical understanding of international aid/development. This group is the youngest of the seven groups of participants.	8 (15)
2. Enhancers	**Progressing a career through a meaningful & developmental experience:** A volunteer assignment as a means to consciously develop or enhance a career through the acquisition of skills, experiences, opportunities, and/or networks. Among the benefits sought by this group are opportunities made available via the volunteer role and/or the context of the role (e.g. PO, international focus), applying professional expertise in a new context (e.g. international development), or to a new role that is outside their prior training and/or experiences. Rather than entering or changing a profession/career, this group views the assignment as an opportunity to fast-track their career in some way. It is the group that most strongly links their motivation to volunteer with their career and career aspirations.	7 (13)
3. Transitioners	**Entering a new sector or context that provides meaning:** A volunteer assignment as a pathway to enter a new sector or context, most commonly with an international (rather than domestic) focus. For some, this is a transition from a government or corporate sector to international development or aid. None in this group report having firm post-assignment plans. In explaining their reasons for their volunteer assignment, some report elements of 'push' (e.g. dissatisfaction with current career), but all reported a desire to switch to (or at least explore) a new professional role that is distinctively different to their previous career. Members of this group typically identify the career opportunities presented by the role, organization, sector or networks to which the assignment would expose them, as important factors in the decision to volunteer.	11 (20)
4. Career Breakers	**Temporary and meaningful hiatus from an ongoing career:** A volunteer assignment as an interlude to a career that may be returned to after the volunteer assignment is completed, but which – at the time of accepting the assignment - is not fulfilling the individual's needs. Thus, members of this group were temporarily breaking a career in which they are well established but which had left them somewhat dissatisfied. While some in this group report being open to learning, networking, and/or developing (career-relevant) experiences, these tend to be subordinate to a desire for improved work or non-work experiences. A recurring theme of this group is that they are yet to find their professional 'passion' and thus a sense of searching for something different or better is apparent in their decision to volunteer. All participants in this category are female completing assignments that are significantly shorter than other groups. While having the greatest variety in age, members of this group are more likely to have firm post-assignment plans than others.	5 (9)
5. Imposed Transitioners	**Meaningful alternative to domestic work with career possibilities:** A volunteer assignment in response to a negative career experience (e.g. labour market conditions) that leads the individual to consider a new profession or context. Thus, this group's decision to volunteer is strongly affected by 'push' factors – e.g. redundancies and/or difficulties finding work in Australia. The volunteer assignment, therefore, as well as providing an opportunity contribute meaningfully, offers members of this group the opportunity to either (i) fill a 'gap' in their CV during the period of uncertainty/unemployment in their lives, or (ii) transition to a different sector and/or profession by providing relevant experiences, even if the new career is not explicitly linked to the volunteer role or sector. For most in this group, there appears to be recognition that the assignment involves exploring a new professional career.	7 (13)
6. Veterans	**Applying career expertise toward a meaningful purpose:** A volunteer assignment as an opportunity to apply professional expertise accumulated through a long career to a volunteer assignment, usually in order to achieve a positive outcome. All members of this group identify 'values' as a primary or secondary motive. All are retired or semi-retired. Thus, the defining feature of this group is the post-career expression of values, with a desire to continue their professional contributions towards something good. Among the common themes expressed in interviews is a desire to remain productive, a passion for their profession, and an interest in potential work/volunteer opportunities that may arise from the assignment. Although the latter is not identified as a strong motivation, some reported awareness of future career/professional opportunities to which the assignment might lead.	12 (22)
7. Non-working Partners	**Vicarious assignment and adventure:** Accompanying a partner on an international volunteer assignment as an approved accompanying dependant (AAD). The diverse members of this group entered the program from a range of contexts and with varying objectives. All have had previously productive working and/or volunteering lives prior to the assignment. Several had volunteered overseas previously and had been applying for international volunteer positions at the time of their partner's admittance to the program. Most identify specific personal goals they hope to achieve during their involvement in the program, including hobbies, skills and/or cultural/travel experiences.	5 (9)
TOTAL		**55 (100)**

Key features of in-country experience

Setting	Key feature of in-country experience	How influenced experience	Examples
Destination/ outside of work/non work	Learning/knowing language (23 case files)	Gained local respect and helped work and experience in direct and indirect ways	*#04, #08, #12, #09, #17, #21, #23, #26, #28, #29, #30, #31, #34, #35, #37, #39, #44, #46, #48, #49, #51and #54*
	Language barrier	Language was a barrier (9)	*#14, #18, #22, #24, #30, #31, #41, #42, #55*
	Lifestyle, travel, engagement (29)	Mindshifts and time to reflect, be not do; appreciated different pace and way of life; get to know place and local people not as a tourist, spending time with other expats and visiting friends and family	*#03, #06, #08, #29, #28, #26, #1, #4, #07, #9, #10, #46, #21, #13, #14, #15, #16, #20, #22, #31, #33, #34, #39, #42, #44, #46, #47, #49, #50, #51 and #55*
	Making local friends (21)	Relationships were Rich and fulfilling and brought new insights and even romantic relationships or long-term friendships from previous assignments	#01, #04, #05, #08, #09, #18, #26, #27, #28, #30, #37, #38, #40, #45, #46, #47, #48, #24, #4, #49, #50, #51 and #54
	Contact with AVP volunteers for socialising and support (25)	Other volunteers were appreciated as a sounding board on the experience and for socialising and exploring and many became lifelong friends	*#02, #03, #05, #06 #11, # 16, #23, #25, #27, #29, #30, #35, # 36, #37, # 42, #43, #44, # 47, #48, #50, #51,#53, #54 and #55*
	Family, Spouse, friends support connection (26)	Provided support &/or accompaniment or visits that share the experience in different ways	#02, #03, #05, #23, #26, #27, #29, #30, #31, #37, #10, #25, #48, #47, #49, #51, #21, #15, #18, #22, #25, #32, #37, #38, #39, #43 and #53
	Civic engagement or residual volunteering (20)	Responded to local requests or provided social outlet or connection and contribution	#04, #08, #09, #10, #15, #16, #18, #20, #23, #25, #26, #28, #29, #30, #33, #38, #44, #48, #49 and #55
	Networks, Connections, informal and formal (17)	Networks both formal and informal made an expected and unexpected contribution to work and life	#02, #07, #15, #16, #19, # 20, #22, # 23, #28, # 30, #40, #44, #45, #51, # 52, #53 and #54
Volunteer role	Role as/not as expected:		
	Unexpected shifts in role Led to pivot in activities/role (28 participants)	Was effective use of expertise for what PO/PO colleagues wanted and still drew on volunteers' abilities usefully or strategically	*#02, #03, #04, #06, #08, #09, #10, #13, #19, #20, #23, #26, #27, #29, #30, #31, #33, #34, #35, #39, #40, #43, #44, #48, #55, #49, #53 and #54*
		Role worked well as planned (10)-professionally and personally satisfying	*#01, #17, #22, #23, #24, #25, #37, #38, #45 and #51*
	Inappropriate or unexpected role (10)	Inappropriate role or unexpected role or activities, required tenacity and persistence to persist and transform work and relationships positively despite times of boredom or apparent lack of engagement from PO or even conflict eg with hierarchy (10)	#08, #09, #13, #14, #15, #16, #30, #35, #36 and #47
	Capacity development (33)	Strengthened 'translation' skills and creativity to understand context and people enough to share/work alongside appropriately or a feeling of just doing not sharing expertise	#02, #03, #04, #05, #06, #07, #10, #12, #14, #15, #16, #17, #19, #20, #24, #27, #28, #29, #31, #33, #34, #35, #37, #39, #40, #44, #45, #47, #48, #49, #51, #52 and #53.
	Work overlap with personal life (21)	Sense of intrusion and loss of privacy or autonomy and/or stronger relationships and understanding with work colleagues and a blurring of personal and professional activities/principles as well as a new sense of independence and confidence that overlapped work/non work	#01, #08, #11, #12, #13, #20, #23, #24, #29, #30,, #31, #48, #37, #39, #43, #44, #46, #47, #49, #50 and #53
	Public diplomacy (18)	Some volunteers reacted to being connected with the government or marketing their experience, most happy to see afresh Australia's role and contribution in region and promote their role as volunteers	#03, #04, #05, #07, #16, #19, #23, #27, #31, #48, #49 #50, #54, #39, #33, #37, #25 and #55
	Volunteer status influence on work &/or respect (16)	Being seen as a volunteer was seen by a small number as diminishing appreciation of their technical expertise, many found it helped them build relationships and understanding in their work and community or gave them a distinctive status that could be used to advantage.	#04, #05, #08, #09, #13, #24, #25, #28, #29, #33, #35, #37, #40, #44, #45 and #49
	Time lost or slow pace of work (24)	Frustration and new patience and appreciation of challenges and timeframes required for change	#03, #04, #06, #07, #09, #11, #13, #14, #17, #19, #25, #26, #27, #28, #29, #35, #42, #44, #47, #48, #49, #52, #53 and #55
	Unfinished business and ongoing connections with PO or colleagues/friends country (15)	A sense that there is unfinished business or connections with colleagues or friends spurs ongoing contact	#33, #05, #07, #25, #26, #27, #29, #30, #37, #42, #45, #49, #51, #54 and #55
PO	PO Processes issues (32)	Frustration as well as new understanding of resource constraints or longstanding cultural norms that were slow to change or necessity to understand and work with different agendas of different people in POs as well as a recognition that much in POs was not clear in terms of processes/information	#02, #05, #07, #08, #11, #13, #14, #15, #16, #17, #20, #22, #23, #24, #25, #26, #29, #30, #33, #34, #35, #36, #39, #41, #42, #45, #46, #47, #52, #53, #49 and #55
	PO Resource/capacity limitations (13)	Had potential to limit effectiveness but also could be a catalyst for adaptation or creativity	#02, #04, #07, #17, #23, #25, #27, #28, #31, #33, #34, #39 and #45
	Feeling out of the loop in PO (11)	Lack of understanding of what was happening in POs had potential for frustration and boredom but also ways to adapt to enhance engagement and understanding.	#06, #10, #14, #16, #22, #24, #29, #36, #40, #41 and #55

Classifications of learning outcomes, contexts and approaches

i. Learning outcomes

Learning outcome	Description
1. Personal development	• Capabilities associated with participants' personal development not related to a particular role or context but which can contribute to personal development and work performance; including greater resilience, self-confidence and assertiveness.
2. Domain-specific capabilities:	• Capabilities specific to participants' professional domain. Includes expanded technical knowledge or know-how, improved performance of domain-related tasks (e.g. more fluent performance), more strategic outlook on profession or role, greater professional confidence, and new domain-specific contacts/ networks.
3. Role performance and management capabilities	• Capabilities required to manage people and projects and to perform work that are not specific to the professional domain. These include generic managerial skills like planning, leading, decision-making and time management, interpersonal skills, as well as capabilities associated with developing others via mentoring, coaching or introducing change.
4. Communication capabilities	• Interpersonal communication capabilities relating to three broad forms of communication: message production (e.g. persuading, negotiating), message reception (e.g. listening and interpreting messages), and managing social and work interactions (e.g. developing networks)
5. Cultural capabilities	• Capabilities that improve participants' cultural awareness (e.g. awareness of differences of perspectives stemming from one's culture) or enhance cross-cultural competence. We distinguish between culture-specific capabilities (e.g. knowledge of expatriates' cultural practices), and culture-general capabilities (e.g. understanding the influence of cultural patterns more broadly)
6. Self-awareness	• Awareness of oneself, including awareness of one's capabilities and outlook (e.g. strengths, weaknesses, beliefs or values) and one's preferences
7. Situational or contextual understanding	• Insights into or different outlook on the strategic nature of one's work environment or context, including awareness of geopolitical/global issues, seeing connections between work/self and other issues, as well as a better understanding of a particular situations or contexts within which the assignment occurs
8. Sector-specific knowledge relating to international development	• Greater awareness of the context, practice and operating environment of the international development sector
9. Career or life priorities	• Changed outlook on one's personal life (e.g. way of living, importance in life) or professional career (e.g. direction or anchors in career)
10. Interests and hobbies	• Development of new interests or hobbies

Classifications of learning outcomes, contexts and approaches

ii. Learning contexts

Learning context		Description
1. Work	**a. Office environment**	• Occurring within the general work environment of the partner organisation. Includes participants' observations, interactions, or other actions associated with the social environment, work practices, office facilities and/or systems.
	b. Routine work	• Performing work activities that would generally be regarded as a normal part of the participants' profession/job function.
	c. Non-routine work	• Performing various activities that were outside the participants' usual work role associated with their profession. These include performing higher duties (i.e. acting up), field trips, undertaking informal or structured capacity development activities that were not part of their regular role, and social interactions at work.
	e. Other	• Other work contexts, including structured professional development activities.
2. Non-work	**a. Living generally**	• Occurring through participants' non-work environment. Includes participants' observations, interactions, or other actions associated with the broader social and/or cultural context, built and/or natural environment. Excludes learning during interpersonal social interactions.
	b. Socialising	• Socialising with host-country nationals or foreigners outside the work environment. Includes social interactions with work colleagues (host-country nationals, volunteers, expatriates) outside the working environment.
	c. Other	• Other non-work contexts.

Classifications of learning outcomes, contexts and approaches

iii. Learning approach

Category		Description
1. Informal	**a. Observe**	• Vicarious learning through observing people, situations, events or other information. Includes observations made of general situations or events through immersion in the host environment, observing people enacting positive or negative 'models' of behaviour, or observing systems or practices within a particular domain or profession. In these cases, the participant may not have been actively involved in the experience that was observed, and which triggered the learning.
	b. Collaborate	• Collaborating with others on activities (e.g. projects) and managing peer-to-peer relationships associated with these. Three nodes in this category include cross-cultural collaborating (typical with colleagues from the partner organisations, including designated counterparts), collaborating with other expatriates, and other (e.g. collaborator not clearly identified).
	c. Adjust	• A separate category of experiential learning approaches stemming from making adjustments to (a) work practices, because of the different context of environment in which these were performed (e.g. organisational or cultural differences), and (b) adjusting to an unfamiliar workplace (e.g. structures and procedures).
	d. Discuss	• Discussing issues and ideas with others in informal settings that were not necessarily intended as specific learning activities. Includes unstructured conversations with host-country nationals, volunteers or expatriates, as well as structured periodic or ad-hoc meetings (e.g. team meetings in partner organisations).
	e. Consult	• Actively seeking assistance to understand something by consulting with expatriates or host-country nationals to seek information, advice or feedback. Includes receiving feedback formally (e.g. structured feedback) or informally (e.g. correcting a mistake). Includes consultations with ICMT.
	f. 'Stretch' role	• Taking on a role or activity that involved applying expertise or knowledge to a novel or unfamiliar area and/or with a different level of challenge and/or responsibility (i.e. a 'stretch' role that the participant had not previously performed).
	g. Challenge	• Experiential triggers that stemmed from situations/circumstances in which the participant was actively involved and which involved high levels of challenge or difficulty. Within this group, three main sub-categories were distilled: (a) confronting problem situations, that involved, for instance, conflict, stress or frustration (including forced repatriations), (b) having to deal with insufficient resources (usually within the partner organisation), and (c) making errors or mistakes.
2. Formal	**a. Work training**	• Participating in structured training programs offered through association with the partner organisation. Included in-house training, workshops, online programs and seminars/conferences.
	b. Other (formal)	• Participating in structured training programs not associated with the partner organisation. Included self-organised seminars and events, and formal studies (typically completed online through Australian universities).

Reported learning outcomes by volunteer type (panel 1)

LEARNING OUTCOME	LAUNCHER	ENHANCER	TRANSITIONER	CAREER BREAKER	IMPOSED TRANSITIONER	VETERAN	AAD	TOTAL	TOTAL
	8	7	11	5	7	12	5	55	%
1. Personal development: Capabilities associated with respondents' personal development not related to a particular role or context but which can contribute to personal development and work performance; including greater resilience, self-confidence and assertiveness									
1.1 Resilience and persistence	1			1		2	2	6	1%
1.2 Patience	2**	1	3	1	3	5		15	3%
1.3 Overall self-confidence (personal); includes independence, 'life growth', personal autonomy [could also be in 'self-awareness' category]	4**			1	3		1	9	2%
1.4 Openness to difference, acceptance of difference, less judgmental of others, not make assumptions about others				1	2	3*		6	1%
1.5 Assertiveness, willingness to speak up (e.g. push back on unreasonable requests)		2	1	1	1			5	1%
1.6 Humility		1	2					3	1%
1.7 Manage emotions, manage mental health, EQ (emotional intelligence)				1	1	1*		3	1%
TOTAL (personal development)	*7*	*4*	*6*	*6*	*10*	*11*	*3*	**47**	**9%**
PERCENTAGE (personal development)	*9%*	*5%*	*5%*	*11%*	*13%*	*12%*	*13%*	*9%*	
2. Domain-specific capabilities: Capabilities specific to respondents' professional domain. Includes expanded technical knowledge or know-how, improved performance of domain-related tasks (e.g. more fluent performance), more strategic outlook on profession or role, greater professional confidence, and new domain-specific contacts/ networks									
2.1 Technical knowledge/know-how (including knowledge 'extension' by applying domain capabilities in new contexts)	7	2	5*	2	8*	3*	1	28	5%
2.2 Task performance (e.g. performing new tasks relevant to profession; included practical grounding for theoretical knowledge)		4	3	1	3	1	1*	13	2%
2.3 Strategic outlook on profession/role (e.g. awareness of career possibilities of profession or application). Differentiated from 9.1, which deals with clarification of own career direction or priority		1	1		1			3	1%
2.4 Domain-specific contacts (establishing beneficial networks or social capital). Differentiated from 3.3, which focuses on the (interpersonal) skills to develop networks	3		4					7	1%
2.5 Overall professional confidence (confidence in professional abilities) [could be self-awareness]. Differentiated from 1.3 by focus on work rather than personal confidence	4*	1	5		4**	1		15	3%
2.6 Introduction to a new professional field – understanding or skills (e.g. teaching EFL)		1		2	1	2		6	1%
TOTAL (domain-specific capabilities)	*14*	*9*	*18*	*5*	*17*	*7*	*2*	**72**	**14%**
PERCENTAGE (domain-sepcific capabilities)	*17%*	*12%*	*16%*	*9%*	*21%*	*7%*	*9%*	*14%*	
3. Role performance and management capabilities: Capabilities required to manage people and projects and to perform work that are not specific to the professional domain. These include generic managerial skills like planning, leading and time management, interpersonal skills, as well as capabilities associated with developing others via mentoring, coaching or introducing change									
3.1 Professionalism in work performance (work style and ethic)		1	1					2	0%
3.2 Planning and organizing work, prioritizing, project & time mgmt	1	1				2		4	1%
3.3 Interpersonal skills, including relationship building skills, conflict mediation, trust building [differentiated from 2.4, which focuses on the networks that are established rather than the networking skills]	2	2*	3	2	2	3		14	3%
3.4 Leadership & self-management skills	1*			3*		1		5	1%
3.5 Managing & implementing change (introduce new initiatives; includes issues of time taken & importance of relationship building beforehand) (CD)	1	5	3		2	5		16	3%
3.6 Acceptance of different standards of performance (accept imperfection; happy to let small mistakes go) (CD)		1	1*	2		1		5	1%
3.7 Support others' learning – e.g. coach, mentor, provide feedback (CD)		1	2	1	5			9	2%
3.8 Managing or coping with uncertainty, working in uncertain environments; includes openness to uncertainty (no expectations, 'go with the flow')	2	8	2	1	1	3		17	3%
3.9 Problem solving (include creative problem solving)		2			2			4	1%
3.10 Making decisions (e.g. not jump to conclusions)		1		1	1		1	4	1%
3.11 Other (grant writing, research, computer)	4	1		1		1		7	1%
TOTAL (role performance and management capabilities)	*11*	*23*	*12*	*11*	*13*	*16*	*1*	**87**	**17%**
PERCENTAGE (role performance and management capabilities)	*13%*	*29%*	*11%*	*20%*	*16%*	*17%*	*4%*	*17%*	

Reported learning outcomes by volunteer type (panel 2)

LEARNING OUTCOME	LAUNCHER 8	ENHANCER 7	TRANSITIONER 11	CAREER BREAKER 5	IMPOSED TRANSITIONER 7	VETERAN 12	AAD 5	TOTAL 55	TOTAL %
4. Communication capabilities: Interpersonal communication capabilities relating to three broad forms of communication: message production (e.g. persuading, negotiating), message reception (e.g. listening and interpreting messages), and managing social and work interactions (e.g. developing networks)									
4.1 Negotiation, persuasion skills	1	1	1	1	1			5	1%
4.2 Language grading (conveying simple messages so can be understood)	1	2	1	1	1	2		8	2%
4.3 Using indirect/diplomatic communication devices (e.g. suggestive dialogue, communicate to preserve 'face')	1	1	3	1	1	2		9	2%
4.4 Communicative flexibility (ability to adjust in various ways, excluding those identified above); communicate with different levels of people; communicate across language barriers generally	5**	1			1	3		10	2%
4.5 Message reception (e.g. listening, inferring meaning)	1		1			1		3	1%
4.6 Foreign language (not host country)	1							1	0%
TOTAL (communication capabilities)	10	5	6	3	4	8	0	36	7%
PERCENTAGE (communication capabilities)	12%	6%	5%	6%	5%	9%	0%	7%	
5. Cultural capabilities: Capabilities that improve the individual's cultural awareness (e.g. awareness of differences of perspectives stemming from one's culture) or enhance cross-cultural competence. We distinguish between culture-specific capabilities (e.g. knowledge of expatriates' cultural practices), and culture-general capabilities (e.g. understanding the influence of cultural patterns more broadly)									
5.1 Culture-specific knowledge and understanding (lifestyle, history, politics, diversity)	8	4	9	3	8	10*	4	46	9%
5.2 Appreciation for values, culture, way of life of host country		1	4	1	1	5		12	2%
5.3 Host-country language skills	4	4	8	2	2	1	2	23	4%
5.4 Culture-general awareness (awareness of different ways of life; appreciate importance of language skills)	1	1	2	1		5	1	11	2%
5.5 Culture-general skills e.g. (working in different cultural environments)		1	3	2	2	1		9	2%
TOTAL (cultural capabilities)	13	11	26	9	13	22	7	101	19%
PERCENTAGE (cultural capabilities)	16%	14%	23%	17%	16%	23%	30%	19%	
6. Self-awareness: Awareness of oneself, including awareness of one's capabilities and outlook (e.g. strengths, weaknesses, beliefs or values) and one's preferences									
6.1 Awareness of individual strengths & weaknesses	1	1	3	2*	1	1	1*	10	2%
6.2 Awareness of the way view the world or place in it (dispositions, social identity, schemas, privilege). Include clarity about own ethical values		2	3*		2	2		9	2%
6.3 Appreciation of or gratitude for Australia	1		4	2	1	3*	1*	12	2%
6.4 Awareness of what enjoy in workplace environment (importance of work environment)	1	3	2*	1	1	1		9	2%
6.5 More reflective; learning how to learn/reflect; importance of learning [could also go to section 1, 'personal development']				2	1	1		4	1%
TOTAL (self-awareness)	3	6	12	7	6	8	2	44	8%
PERCENTAGE (self awareness)	4%	8%	11%	13%	8%	9%	9%	8%	
7. Situational or contextual understanding: Insights into or different outlook on the strategic nature of one's work environment or context, including awareness of geopolitical/global issues, seeing connections between work/self and other issues, as well as a better understanding of a particular situations or contexts within which the assignment occurs									
7.1 See work in wider context – understand impacts, political implications of work	2	5	5	2*	2	3		19	4%
7.2 See connections, similarities home/host countries; include seeing 'local' point of view		3	2		1		1	7	1%
7.3 Awareness of global & geopolitical issues	2	1	3	1	2	3*	1	13	2%
7.4 Awareness of inequality/poverty	1			2		4	1	8	2%
7.5 Awareness of Australia's 'footprint' and how viewed in region (e.g. impact, change view of Australia's role in development/region)			2	1	1	3	1	8	2%
TOTAL (situational or contextual understanding)	5	9	12	6	6	13	4	55	11%
PERCENTAGE (situational or contextual understanding)	6%	12%	11%	11%	8%	14%	17%	11%	
8. Sector-specific knowledge & skills (IAD): Greater awareness of the context, practice and operating environment of the international development sector									
8.1 Understanding of operations of aid/development sector	7	5	8	1	4	6		31	6%
8.2 Appreciation or understanding of development volunteering		1	1	1	1	3	1	8	2%
8.3 Awareness of challenges in sector (resource constraints, inefficiencies)	1	2	2	1				6	1%
TOTAL (sector-specific knowledge and skills)	8	8	11	3	5	9	1	45	9%
PERCENTAGE (sector-specific knowledge and skills)	10%	10%	10%	6%	6%	10%	4%	9%	
9. Career or life priorities: Changed outlook on one's personal life (e.g. way of living, importance in life) or professional career (e.g. direction or anchors in career)									
9.1 Clarification of career direction/priority (incl work/ife balance)	7**		6	1	2		1*	17	3%
9.2 New life priorities (e.g. simplified living, importance of relnships, pace of life)	1	1	1	1	2			6	1%
TOTAL (career or life priorities)	8	1	7	2	4	0	1	23	4%
PERCENTAGE (career or life priorities)	10%	1%	6%	4%	5%	0%	4%	4%	
10. Interests and hobbies: Development of new interests or hobbies, including friendships									
10.1 New hobby or interest	2	2					2	6	1%
10.2 New friendship, deepen existing friendship			1	2	1			4	1%
10.3 Find happiness, satisfaction	1				1			2	0%
TOTAL (interests and hobbies)	3	2	1	2	2	0	2	12	2%
PERCENTAGE (interests and hobbies)	4%	3%	1%	4%	3%	0%	9%	2%	
TOTAL (count)	82	78	111	54	80	94	23	522	100%
TOTAL (percentage)	16%	15%	21%	10%	15%	18%	4%	100%	
Mean learning outcomes per participant	10.25	11.14	10.09	10.80	11.43	7.83	4.60	9.49	

* Indicates 'major impact'; number of asterisks indicates number of respondents identifying this as a major impact.

Communities of practice and volunteers' sensemaking and learning

One way that volunteers can gain access to important knowledge to help or support them during the assignment is through participation in '**communities of practice**' (CoP) – in this case, an informal support network of volunteers who help each other learn and cope in the new environments (Wenger 2000). According to situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger 1991) learning takes place through participating in CoPs which establish unique sets of knowledge specific to the (local) experiences & needs of their members.

An important implication of this theory is the way that newcomers are socialised to a CoP's insights, initially by taking on the role of 'legitimately peripheral' participants - guided by more experienced members of the community – and over time, increasing the engagement and complexity of their participation as their learning shifts from observing or consulting to participating & (later) mentoring/guiding. It is through this process that newcomers become embedded in the CoP, and through the processes of interaction that members make sense, reflect, share and construct meaning (Lave et al. 1991). Previous studies of volunteer learning (Fee & Gray, 2011, 2013) have highlighted how, as volunteers became more embedded within CoPs in a host country, they tend to consult their CoPs less frequently and rely on more individual learning strategies (e.g. personal reflection, trial and error); in doing so, they transition from information seekers to more independent 'learners' and, potentially, informants or mentors for other members of their volunteer community.

As well as helping to orient and support newcomers, CoPs provide a platform for the social construction of meaning and/or knowledge – for instance, as negotiated among the group - rather than just the transferral and subsequent internalization of knowledge (Lave 1993). In this, the establishment of CoPs during VPLJ activities is likely one mechanism through which volunteers construct shared meaning of their experiences and develop shared attitudes toward their assignments and the program.

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Proposed interview schedule and timetable (T3)

Proposed interview schedule: T3 (post-assignment) – December 2020 to July 2021

Type	Theme
Time-specific themes	**Post-assignment experiences:** Overview of key features of participants' post-assignment experiences: current situation professionally and personally; major challenges, opportunities and events (e.g. repatriation stress)
	Program contact and support: Participants' contact with the program after completing their assignment, including contact with RAVN and '*Settling back in workshop*', peer mentoring or remote volunteering and overall experience with Melbourne teams, the pertinence of particular features of this contact to their experience, and their suggestions for improving engagement and procedures
Replicated themes	**Current attitudes, behaviours and capabilities:** Participants' current attitudes, behaviours and capabilities relevant to: their career, personal life, civics, and international (including host community)
	Future Plans: Participants' future personal and professional plans (5 years)
	Reflections: Participants' reflections on changes (perceived changes and responses to noted changes, T1-T3)

Proposed interview timetable: T3 interviews (December 2020 to July 2021)

Month	T3 interviews
Dec-20	7
Jan-21	6
Feb-21	4
Mar-21	-
Apr-21	-
May-21	14
Jun-21	20
Jul-21	4
Total	**55**