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Lessons Learnt Summary

International Volunteering Pilot

Summary of the pilot evaluation findings. December 2018

“The IVP is a great initiative by Australian Red Cross, especially in today’s digital era of internet. This is a common platform for National Societies to access external expertise, and also to support each other by sharing knowledge and expertise. This promotes the concept of peer learning and shared leadership.”

- Puja Koirala, Nepal Red Cross

Program Summary

Australian Red Cross concluded a pilot of its new model of International Volunteering. Importantly, the new model focuses on strengthening the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement through the exchange and recruitment of online and in-country volunteers. This [short animation](#) summarises the program nicely.

The International Volunteer Program (IVP) acts as a broker between National Societies and highly-skilled volunteers by connecting them through a new interactive online platform. The initial overarching goal of the program is to provide an opportunity for National Societies to access some extra technical support and human resources to help realise some of its National Society’s development goals. Highly-skilled volunteers are recruited through partnerships, primarily with corporates, universities & National Societies. Both online and in-country volunteer assignments are designed locally to contribute towards National Society Development by providing discrete inputs into the National Society’s existing strategies and plans.

- *Online assignments* range from small tasks requiring only a few hours to ongoing roles lasting up to 6 months, allowing volunteers to take on an assignment without leaving their lounge room or office
- *In-Country assignments* combine online volunteering with an overseas placement of up to three months with a National Society.

Evaluation

At the end of the year-long pilot an in-depth evaluation was conducted by Jessica Stevens. It analysed the experiences and views of National Society partners, volunteers and Australian Red Cross program management staff. Key evaluation questions covering Relevance, Effectiveness, Sustainability, Appropriateness & Localisation.



Image: (Top) IFRC/ Asri Zaidir, (Lower Left) ARC/ Conor Ashleigh

Innovative Volunteering

Humanity in Action: Our International Work, Supporting Locally-led Humanitarian Action

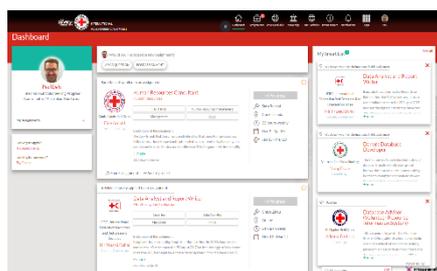


Image: (From Top to Bottom) IVP Online Platform Desktop; ZOOM Fiji/ Damien Light, IVP volunteers in Mongolia/ Sue Damico

What happened? / Overview of achievements

- Twenty eight (28) out of 33 assignments listed were filled. Of these, 20 were online, and 8 in-country.
- Thirteen (13) of the 28 were peer to peer assignments within the Red Cross Red Crescent movement.
- Six (6) assignments were group assignments where two or more volunteers collaborated to complete the assignment.
- Two hundred & twenty (220) volunteer users registered in the platform and 34 were successful in securing an assignment. 10 additional volunteers supported the program manager in Australia over the course of the pilot.
- National Societies who received volunteers were:
 - Australian Red Cross
 - Cook Islands Red Cross
 - IFRC Pacific CCST Pacific – Fiji
 - IFRC Cox’s Bazar PMO
 - IFRC Asia Pacific Regional Office
 - Mongolia Red Cross Society
 - Nepal Red Cross Society
 - Philippine Red Cross
 - Vanuatu Red Cross Society
 - Vietnam Red Cross Society
 - IFRC North Pacific sub-office for Micronesia & Marshall Islands RCSS
- Volunteer roles supported the locally-led work of National Societies and the IFRC in areas such as; Finance & Sustainability; HR & Volunteer Management; Resource Mobilisation; Communications; ICT; Protection, Gender & Inclusion (PGI), Monitoring, Evaluation & Reporting.

Key Insights

Relevance

The design of the program has allowed for unique experiences for the National Societies and volunteers who participated, allowing for expertise, learnings and skills sharing. The report found the shorter assignment length has allowed for discrete pieces of work to be done at the direction of National Societies. While it may still take some time for National Societies to feel comfortable with the platform and online volunteering the pilot results show that there is momentum and promise for online volunteering to be taken to scale in time.

The addition of online volunteering has opened up flexibility for volunteers who may not have otherwise been able to volunteer. The peer to peer aspect of the model has also allowed information and skills sharing within the RCRC Movement and further supported locally led humanitarian action.

Effectiveness

The program has been able to attract a diverse set of volunteers, with the addition of peer to peer assignments and online volunteering being an enabler for this diversification. Volunteers were able to adapt to the online platform and the program was flexible enough to meet volunteer needs. National Societies found the work and outcomes of the 34 volunteers beneficial.

Sustainability

The report found that it is highly unlikely that the Platform will be financially self-sustainable through revenue from humanitarian training and subscription fees from university or corporate partners in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the evaluation recommends a new business model would need to be developed with consideration of product market fit and alternative sources of funding or revenue.

Whilst National Societies acknowledged that online volunteering has greater flexibility and financial viability, there is still a need for in-country assignments in some instances. Further, it was noted that National Societies will continue to need program management support in order to become self-organising.

“I would volunteer again. I think a good thing about the program is its flexibility for online volunteers. I can be independent and work it into my lifestyle, say around my fulltime job. I think it makes it easier for volunteers to assist with the work of Red Cross.”

- Hedda Ngan, IVP Volunteer



Key Insights (continued)

Appropriateness & Localisation

Supporting locally-led humanitarian action was a key part of the program and can be seen clearly throughout it, in terms of delivery, the peer to peer nature of many assignments, and National Societies owning the process. The report found the program was aligned to localisation principles and recommendations outlined in *'Going Local, Achieving a more appropriate and fit-for-purpose humanitarian ecosystem in the Pacific.'* The peer to peer aspect of the IVP, including treating Australian Red Cross as a volunteer receiving National Society has allowed for an open dialogue between all National Societies. All participating National Societies guided the management of this program through their involvement in the IVP Reference Group, however, more time was needed to implement co-design process

CASE STUDY 1: A 'safe migration toolkit' for the Movement

Saagar Shrestha, from the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) volunteered with the Asia-Pacific Migration Network (APMN) Secretariat based at Australian Red Cross for six months, including a one-month in-country placement in Australia and five months volunteering online. Saagar developed a 'Migration Toolkit' which is designed to be a living document, which focuses on migration in the Nepali context and effective initiatives aimed at reducing vulnerability of migrants and their families left behind. The toolkit has been presented widely to National Societies in the region as an example for other National Societies trying to socialise and implement the migration agenda of the RCRC movement.

In the context of this volunteer assignment, Mukesh Singh Nepal Country Manager for ARC stated:

"Another strength of IVP is that it is two way – it is not just that Australian volunteers go to other countries, but also the volunteers from other National Societies can go and volunteer.... This also gave exposure for Nepal Red Cross, as Sagar jee went to Australia to share his expertise. This two-way mechanism is the strongest point."



CASE STUDY 2: Online Volunteering

Business Development Team – Melbourne Business Practicum

A team of four Masters Students from the University of Melbourne volunteered online under the remote supervision of Vanuatu Red Cross Society staff and gained credit towards their degree. The volunteers worked together to review the current fundraising and income-generating business activities of VRCS; mapped potential new avenues for fundraising; developed basic business plans for fundraising opportunities; and compiled a spreadsheet of grants donors.

One of the four volunteers, Temidayo Adebisi had this to say about the experience:

"The IVP was particularly exciting as it provided a platform to tackle real global problems hands on. The opportunity to work across borders, remotely, with a diverse team of highly-skilled, intellectual and passionate individuals whose work played such an important role in the sustainability of communities across the world was an incredible privilege."

Renie Anderson, from the Vanuatu Red Cross Society stated:

"The team did very well in the face of a number of challenges in collecting information. The business development & fundraising report will be utilised as the basis of an upcoming fundraising strategy development meeting to discuss how we can make VRCS more financially sustainable in the future. It has provided a discussion point and some ideas to the team on the potential for fundraising."



CASE STUDY 3: Micro-volunteering – National Societies ‘headhunting’ volunteers

During the pilot several National Societies (NS) benefitted from Micro-volunteering assignments. Micro-volunteering is a fast and innovative method of recruiting an online volunteer for a short task-based assignment. Micro-volunteer assignments are less than 40 hours in total and do not require a Position Description or a Terms of Reference. Through the ‘Who’s Available’ function, a NS can browse, search, and filter volunteers by skills and availability, then they can approach a volunteer who is suitable for the assignment or task. Micro-volunteering is a special new function that gives NSs the flexibility to identify and approach volunteers with specific skills. It is a faster way for NSs to target and match a volunteer to a particular short-term assignment.

Four volunteer assignments during the pilot tested this new function. One NS used a micro-volunteer assignment to engage a specialist to review and critique a business development report compiled by another IVP volunteer. Another NS used a micro-volunteer assignment to leverage the support of a volunteer with graphic design skills. Staff at another NS engaged two micro-volunteers to test and critique an M&E toolkit and to edit and review a 300-page evaluation report.



CASE STUDY 4: Online Volunteers Supporting Humanitarian Disaster Response

A promising case study that emerged during the IVP Pilot, was how remote online volunteers can support the work of the RCRC movement in responding to emergencies.

Since August 2017, owing to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the northern areas of Rakhine State, Myanmar, hundreds of thousands of women, children and men – have crossed into Bangladesh. This is one of the largest and most complex crises in the region in decades. The [IFRC](#) is working with the [Bangladesh Red Crescent Society](#) to provide support to 200,000 displaced people in the Cox’s Bazaar region.

During the IVP pilot, Nir Prasad Dahal, the IFRC’s Planning Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning (PMEAL) Delegate engaged two online volunteers to provide support to the PMEAL team. These volunteers assisted by programming online surveys for data collection on android devices using ODK and KoBo toolkits and analysing the survey data after it was collected by BDRCS field volunteers. This analysis and reports were used by the IFRC & BDRCS program team in Cox’s Bazaar to monitor, track the progress, feedback to communities and inform future program design.

“Through IVP program, we were able to get the skilled volunteers who could support our team remotely on part time basis. They helped to complete the tasks of data collection tool programming and its descriptive analysis during a time of great pressure during the emergency response. I found the IVP an effective tool and it was beneficial in filling the gap during the time of urgency as well as building the capacity and confidence of the volunteers”

Additional opportunities for online volunteers to support disaster and crises response operations include roles in the areas of desktop research, humanitarian diplomacy research, mapping data to geographic information systems and data entry for first responder tools such as the [DEEP platform](#).

INTERNATIONAL



FEDERATION



OPEN DATA KIT

Future Opportunities

- Assess potential partnerships with other organisations including outside of RCRC, more closely aligned to a ‘marketplace’
- Take insights from the pilot to test demand and redesign for product and market fit.
- Further exploring the opportunity with academic institutions in particular approaching alliances of universities.
- Explore alternative business models and sources of funding, including corporate partnerships and alliances interested in supporting humanitarian action towards the SDGs.