

MFAT Management Response to Evaluation of Volunteer Service Abroad Core Funding Arrangement

About this document

This document describes the programme's response to the evaluation.

Evaluation report title:	Volunteer Service Abroad Core Funding Arrangement
File title of final pdf report:	Final VSA Evaluation Report
GDM Link to final pdf report:	INTD-59-9042
GDM Link to final Word report:	INTD-59-9041
AMS Activity Number:	A11063
Activity Manager	Chris Day
Programme:	NGO Strategic Partnerships
MFAT response approved by:	Helen Leslie, Acting Director, PHM
Approved date:	
Evaluation cost to MFAT:	\$100,000

Approval

Approval of the MFAT Management Response to Evaluation	
Approved by:	
Signature:
	Helen Leslie, Acting Director, PHM
Date:

MFAT Management Response

Evaluation team members

Members of the evaluation team from Allen and Clarke were:

Name	Role
Matthew Allen	Director
Lucina Schmich	Senior Associate
Dr Patricia Vermillion Peirce	Senior Associate
Paula White	Senior Associate
Jessie Wilson	Associate
Heather Brown	Consultant

Key findings/conclusions of the evaluation

The key findings/conclusions of the evaluation are:

- VSA works with beneficiary countries to identify current development needs in each of the MFAT priority sectors, and with partner organisations to identify and scope assignments.
- Current recruitment processes secure a range of skilled volunteers in a cost effective way.
- Volunteer achievements are varied, assignment specific, and consistently contribute to individual and organisational development.
- Resources for the Activity implementation are appropriately allocated for volunteer assignments, managing partnerships and relationships, and training and capacity building.
- VSA should strengthen Activity monitoring and reporting to improve sustainability and impact and capture key outcomes, by clearly defining key development objectives, and agreeing on performance indicators and targets for capacity building, cross-cutting issues, value for money.
- VSA should continue to review and strengthen operational policies and procedures, that will assist with identification of opportunities for increased efficiency and effectiveness and sustainability of the Activity in areas such as recruitment processes, mix and type of volunteer assignments.

Lessons that MFAT can take from the evaluation are:

No.	Lesson	Programme response
1	The report makes a number of references to increasing collaboration between MFAT and VSA on key priorities and strategies for maximum impact.	MFAT/IDG agrees with this, and a number of initiatives to address this are being considered. MFAT should give further consideration to how they work with strategic partners for increased impact.
2	The report confirmed that VSA has transparent and robust governance arrangements, a commitment to professionalising and improving systems and processes, and that their strategic planning enables them to be agile and responsive to MFAT's needs.	VSA is a long established, professional and committed development organisation which has no doubt contributed to this.

Recommendations for MFAT

We recommend the following:

No.	Recommendation	Programme response
1	MFAT and VSA should use a collaborative approach for future Activity design, to ensure key features identified in the evaluation are incorporated.	Agree. MFAT/VSA will take a collaborative approach to development of the Activity Design Document for Phase 2 of the Activity.
2	MFAT and VSA should agree, define, and describe key value for money indicators and means of verification.	Agree.
3	MFAT and VSA should strengthen Activity monitoring and reporting to improve sustainability and impact and capture key outcomes.	Agree. MFAT/VSA will address this as part of the Activity Design for the next phase.

Further programme response

The processes adopted by Allen and Clarke to synthesise data gathered into a coherent report were not straightforward, which did mean the evaluation period was protracted by at least three months. To some extent the report lacks depth of analysis, but the Steering Committee felt the overall genesis of the report and its findings addressed the key requirement to inform decision-making with regard to the next phase of support to VSA.

Comments on the Evaluation from VSA:

VSA Comment	MFAT response
<p>VSA acknowledges the time and thought invested by Allen + Clarke, the Steering Committee and MFAT staff during this evaluation, and the willing contribution of a large number of interviewees, including current and returned volunteers.</p>	
<p>We regret that information was not obtained from our New Zealand NGO, university and corporate partners, nor from our International and Regional partners including UN agencies, despite our requests that this be included. We believe this would have provided a valuable perspective. Likewise we consider that conversations with New Zealand High Commission staff and VSA Programme Managers in those countries which were not visited would have provided further insights into our overall programme, lessons learned and recommendations.</p>	<p>From MFAT’s perspective the evaluation was a snapshot of programme countries and partners. The consultants collected a large amount of data from the many interviews conducted which supported the conclusions.</p>
<p>We were also disappointed at some contradictory comments in relation to efficiency in the DAC criteria. Although the narrative recognised some positive aspects of our work, the rating seemed to focus largely on the time required for recruitment and mobilization. All agencies engaged in volunteering for international development recognise this as a complex area as it involves a large number of factors that are outside VSA’s control, although we continue to work to make improvements where we can. Our recruitment processes have been positively reviewed and VSA’s performance in this is more than comparable with others, with considerably fewer early returns. The comments also seems to consider the impact of the use of months as a target as inefficient, however VSA has been clear that this was not our choice.</p>	<p>MFAT is confident VSA will continue to review their recruitment processes to seek efficiencies where possible.</p>
<p>VSA will make maximum use of lessons learned and the recommendations as we continue to optimize our efforts to deliver effective people-centred development.</p>	

MFAT follow up actions

This table lists actions that MFAT will undertake in response to the findings, lessons and recommendations of the evaluation.

Lesson learned / Recommendation	Action	Who will action	When	Resource Implications
<p>The first phase of this Activity has been well established as a programme of development assistance in the Pacific. The next phase will build on and consolidate systems, processes and approaches established in phase one. MFAT/VSA will collaborate on the design of the next phase. The key areas to improve upon include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strengthen relationships with in-country partners. - Develop a robust monitoring and results reporting system. - Consider the length of time it takes to scope/recruit for assignments. - Develop value for money indicators 	MFAT/VSA	MFAT/VSA	By 1 October 2015	VSA will lead on the activity design. They have contracted in some resource. MFAT will contribute through existing resources. Activity Manager to coordinate MFAT's inputs.

Dissemination plan

The evaluation will be/has been shared with partner organisations, MFAT staff and other stakeholders in the following ways:

No.	Method of dissemination	Responsibility of	When
1	The evaluation report shared with VSA	Activity Manager	By 10 May 2015
2	Evaluation report shared with MFAT staff and Posts via Formal Message	Activity Manager	By 30 October 2015
3	The evaluation report published on the NZ Aid Programme website.	The Development Support Officer, DSE, IDG, MFAT	On signing management response
4	VSA to share with Partner Organisations	VSA	On signing management response.

Report Release Checklist

Note: This checklist must be used for all evaluations that will be published in full on MFAT's website. Where the report has been commissioned by a partner organisation and is published on their website, MFAT should simply seek written permission from the partner to provide a link to the published evaluation from our website. Attach a copy of the partner's permission to this MFAT Response to Evaluation template in lieu of this Report Release Checklist.

NAME OF THE REPORT: EVALUATION OF THE VSA CORE FUNDING ARRANGEMENT

AUTHOR(S): ALLEN AND CLARKE

REPORT MONTH AND YEAR: MAY 2015

All evaluation reports should be able to be publicly released in accordance with the principle of availability (Section 5 of the Official Information Act (OIA)). However, this principle can be overridden if there is 'good reason' (as set out in the OIA) to withhold information. Use this checklist to help you decide if sections in the evaluation report should be withheld.

If any of the answers to these questions is 'yes' then:

- A hard copy of the report should be marked up with brackets around the information to be withheld, and the OIA section under which the information is to be withheld noted (refer to MFAT Style and Practice Guide OIA Requests)*
- The PDF copy of the report that is submitted to the Development Support Officer (DSE) for the library and public release will have the withheld information whited out and the reasons for withholding noted in the margins. The following note should be placed in the report: Certain information in this report has been withheld in accordance with the Official Information Act and the grounds for withholding, as at the time of publication, are noted in the margins.*

If you are unsure whether a good reason to withhold exists seek advice from the IDG staff member responsible for OIAs or the MFAT corporate legal team.

OIA Section 6 Conclusive Reasons: Are there words in the evaluation that are likely to:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| a) Prejudice the security or defence of NZ or NZ's international relations? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| b) Prejudice the entrusting of information to the Government of NZ on a basis of confidence by (i) the Government of any other country or (ii) any international organisation? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| c) Prejudice the maintenance of the law? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| d) Endanger the safety of any person? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| e) Damage seriously the NZ economy? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

OIA Section 7 Special Reasons: Are there words in the evaluation that are likely to:

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| a) Prejudice the security or defence of the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau or the Ross Dependency? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| b) Prejudice relations between the governments of NZ, and governments of the Cook Island and Niue? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| c) Prejudice the international relations of the governments of the Cook Islands or Niue | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

OIA Section 9 Other Reasons: Are there words in the evaluation that need to be withheld to:
(Note: There is need to balance Section 9 grounds for withholding against 'public interest considerations'. Consider the negative consequences from release, and whether or not these consequences are outweighed by the public interest in access to the information.)

- a) Protect the privacy of natural persons? Yes No
- b) Protect trade secrets and commercial positions? Yes No
- c) c)Protect information that is subject to an obligation of confidence where release of the information would be likely to i) prejudice the supply of similar information from the same source and it is in the public interest that such information should continue to be supplied or (ii) otherwise damage the public interest? Yes No
- d) Avoid prejudice to measures protecting the health or safety of members of the public? Yes No
- e) Avoid prejudice to the substantial economic interests of New Zealand? Yes No
- f) Avoid prejudice to measures that prevent or mitigate material loss to members of the public? Yes No

- a) Maintain the constitutional conventions including the confidentiality of advice tendered by ministers and officials? Yes No
- b) Maintain effective conduct of public affairs through free and frank expressions of opinion and protection from improper pressure or harassment? Yes No
- c) Maintain legal professional privilege? Yes No
- d) Enable a minister department or organisation holding information to carry out commercial activities without prejudice or disadvantage? Yes No
- e) Enable a minister, department or organisation holding the information to carry on negotiations without prejudice or disadvantage? Yes No
- f) Prevent the disclosure or use of official information for improper gain or advantage? Yes No

Other Reason: Is there any other reason for withholding information?

- If the answer is yes then seek advice from the IDG staff member responsible for OIA or the MFAT corporate legal team. Yes No

RECOMMENDATION

- Withhold selected parts, noting sections of the OIA applying to these in a copy of the report that is filed, and white-ed out in the copy of the report to be forwarded to the Development Support Officer (DSE) for public release and the library
- Release entire report

Signed by Chris Day (Activity Manager)

Signed by Helen Leslie, Acting Director, PHM

Date: / /