



# Study Melbourne

## LIVE Volunteers

### Pilot program

# Final report

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## Executive summary

### Introduction

*Study Melbourne LIVE Volunteers* was a year-long pilot project to explore volunteering by international students with community-based organisations across Victoria. The program was supported under the Study Melbourne Lead, Intern, Volunteer and Experience (LIVE) initiative, which seeks to enhance the experience of international students.

*Study Melbourne LIVE Volunteers* has made progress against the Study Melbourne objectives related to student experience, and key outcomes include:

- Increased awareness and capacity of six educational institutions, 17 volunteer-involving organisations to support and facilitate volunteering by international students
- Over 210 students reporting increased awareness of volunteering or increase confidence to apply for a volunteer role
- 396 instances of connection between international students and volunteering, with overwhelmingly positive experience
- Deeper understanding of the needs of international students in terms of community-based volunteering, and how these can be met by volunteer-involving organisations and educational institutions
- A collection of inspirational stories of volunteering by international students

### Findings

Through our research and engagement with students, volunteer-involving organisations and educational institutions, we have made the following findings:

- International students want to volunteer.
- International students are actively taking part in volunteering in the community.
- Volunteering supports international students to develop employability skills, and increase social connectedness.
- VIOs benefit from engaging international students as volunteers with unique skills and abilities especially related to cross-cultural understanding and language skills.
- Where international students do volunteer, their experiences are overwhelmingly positive.
- Preparing international students to volunteer can enhance their experience through raising awareness and building confidence.
- Student experience of volunteering is impacted by concerns about rights and responsibilities of volunteers in Australia, particularly the right not to be exploited.
- Connecting international students with volunteering opportunities requires a diversity of approaches.
- Educational institutions can play a key role in connecting international students to volunteering opportunities.

- VIO's perceive that their volunteer programs need to be more flexible to accommodate international students.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, we have made a series of recommendations, to more effectively facilitate volunteering by international students and to fully realise the benefit to volunteering organisations, educational institutions, and the students themselves.

Our recommendations include

- 1) Design of volunteering programs inclusive of international students should take into account:
  - a) Students' need for flexibility around study timetables and potential home visits
  - b) Students' abilities to navigate complex recruitment processes
  - c) Information sessions on volunteer opportunities as a key part of the recruitment process
  - d) Opportunities for students to interact with a wider volunteer cohort
  - e) Limited opportunities for international students to call on Australian contacts as referees
- 2) Volunteer-involving organisations see the benefit of engaging international students in volunteering, but need support to build that capacity, in areas including:
  - a) Workplace checks for international students
  - b) Addressing perceived or actual language barriers to engaging with international students
  - c) Collection of information on engagement of international students
- 3) Volunteer-involving organisations and educational institutions should offer clarity in their use of the term 'volunteer' and related terms. Ideally, this would be consistent with the definition developed by Volunteering Australia.
- 4) Educational institutions should offer incentives for international students to record and capture their volunteering activity, whether ad-hoc or systematically via a program such as RMIT Edge
- 5) Study Melbourne considers supporting an audit on online material on volunteering available to international students, with the intent of identifying and correcting inaccurate information
- 6) Organisations in the international education sector consider undertaking additional research on the contribution of volunteering to changing community perceptions about international students

## Introduction

*Study Melbourne LIVE Volunteers* was a year-long pilot project to explore volunteering by international students with community-based organisations across Victoria. While the concepts underpinning the project were based on deep understanding of volunteering, the pilot nature of the project entailed learning and experimentation as fundamental to the approach.

### Study Melbourne and LIVE Volunteers

International education is vital to Victoria's economy and education institutions. Each year more than 200,000 international students from over 170 countries choose to come to Victoria to study.

Study Melbourne is a Victorian Government initiative providing support and information to this community of international students, helping them have the best possible time while studying and living in Victoria.

With respect to student experience, Study Melbourne has the following objectives.

- International students find it easy to access and navigate our programs and services
- Reduced risk of exploitation and discrimination for international students
- Improved participation and inclusion of international students in the Victorian economy and society
- Improved health and wellbeing outcomes for international students

Study Melbourne seeks to enhance the experience of international students through the Lead, Intern, Volunteer and Experience (LIVE) initiative.

Study Melbourne LIVE Volunteers was supported under the volunteering part of LIVE, which aims to enhance the employability skills of international students by developing soft skills, building social connectedness and confidence, through experiencing local workplace culture, and expanding support networks and contacts.

## Program outcomes

Study Melbourne LIVE Volunteers comprised five components: engagement, preparation, placement, promotion and experience. Key outcomes include:

- Increased awareness and capacity of six educational institutions, 17 volunteer-involving organisations to support and facilitate volunteering by international students
- Over 210 students reporting increased awareness of volunteering or increase confidence to apply for a volunteer role
- 396 instances of connection between international students and volunteering, with an overwhelmingly positive experiences

- Deeper understanding of the needs of international students in terms of community-based volunteering, and how these can be met by volunteer-involving organisations and educational institutions
- A collection of inspirational stories of volunteering by international students

Full details of program achievements are included in Annex A.

Study Melbourne LIVE Volunteers was designed and delivered in line with the above objectives, and the outcomes represent progress towards these objectives. For example, by identifying and developing clearer pathways for international students to connect with off-campus and community-based organisations, the pilot has endeavoured to increase access to volunteering. Similarly, by building student awareness of the rights and responsibilities of volunteers in Australia, the pilot has reduced the risk of exploitation on international students in volunteering content.

Study Melbourne LIVE Volunteers has highlighted the valuable contribution of volunteering to increasing participation and inclusion of international students in the Victorian economy and society, as well as improving health and wellbeing outcomes for international students. Through our research and engagement with students, volunteer-involving organisations and educational institutions, we have learned about the diverse opportunities for participation, as well as how to facilitate these more effectively. We have learned about the many benefits of international student volunteering, both for organisations engaging them and the students themselves. Our findings are set out in more detail in this report.

## Data use in this report

The findings on this report are based on the following data:

- 200 international students registered for volunteering preparation sessions at the Study Melbourne Student Centre between 1 November 2017 and 31 May 2018
- 236 international student participants in 17 volunteering preparation sessions at the Study Melbourne Student Centre and on-campus at RMIT, RMIT, William Angliss Institute and Central Queensland University or at Volunteering Victoria between 5 September 2017 and 23 May 2018
- 46 international students who provided written feedback on their volunteering experiences
- 30 international students who provided informal or ad-hoc feedback on their volunteer experience
- 10 students who took part in an interview and contributed to the creation of a case study or story
- 71 managers or leaders of volunteers who provided written responses in a survey of volunteer-involving organisations
- Engagement with:
  - 15 representatives from six educational institutions
  - 5 representatives from international student associations
  - 20 managers or leaders of volunteers
- Study Melbourne LIVE Volunteers Advisory Group

## What we have learned

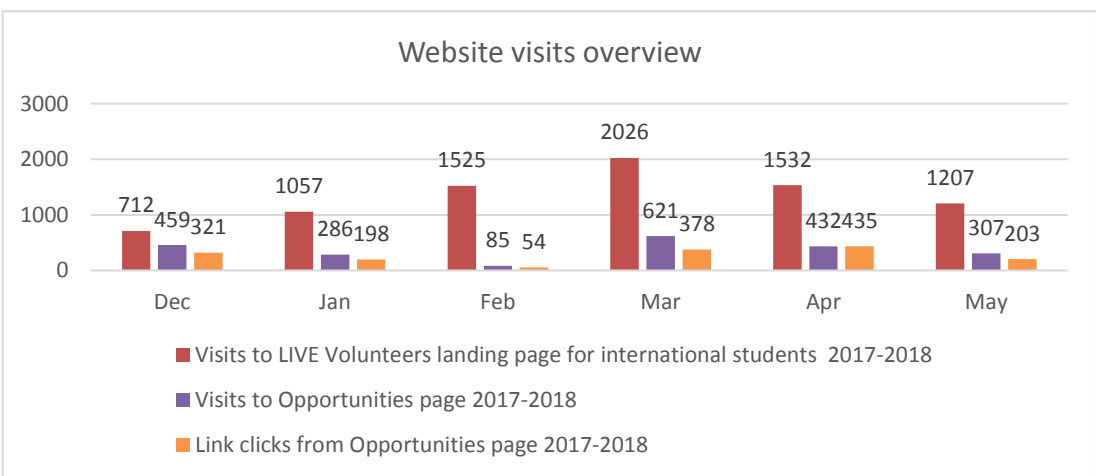
We made a number of findings throughout the implementation of the pilot program, via engagement activities, dedicated research and data collection, and participant feedback on volunteering preparation sessions.

These include:

### International students want to volunteer.

We've measured international student interest in volunteering in a number of ways, including unique visits to our dedicated program webpages and registration and attendance at volunteering preparation sessions.

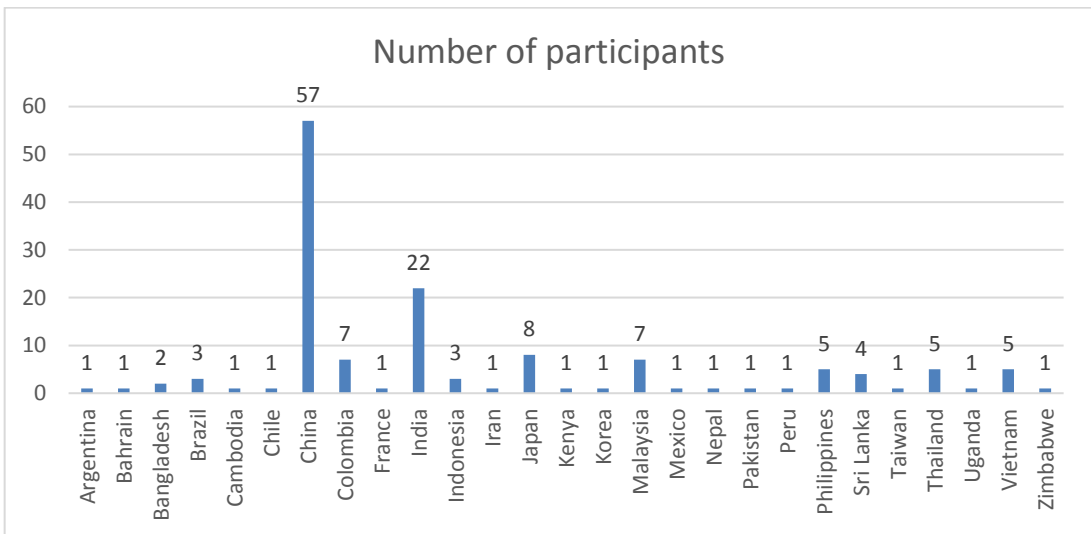
Over the period from December 2017 to May 2018, there was a monthly average of 1343 unique visits to the program pages dedicated to an international student audience, rising to over 2000 visits in March 2018. Over the same period, there were 365 visits to the Volunteering Opportunities page each month, with over 60% of visits resulting in the visitor progressing to view an opportunity in more detail. This compares with a monthly average of 1,754 and 182 unique page views on the 'For volunteers' and 'Resources' pages respectively.



**Table 1:**  
Unique website visits and engagement over the period 1 Dec 2017 to 31 May 2018

200 students registered for and 94 students participated in volunteer preparation sessions at the Study Melbourne Student Centre between November 2017 and May 2018, with a further 142 participating in sessions held on-campus at RMIT, William Angliss Institute and Central Queensland University or at Volunteering Victoria. Feedback received from the staff at the Student Centre and education partners indicate that turnout has been consistent with their expectations, and indicates a growing interest in volunteering from international students.

We did not find nationality to be a key determinant of interest in volunteering. Of session participants who gave their nationality, Chinese and Indian students were the most populous groups, reflecting the proportionally higher numbers of students from these two countries undertaking courses in Victoria. Overall, 27 nationalities were represented – from Argentina to Zimbabwe.



**Table 2:**  
Self-reporting of home country by session participants

Where students gave their motivations for seeking volunteering opportunities, these were divided evenly between developing employability skills and more personal reasons such as a desire to help people, make new friends or improve their communication skills. Taken from student feedback, some examples include:

- 'Art and cultural groups - mostly for personal interest'
- 'I want to work with refugees and tell their stories'
- 'Sports competitions or education - interested in volleyball, and want to know more about footy'
- 'Connect with nature, and children and older people – these kinds of communities will help me feel comfortable'
- 'Digital design volunteering to build professional networks, and sailing club volunteering to teach sailing'
- 'Volunteer job related to accounting'
- 'Volunteering to help my nursing studies'
- 'Animals or environment conservation - I feel connected to these areas'
- 'Volunteering feels amazing - I like to help others, and spend time with older people, sick people or children'
- 'Improve my English and how is the environment in Australia'
- 'Cross-cultural, meeting people - because I'd like to be more involved in the community'
- 'Volunteering in a public place, meeting people and knowing more about Melbourne'

Through engagement with students, we learned about their diverse motivations for volunteering, e.g.:

- To help improve their ability to communicate in English, Dai Cheng and Linan Jia decided to volunteer in aged care. They thought that the older people would have more time to communicate, and would enjoy sharing stories.
- Olena Nguyen decided to volunteer so she could help people in the community, while also developing some useful skills.

*"As well as improving myself it was also something to put on my resume to show I'm an active, dedicated and willing to learn person that an employer may be looking for." Olena Nguyen, Study Melbourne Ambassador*



## International students are actively taking part in volunteering in the community.

The assumption that international students are underrepresented in off-campus volunteering was one of the key drivers for the development of this pilot program.

However, 18.5% of the 200 international students who registered for volunteering preparation sessions reported they had volunteered off-campus, with a community-based organisation – while a further 8.5% had volunteered solely on-campus.

Similarly, over 60% of leaders or managers of volunteers reported that their organisation had involved international students as volunteers in the past two years. While few volunteer-involving organisations currently have the capacity to systematically capture this information, we found that leaders and managers of volunteers are generally aware of international students in their volunteer programs.

While our sample size is too small to compare with Census data and represents students already motivated to volunteer, our finding calls this assumption into question and suggests there is value in further research into whether international students are indeed underrepresented in off-campus volunteering.

## Volunteering supports international students to develop employability skills, and increase social connectedness.

There is a considerable body of research into the benefits of volunteering, from practical benefits like skill development, through to health and wellbeing benefits, including a sense of belonging and increased personal resilience. Through our engagement activities and interaction with international students at volunteering preparation sessions, we learned that they are similarly benefitting from volunteering in diverse ways.

Improved communication skills were top of the list of benefits identified by international student volunteers at the Sustainable Living Festival, alongside these other examples taken from volunteer feedback:

- 'Talking to the public'
- 'Patience and friendliness to every guest of the event'
- 'Learning to deal with unforeseen, and with different opinions'
- 'Team work skills and working with others'
- 'Promoting and spreading the word about the program'
- 'Being on time'
- 'Learning so much about the environment'



Several international student volunteers participated in activities to educate children about wildlife conservation, though operating puppets like 'Asta', the *Astacopsis Gouladi* (or giant freshwater lobster).

'I learned how to operate the puppets and more background knowledge about the lobster. It was a pretty good experience on learning to organise other volunteers in lobster teams.' *International student in feedback to Sustainable Living Festival*

Through developing case studies with individual students, we learned that volunteering can have a range of profound benefits. For example:

- While looking for a job and feeling a little homesick from her home in the Philippines, Cristina Magbojos turned to volunteering to reach out to others, gain friends and learn something new.
- Volunteering in leadership roles helped Andrea Mayorga realise she thrived on helping and motivating others to create and innovate. So, she changed her focus of her study, started building a skillset for business and social impact, and is creating a now ‘business for good’ platform.
- An engineer by trade, with a passion for renewable energy, Carlos Espinal wasn’t sure he’d enjoy volunteer roles at festivals and events. But volunteering at the Sustainable Living Festival, he discovered a lot of like-minded people and learned how to decrease his own ecological footprint.
- Olena Nguyen came to Australia to study a Bachelor of Finance at La Trobe University, but with exposure to community work through her active volunteering, she has started new studies in social work.

Volunteer-involving organisations are able to identify a range of benefits accrued by the international students they engage. While practical workplace skills and an opportunity to learn about Australia top the list, managers and leaders of volunteers have also observed the way in which volunteering can create a sense of belonging and friendship for international students.



**Table 3:**  
VIO perspectives  
on how  
international  
students have  
benefited by  
being involved  
with their  
organisation

‘Some [students] have benefited by feeling that they are becoming more involved in community, which is something they miss from back home. Some have benefited by having access to a broader range of relationships and connections than they would within their universities or social circles. Many international students had strong connections with grandparents or aged relatives, and have found satisfaction in building connections with older Australians.’ *Manager or leader of volunteers in an aged-care setting*

**VIOs benefit from engaging international students as volunteers with unique skills and abilities especially related to cross-cultural understanding and language skills.**

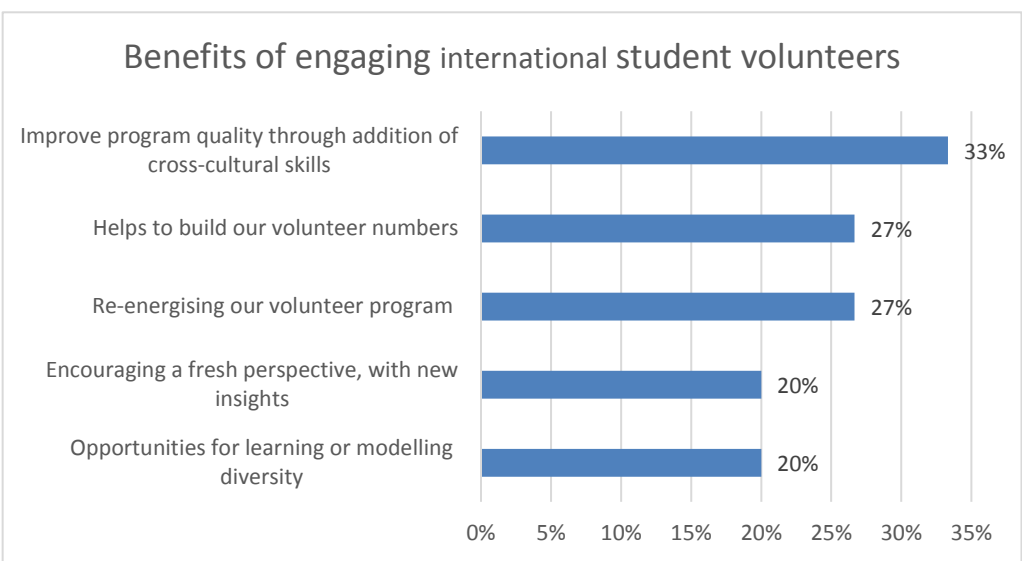
We learned that where volunteer-involving organisations engage international students as volunteers, they are able to deliver more services and at a higher level of program quality.

For some managers, international students provide a willing workforce which assists to increase their volunteer program. However, over half of the managers and leaders who shared their perspective observed that international students brought language and cultural skills, enabling their organisations to connect better with clients, particularly in the areas of aged-care, disability and community services.

‘Greater language diversity within our volunteer team - we are an inner city hospital with patients speaking over 100 different languages. These volunteers allow us to better support non English speaking patients. It also leads to greater acceptance and diversity awareness by our non-international volunteers.’ *Manager or leader of volunteers in a health setting*

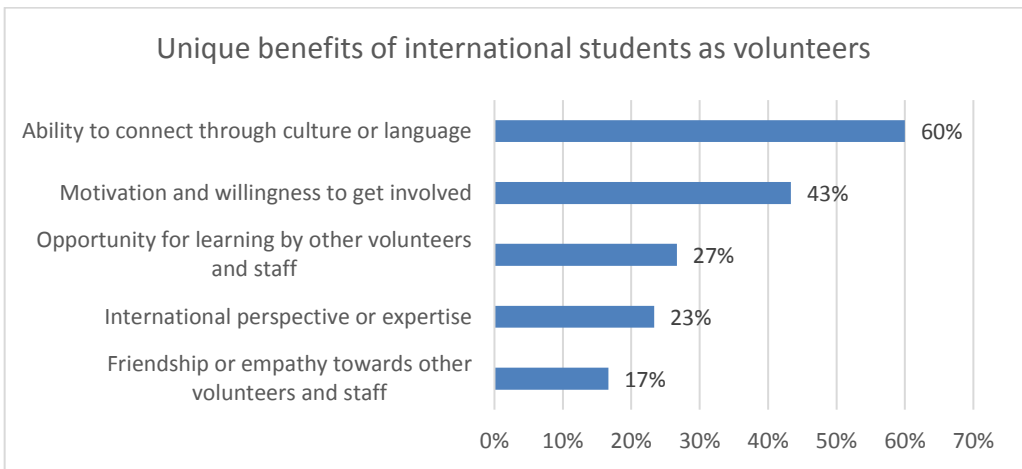
We also learned about the capacity of international students to bring a fresh perspective to volunteer-involving organisations and to encourage learning and modelling of new approaches.

‘We believed the impact on the organisation, beneficiaries and community to be threefold. Firstly, through incentivising volunteering opportunities within our programs we engage an age-bracket of Australians that are traditionally underrepresented in volunteering in Australia. The flow on effects of this is that it places a younger person in front of school students who may more easily engage with somebody closer to them in age. It also demonstrates to young Australians that there is high value that they can add to their communities.’ *Manager or leader of volunteers in an education setting*



**Table 4:**  
VIO perspectives on the organisational benefits of engaging international students as volunteers

Managers and leaders or volunteers were able to identify a range of unique benefits offered by engaging international student volunteer, compared to other groups of volunteers.



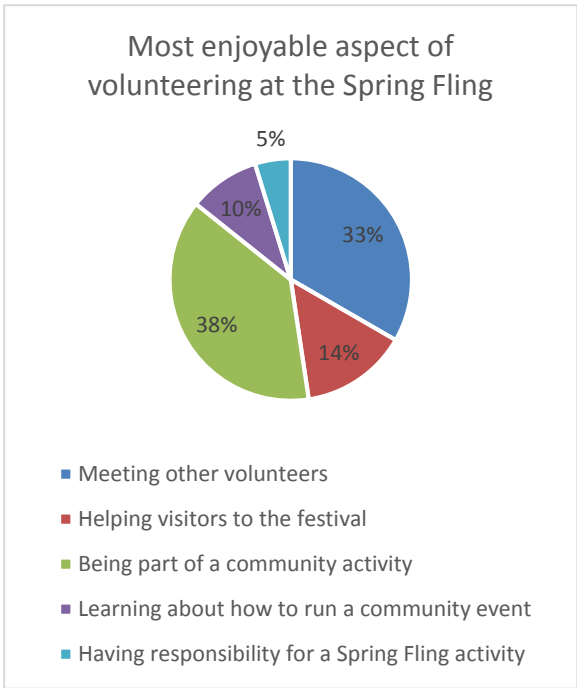
**Table 5:**  
VIO perspectives  
on the unique  
benefits brought  
by international  
students,  
compared to  
other volunteers

While language and cultural skills were identified by over half of the respondents, several managers indicated that they appreciated the way that interaction with the international student volunteers encouraged learning and reflection by staff, other volunteers – as well as clients.

*'We find clients are curious about where the students are from and what their customs are. This helps to break down the walls of prejudice that we find exist in a regional community.'* *Manager or leader of volunteers in a community services setting*

### Where international students do volunteer, their experiences are overwhelmingly positive.

Where international students provided feedback following their experience, 100% indicated that they would be happy to volunteer for the same event or organisation again.



International students who volunteered at the Spring Fling Street Festival (October 2017) and Sustainable Living Festival Big Weekend (February 2018) identified a range of enjoyable aspects, with opportunities to meet people near the top of the list.

*'I really enjoy feel part of the community and the festival.'*

*'Memorable, fun and meaningful experience.'*

*'It's my first time to participate in this kind of festival volunteer. I enjoyed it very much. Enjoy the pizza and the game! Met some friends.'*

*Volunteers at Spring Fling Street Festival*

**Table 7:** Feedback from 21 respondents to the Spring Fling Volunteer Feedback Survey

‘People are responding so positively and I could try vegan nachos!’

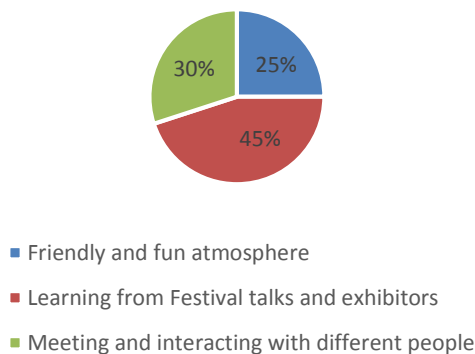
‘Very good chance to work with other volunteers and lobster puppet groups, and food was delicious.’

‘Full of inspiration’

*Volunteers at Sustainable Living Festival*

**Table 6:** Feedback from 21 respondents to the SLF Volunteer Feedback Survey

Most enjoyable aspect of volunteering at the Sustainable Living Festival



Informal engagement with leaders and managers of volunteers about the experience of international student volunteers is consistent with these findings. They emphasise that the majority of issues can be resolved at the time with patience with cross-cultural communication and clear messages around recruitment processes to manage student expectations of a quick response.

‘General feedback from a selection of the international students highlighted that they really enjoyed getting in behind the scenes, learning the process of how it all comes together and "the hard work the entire team does to bring it to life". There is interest in getting more involved into the planning of the organisation of the event and overall the level of enjoyment was predominately high.’ *Amber Rimmer, Event Manager, Melbourne Fashion Festival Ltd*

We also observed that international students are sometimes reluctant to provide feedback that could be perceived as negative. That said, ten volunteers were willing to share feedback on an informal basis during the Spring Fling Street Festival, and while overall very positive, they indicated that they would have enjoyed having more responsibility and to have a better understanding of the entire event.

Throughout implementation of the program, we found numerous opportunities to promote a positive student experience, through support for leaders and managers of volunteers. Many organisations offering short-term or event-based volunteer opportunities are run by a small staff team supplemented by a group of volunteers, often with volunteers in volunteer coordination roles. We found that organisations were very willing to partner with us, to help build their confidence and capacity through advice on role development, recruitment, communications, and evaluation.

We learned that there is considerable diversity in how volunteer-involving organisations collect information about volunteer experience, with few collecting data on international student status from individual volunteers in a systematic way. Across the wider network of volunteer-involving organisations, there are moves to better document the demographic composition of their volunteer group, such as age and cultural background. However, there is not yet a demonstrable business case for collecting information specific to international student status, from the perspective of a volunteer-involving organisation, as many of the changes they may make to benefit their wider volunteer group will also benefit international students.

**Preparing international students to volunteer can enhance their experience through raising awareness and building confidence.**

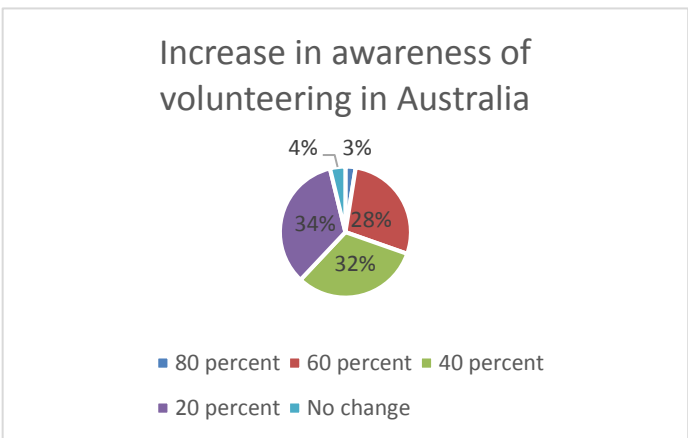
236 international students participated in volunteering preparation sessions, comprising two hour-long interactive sessions:

- Volunteering in Australia: Essentials – this session covered how volunteering is defined and valued in Australia, the benefits and challenges for international students, and rights and responsibilities of volunteers
- Volunteering in Australia: Find the right role for you – this session described the diverse volunteering options available in Australia and typical application processes, helped students to reflect on what would suit them, and demonstrated how to use some of the most common online platforms

Each session concluded with a description of current volunteering opportunities, and some sessions were designed around one specific type of opportunity. For example, two sessions delivered to RMIT students gave details on volunteering opportunities at State Library Victoria, with specific reference to the new Volunteer Greeters Program

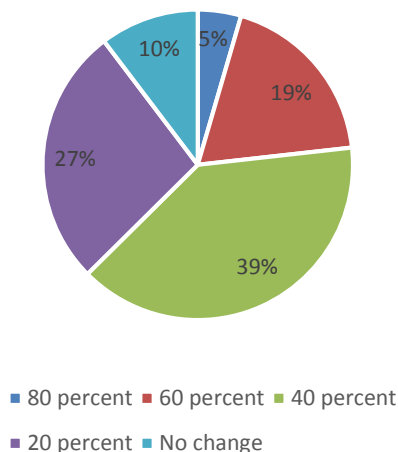
These sessions were well-received by international students, with 70% of participants strongly agreeing that the session provided them with useful information and 95% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the content was appropriate and met their expectations.

We asked participants in each session to self-assess their increase in awareness of volunteering in Australia, their knowledge of how to find an opportunity and their confidence in applying for an opportunity. In both session, at least 90% of participants recorded an increase in their awareness of or confidence to engage in volunteering Australia.



**Table 8:** Self-assessment by participants in the ‘Volunteering Australia: Essentials’ session

Increase in confidence to apply for a volunteer opportunity



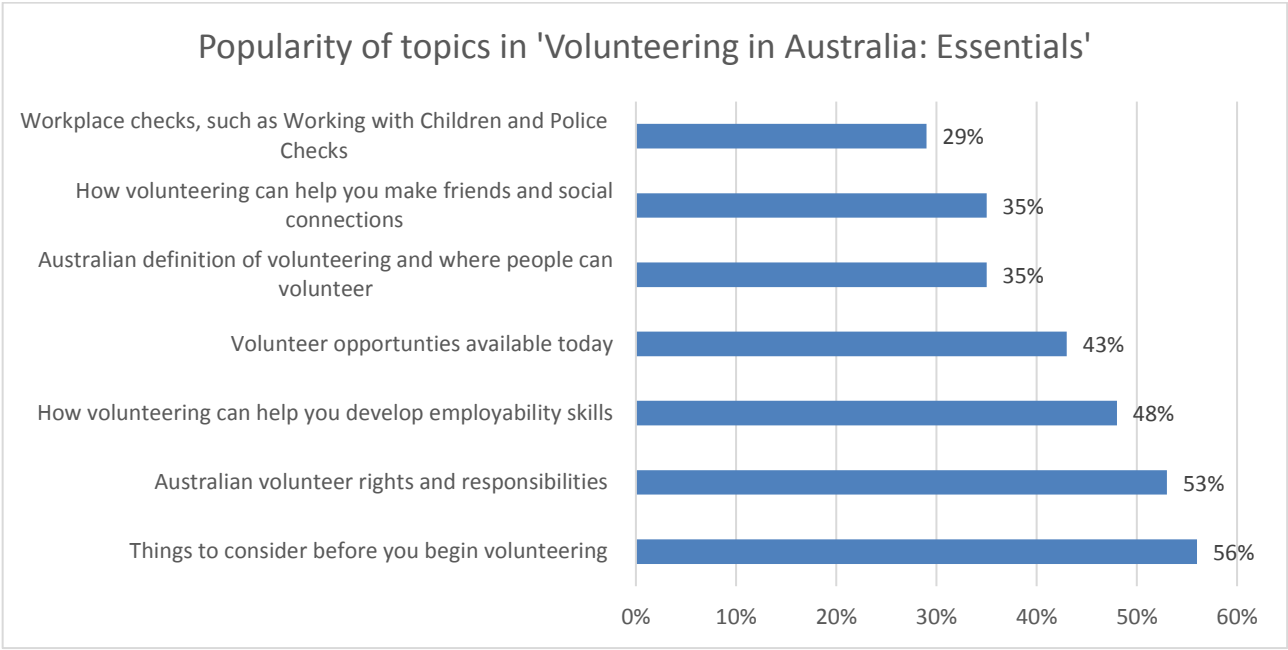
**Table 9:** Self-assessment by participants in the 'Volunteering Australia: Essentials' and 'Find the right role for you' sessions

The sessions were designed to be undertaken in tandem, partly explaining the slightly lower rate of change in confidence to apply for a volunteer opportunity. By the end of this second workshop, 50% of participants rated themselves as 5/5 on this measure.

**Student experience of volunteering is impacted by concerns about rights and responsibilities of volunteers in Australia, particularly the right not to be exploited.**

This was a clear message from our early engagement with students. While it is likely influenced by growing attention on the poor working conditions of international students in Australia, several groups and individual international students raised the risk of exploitation in volunteering specifically.

In response, we included significant content on the Australian definition of volunteering, rights and responsibilities of volunteers and the types of organisations that can legally engage volunteers. We were pleased to learn that 53% of participants in the '*volunteering in Australia: Essentials*' session listed the content related to rights and responsibilities as one of their top three topics.



**Table 10:** Percentage of participants who selected the topic as one of their three most helpful

In the first few volunteering preparation sessions, we also received numerous questions on volunteering and students visas from participants. While we were able to refer participants to resources offered by Study Melbourne and Justice Connect, this issue remains complex, with a high volume of out-of-date information present online.

The issue is further compounded by inconsistent and sometimes incorrect use of the term ‘volunteer’ and related concepts by people and institutions in the international education sector. For example, where an ‘unpaid placement’ is offered with credit points, it may not be defined as ‘volunteering’ by the Department of Home Affairs. Similarly, some volunteer-involving organisations may use the term ‘internship’ when they are referring to a genuine volunteering opportunity, usually where skills are required.

**Connecting international students with volunteering opportunities requires a diversity of approaches.**

We learned that connecting students with volunteering opportunities is most effective when a range of approaches and models is used. This is consistent with the underlying assumption of the pilot that a mix of models, including project-based, episodic, ongoing and virtual volunteering, across a diverse range of sectors and activities, would increase the likelihood that the placements are timely, appropriate, mutually beneficial and relevant to individual students and volunteer-involving organisations.

Initially, we had planned to adopt Volunteering Victoria’s corporate volunteering model, however we learned that this type of model has a number of limitations when applied in an international education setting. Corporate volunteering programs involve a coordinated group via a single contact point, generally connecting to an unskilled volunteering opportunity of a day’s duration.



Through early engagement with educational institutions, we learned that students are generally not coordinated in a similar way to employees. In addition, some of our institutional contacts sought only volunteer opportunities aligned with areas of study, quite different to the types of opportunities generally offered through corporate volunteering programs.

Instead, the program adopted the model used by volunteering support services across Australia, tailoring the opportunities offered and support provided to an international student audience. This model enabled the program to offer a wide range of opportunities, regarded as a strength by educational institutions, and placed the responsibility for action in the hands of the student. This is in keeping with volunteering philosophy, but may represent a different approach to the concept of 'placement' as it is commonly applied in international education.

With respect to recruitment, we learned that international students are sensitive to lengthy, administration-heavy recruitment process – a sensitivity common to almost all younger volunteers. Initially, we had planned to utilise GoVolunteer, an online volunteering platform, to enable international students to browse and express interest in specific opportunities. This plan met with resistance from organisations with their own comprehensive online recruitment process, as an extra and unnecessary step – and thus, a barrier – for prospective volunteers.

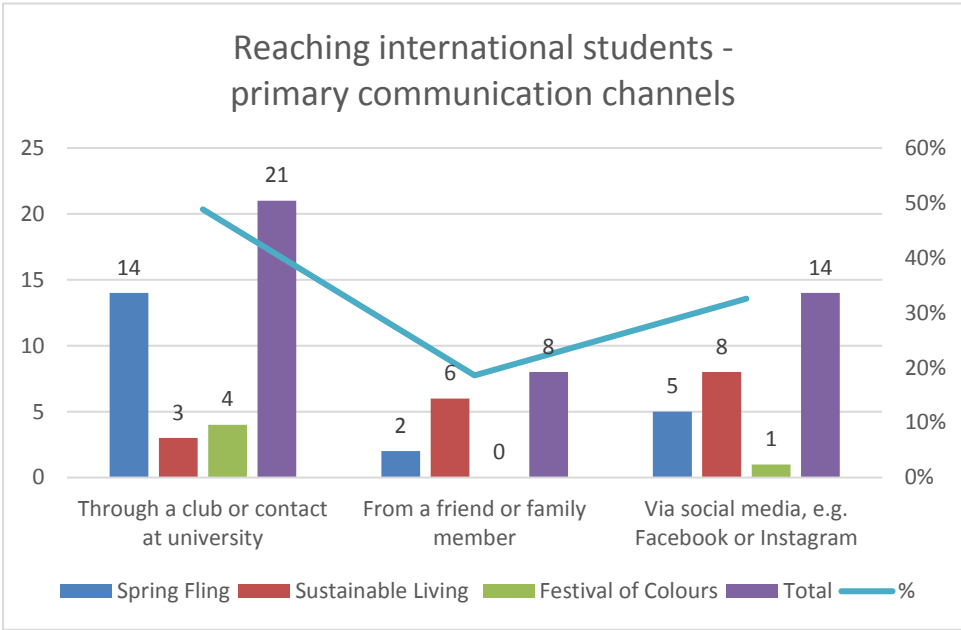
With respect to the type of volunteering opportunities most popular or accessible for international students, we were unable to make any conclusive findings. However, we did learn that event-based volunteering provides a low-barrier option for students who are relatively new to volunteering. While a small number students reported that they had applied for ongoing volunteer roles, they were most likely to be successful once they had undertaken one or more short-term or event-based role.

In this respect, we were informed by several of the students featured in our case studies, who described how they were creating a 'portfolio' of volunteer experiences. For example, Olena Nguyen has had a varied and active volunteer experience in Australia including the C2 Melbourne Preview, Centre of Multicultural Youth and The Sustainable Living Festival. While these varied experiences may seem unconnected, they have all helped Olena to build her confidence.

"It absolutely built up my confidence in talking to people. English is not my first language so I just wanted to open myself up to talk to them. It was a good opportunity for me to improve my teamwork skills as well. I needed to work collaboratively with other team members so that we could make sure that things happened smoothly." *Olena Nguyen, Study Melbourne Ambassador*

### **Educational institutions can play a key role in connecting international students to volunteering opportunities.**

While 'word of mouth' is generally accepted as the most common way of finding a volunteer role, we learned that reaching international students through peer based and university administration and academic contacts is likely to be more effective than other forms of promotion.



**Table 10:** How student volunteers learned about opportunities to volunteer at three events

This finding is consistent with the partnership approach used by the pilot program, which aimed to engage students through a familiar and trusted medium. Personal networks and face-to-face modes of recruitment and referral are likely to be helpful to build the confidence of students to approach volunteer-involving organisations. In addition to staff contacts, student leaders can play a key role in modelling and encouraging other students – for example, Andrea Mayorga and Don Doughty collaborated to deliver a Skills Expo for international students at the Melbourne Polytechnic August 2017, building confidence and awareness of how to find genuine volunteering opportunities.

Each of the educational institutions participating in this program encouraged volunteering by international students, and had some type of mechanism to connect them with opportunities on- and off-campus. In smaller institutions such as Melbourne Institute of Technology, staff would be more likely to have a personal connection with some of the students, and would be able to build their trust and confidence in volunteering options. At the other end of the scale, RMIT students benefit from more networks and structured options such as Future Edge, but need to be proactive in identifying and applying for volunteer opportunities.

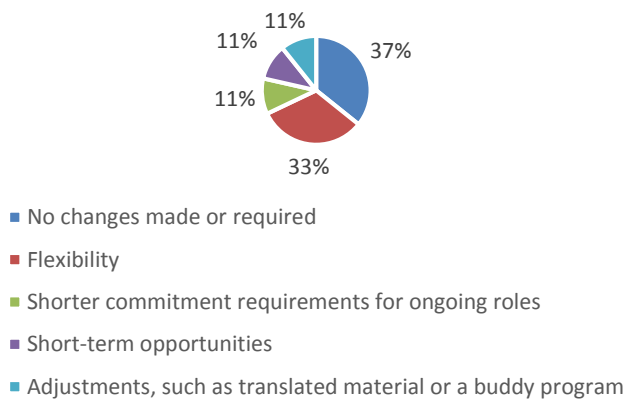
**VIO’s perceive that their volunteer programs need to be more flexible to accommodate international students.**

While sourcing event-based roles has been relatively easy, we encountered challenges to sourcing appropriate ongoing and project-based opportunities. This is partly due to a perception that international students are unable to commit for the period required by the VIO or bring the skills required, but also reflects the way in which the sector has been slow to embrace the need for flexibility in volunteer offerings to match expectations from across the community.

International students are part of a growing group of potential volunteers, including domestic students and members of the ‘baby boomer’ generation, who are seeking to balance volunteering with a range of other commitments. In 2016, the State of Volunteering in Australia report found a misalignment between the types of roles offered and demand from prospective volunteers, and flexibility was a contributing factor.

Of the organisations who have successfully involved international students as volunteers, we learned that one third had increased the flexibility of their program, while almost a quarter had created short-term opportunities and/or reduced the time commitment required from volunteers. A further third of organisations reported that they did not need to make changes, as their program was already sufficiently flexible to accommodate students.

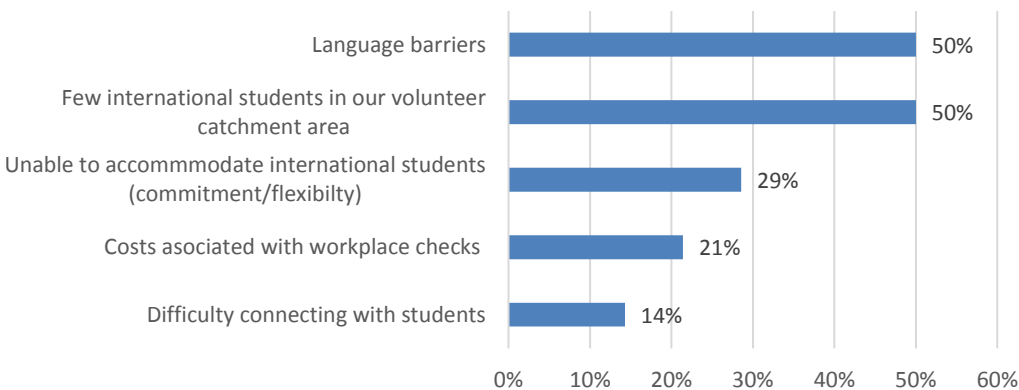
Changes to accomodate international students



**Table 10:** Adjustments made by organisations to accommodate international students

We learned more about this perceived need for flexibility through examination of barriers to engaging volunteers. Almost a third of the 14 organisations that provided a perspective on barriers to engaging international student volunteers gave answers related to flexibility, including unable to accommodate a shorter time commitment or provide flexible, shorter-term volunteering opportunities.

Barriers to engaging international students volunteer



**Table 11:** Perceived organisational barriers to engaging international students as volunteers

We were interested to see that while half of the leaders or managers of volunteers cited language barriers as an issue in engaging with international students, only a small number had made related changes to their program. Where introduced, these changes included using plain English in organisational materials and creating a buddy program for new volunteers. Our findings on the value of a volunteer cohort with diverse languages and cultural backgrounds, as well as cultural skills, indicates that this is an area for further development.

## Recommendations

Based on our findings from this pilot program, we have a number of recommendations for the design of future initiatives or for application by volunteer-involving organisations or educational institutions with an international student cohort. These recommendations are intended to more effectively facilitate volunteering by international students and to fully realise the benefit to volunteering organisations, educational institutions, and the students themselves.

Our recommendations are:

- 1) Design of volunteering programs inclusive of international students should take into account:
  - a) Students' need for flexibility around study timetables and potential home visits, recognising that this flexibility will also benefit other volunteer groups such as professionals and skilled retired people seeking to balance volunteering with other commitments
  - b) Students' abilities to navigate complex recruitment processes, as well as preference for simplified online options, recognising that these options will be attractive to other younger volunteers
  - c) Information sessions on volunteer opportunities as a key part of the recruitment process
  - d) Opportunities for students to interact with a wider volunteer cohort, with an emphasis on friendship and mutual learning
  - e) Limited opportunities for international students to call on Australian contacts as referees
- 2) Volunteer-involving organisations see the benefit of engaging international students in volunteering, but need support to build that capacity, in areas including:
  - a) Workplace checks for international students, especially where an international police check is required at a higher cost
  - b) Addressing perceived or actual language barriers to engaging with international students
  - c) Collection of information about engagement of international students, as part of an overall strategy of moving to a more diverse and representative volunteer program
- 3) Volunteer-involving organisations and educational institutions should offer clarity in their use of the term 'volunteer' and related terms. Ideally, this would be consistent with the definition developed by Volunteering Australia.
- 4) Educational institutions should offer incentives for international students to record and capture their volunteering activity, whether ad-hoc or systematically via a program such as RMIT Edge
- 5) Study Melbourne considers supporting an audit on online material on volunteering available to international students, with the intent of identifying and correcting inaccurate information
- 6) Organisations in the international education sector consider undertaking additional research on the contribution of volunteering to changing community perceptions about international students.

## Annex A: Performance against KPIs

Description of Each Activity/ Undertaking	Target Outcome <i>What is to be achieved by each activity.</i>	Measure <i>How will this be measured?</i>	Status and comment
Education and volunteering sector engagement	At least five educational institutions and five volunteer-involving organisations (VIO) are participating in the project	Via participation in project activities, including regular meetings and engagement activities	Target outcome achieved 6 educational institutions and 17 VIOs have participated in project. Please see Annex B for a full list of organisations engaged.
Identification of volunteering opportunities	Sufficient opportunities are identified to generate 200 placements, with a mix of models across sectors	Via availability and promotion of opportunities	Target outcome achieved 28 roles promoted, with over 1000 placement opportunities Please see Annex C for a full list of volunteer roles.
Promotional material on the value of international students to volunteering, and the value of volunteering to international students	Set of project resources with messages appropriate to their audiences, developed with input from students and VIOs	Via feedback on messages received from participants in pre-placement training and via surveys of VIOs	Target outcome achieved Key messages on value of volunteering used in all communications and information sessions
Match and preparation of international students for volunteering, including pre-placement training	At least 200 students participate in pre-placement training sessions	Via attendance and feedback from pre-placement training sessions	Target outcome achieved. 236 students have participated in training sessions

Description of Each Activity/ Undertaking	Target Outcome <i>What is to be achieved by each activity.</i>	Measure <i>How will this be measured?</i>	Status and comment
Monitor and evaluate the student experience	Challenges and issues related to placements are identified and resolved as early as possible, to promote a positive experience	Via evaluation during and following volunteer placements	Target outcome achieved. Feedback from international student volunteers indicate a generally positive volunteering experience. Please see below for discussion of the student experience.
Students placed	At least 200 students are matched to volunteering opportunities	Via reports from students and VIOs that student placements have been agreed and/or commenced	Target outcome achieved. At least 396 instances of connection between an international students and a volunteer opportunities Please see Annex C for a full list of volunteer roles.
Provision of content to promote volunteering experiences for SM digital channels	Appropriate content available to Study Melbourne, reflecting the diversity of organisations types and student countries of origin	Via availability of content, and feedback from Study Melbourne that content is appropriate	Target outcome achieved. Regular posts on Study Melbourne onshore Facebook group and Volunteering Victoria social media. Provision of content to Student Centre e-newsletter.
Provision of a pool of volunteers to respond to Study Melbourne requests	A network of students across all participating educational institutions and the wider international student community are interested and available to participate in Study Melbourne activities	Via student availability to respond to requests to Study Melbourne	Target outcome achieved. Pool of volunteers developed through via engagement, email list, and information session attendees.
Provision of case studies, videos and photos, under the Study Melbourne brand	At least five case studies, with videos and photos, are available for distribution under the Study Melbourne brand	Via availability of case studies which meet Study Melbourne content requirements	Target outcome achieved. 5 student stories made available for distribution under the Study Melbourne brand.

## Annex B: List of participating organisations

### ***Educational institutions***

We established program-related relationships with six educational institutions, representing a mix of public and private institutions, higher education and TAFE, larger and smaller.

- Melbourne Institute of Technology
- William Angliss
- Melbourne Polytechnic
- CQU
- RMIT
- Deakin

### ***Volunteer-involving organisations***

We established program-related relationships with 17 volunteer-involving organisations, including many members of Volunteering Victoria.

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| • Ardoch Youth Foundation             | • Next Wave Festival                          |
| • Arts House                          | • Open Table                                  |
| • C2 Melbourne                        | • Sustainable Living Foundation               |
| • Conversation Volunteers Australia   | • The Centre (North and West Melbourne)       |
| • Disability Sport and Recreation     | • The State Library of Victoria               |
| • Human Rights Arts and Film Festival | • Virgin Australia Melbourne Fashion Festival |
| • ISANA                               | • West Footscray Festival of Colours          |
| • MannaCare                           |   |
| • Melbourne Food and Wine Festival    |   |
| • Midsumma Festival                   |   |



## Annex C: Volunteering by international students – Organisations and opportunities

Organisation	Opportunity	Number of international students volunteering	Comment
Spring Fling Street Festival	Spring Fling Street Festival General Volunteer	50	This is the observation of the Volunteer Coordinator.
C2 Melbourne Preview	C2 Volunteer Community	14	This data was collected from confirmed volunteers who responded to a pre-event survey.
Volunteering Victoria	Various - including events, research and marketing	10	This data was collected during recruitment.
ISANA	ISANA Vic-Tas Conference	0	ISANA advised that no external international students were engaged for their conference.
Sustainable Living Festival	Sustainable Living Festival Volunteer	150	This is the observation of the Volunteer Coordinator and SLF Director.
Ardoch Youth Foundation	Education Volunteer: STEM Program (LEGO and Robotics)	1	Ardoch have indicated the actual figure may be higher, as they have a further 27 volunteers who are studying, aged 18-25 and speak a language other than English.
Midsumma Festival	Midsumma Festival Volunteer	27	This is the observation of the Volunteer Coordinator, using a count of hands during the induction.
2018 Virgin Australia Melbourne Fashion Festival	Festival Volunteer – Front and back of house	55	This data was collected during recruitment. On request, VAMFF changed their online application form to include a question on international student status, early in their application period.

Organisation	Opportunity	Number of international students volunteering	Comment
Conservation Volunteers Australia	Various day-long volunteering activities	5	The number of likely to be far higher, though with a high volume of volunteers and no systematic collection of this data, CVA are unable to estimate. They are looking into this for a future update of their database.
MannaCare	MannaCare volunteer program – rehabilitation, conversation and cafe	5	This data was collected during recruitment.
State Library	Volunteer Greeters	10	The number may be higher, and SLV will test various questions in their application form to determine which gives the most accurate result.
West Footscray Festival of Colours	Celebrate the ancient tradition of ‘throwing the colours’	10	This data was collected during recruitment.
Human Rights Arts and Film Festival	Human rights and social change	30	This is the observation of the Volunteer Coordinator, based on assessment of applications.

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### About Volunteering Victoria

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering and we have a singular and specialised focus on volunteering.

Through our dynamic and transformative leadership we will promote and build a vibrant, prosperous and strong volunteering community that is inclusive, respected and sustainable. Our vision is resilient communities and empowered and active citizens through volunteering.

We provide support to volunteers and to organisations that involve volunteers in their workforce, support volunteering in their communities, or offer volunteering programs for their employees.

Level 2/491 King Street  
West Melbourne VIC 3003

[www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au](http://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au)

Ph 03 8327 8500 Fax 03 8327 8599

ABN 79 378 017 212

*Volunteering Victoria is endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR)*