



**AUSTRALIAN
BUSINESS VOLUNTEERS**

**Australia in the Asian Century
China Strategy Submission
by
Australian Business Volunteers
May 2013**

Strengthening businesses and, through them, communities

PO Box 25, Deakin West ACT 2600 | P +61 2 6151 9999 | F +61 2 6103 9129 | info@abv.org.au | www.abv.org.au

INTRODUCTION

Australian Business Volunteers (ABV) is an international development agency with a focused mission to strengthen businesses and, through them, communities. We have a 32 year history of achieving this outcome by using expert volunteers to transfer skills and build the capacity of local businesses across Asia and the Pacific.

ABV works with its in-country partners to implement a program over a sustained period of time. We do this through a range of short-term assignments jointly scoped by our partners and ABV to meet the partner's specific organisational needs. Over time, follow up assignments by our volunteers continue to build the capacity of our partners, generating joint participation and sustainability when the program comes to an end.

For much of our 30 + year history, ABV has undertaken its work directly through the Australian Government's volunteer program, and since 2011, as a partner with Austraining International under AusAID's Australian Volunteers for International Development Program (AVID), delivering the short-term, business component. For this arm of our work, ABV draws its volunteers from our database of pre-qualified business experts who are typically mid-career or early retirement.

A second arm of our work is our Corporate Volunteer Program, whereby we partner with businesses through a corporate social responsibility initiative, utilising the expertise of their employees as volunteers.

A key example of this model is ABV's partnership with IBM to deliver its Corporate Services Corps and Executive Services Corps since its inception in 2008 (<http://www.ibm.com/ibm/responsibility/corporateservicecorps/>).

All our programs, irrespective of where the volunteers are drawn from, work towards supporting ABV's altruistic mission of strengthening businesses and their communities whilst also deepening people-to-people engagement between countries. Using the expert business skills of employees within corporate social responsibility programs, we have also seen the added benefit for companies in building the cultural literacy of their own workforce to more effectively operate in culturally diverse markets.

In view of ABV's experience, the following two questions are addressed collectively below:

- What opportunities are there to deepen our engagement across the board, including through people-to-people, economic and political/strategic links?
- How can we support stronger social and cultural links with these countries, for example through networks of Australians living in these countries or through communities in Australia?

DISCUSSION

As well recognised by the Australian Government, Australia's aid program creates closer personal ties between Australia and the communities within which Australians work, the AVID Program being a critical element of this. A recent AusAID survey of returned volunteers indicated that 97 per cent of volunteers increased their understanding of other cultures after developing good relationships with their in-country colleagues¹. ABV plays a role in this work and over two thirds of our volunteers continue to provide ongoing support to the organisation when they return to Australia. This is often in the form of a mentoring role.

¹ 2012 Survey of Returned Volunteers, Orima Research, October 2012.

Further, given our particular niche of supporting businesses, we support the economic development of communities through the specific transfer of strategic planning, financial management, accounting, IT, human resources and marketing skills.

It is not only governments however, which recognise the importance of, and support, volunteering. Our conversations with corporates globally, and increasingly within Australia, demonstrate a recognition of a stronger role they can play through corporate volunteering and are reaping the benefits.

Obvious business benefits of a one month corporate volunteer program include the enhanced reputation of the company and leadership development. More subtly however, is the experience acquired by working with people in different cultural settings and often with limited resources. It challenges participants to examine assumptions and preconceived ideas of doing business, and to think creatively in developing solutions, working with a team of individuals who each bring unique perspectives to the table. This is mutually beneficial to the participants and ultimately the business, as well as the in-country partners with which they work.

As Australian businesses increasingly look to work in global markets, particularly in Asia, a corporate volunteering program is a unique way to understand how to do business in other markets. IBM employees testify that participation in their Corporate Services Corps Program has enhanced their leadership, consulting and training skills to facilitate international partnerships and, most importantly, their cultural intelligence.

From a corporate social responsibility perspective, businesses are recognising that they need to support the communities within with they work. Hence, whilst also driven by long-term business imperatives, there is also a moral obligation to do so. From ABV's perspective, the local organisations we partner with in country benefit through skills improvement and overall increased staff performance and morale; new or improved practices, behaviours, standards and products; and exposure to outside experience and knowledge.

Case Study

ABV In-Country Partner: Henan University of Finance, Economics and Law

Location: Zhengzhou, Henan Province, China

Project: Teaching and Research Data Analysis Training

The Henan University of Finance, Economics and Law (HUFEL) was established in 2010 with the merger of the former Henan University of Finance and Economics and the Henan Administrative Institute of Politics and Law. Located in Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan Province, HUFEL offers higher education programs in six disciplines – economics, management science, law, literature, science and engineering.

The College of Computer and Information Engineering within the university offers software engineering and technology subjects, combining productivity, study and research.

Project Goal

The goal of the project was to improve the teaching ability of faculty staff in various aspects of the IT industry, such as project management and ways to adapt software design to business needs and processes. A second goal was to improve research data analysis skills and techniques.

Strengthening businesses and, through them, communities

PO Box 25, Deakin West ACT 2600 | P +61 2 6151 9999 | F +61 2 6103 9129 | info@abv.org.au | www.abv.org.au

Outcomes

As a result of skills and knowledge transfer between the business volunteers and faculty staff, the college was able to improve the design of workshops and lectures in IT trends and related topics such as project management and the adaptation of software development to business needs. Faculty staff improved their research data analysis skills, teaching delivery and international IT academic knowledge.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Corporate volunteering programs (which can be developed through various team and customised models) provide opportunities for deeper engagement through people-to-people links, thereby developing strong social and cultural links. Businesses are increasingly finding that corporate volunteering also provides enhanced economic links.

Government departments, particularly those with a presence in Asia such as the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Federal Police should also consider the potential opportunities and political and strategic benefits that such a program would bring.

“It’s not just philanthropy, it’s leadership development and business development, and it helps build economic development in the emerging world.”

Stanley Litow, IBM Vice President, Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs