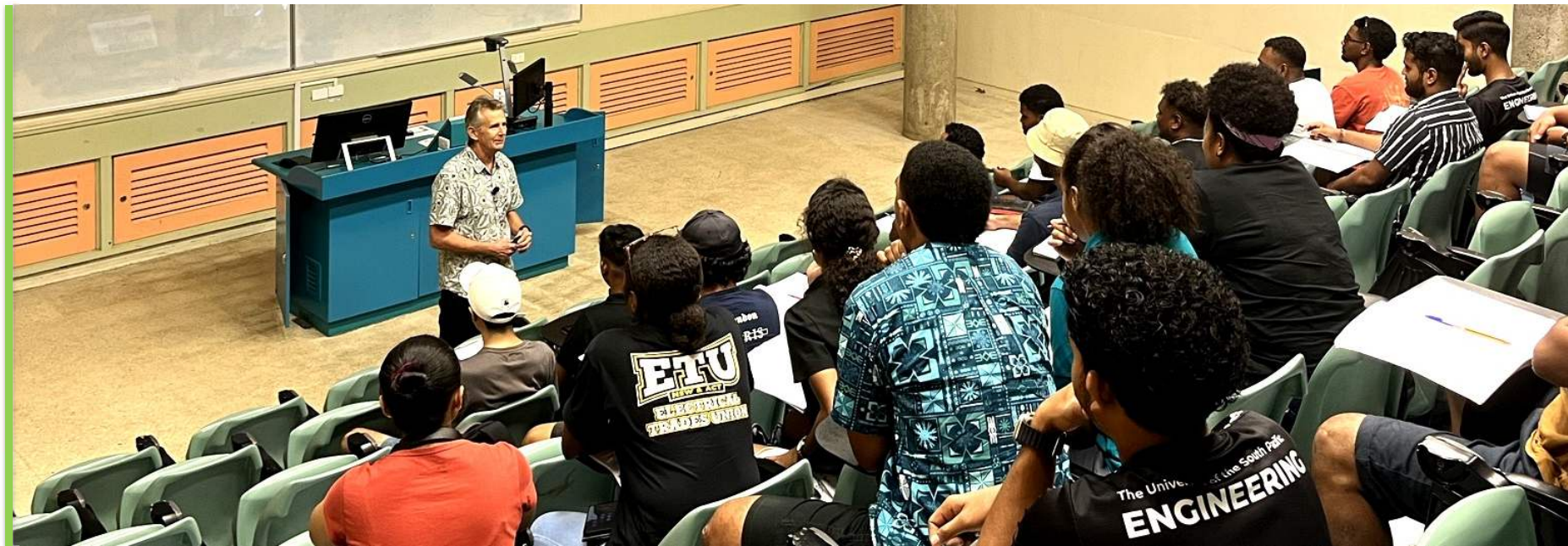


Strengthening a university strengthens a nation.

Unlocking a lifetime of Australian academic expertise to support the education of the next generation across the Indo-Pacific.

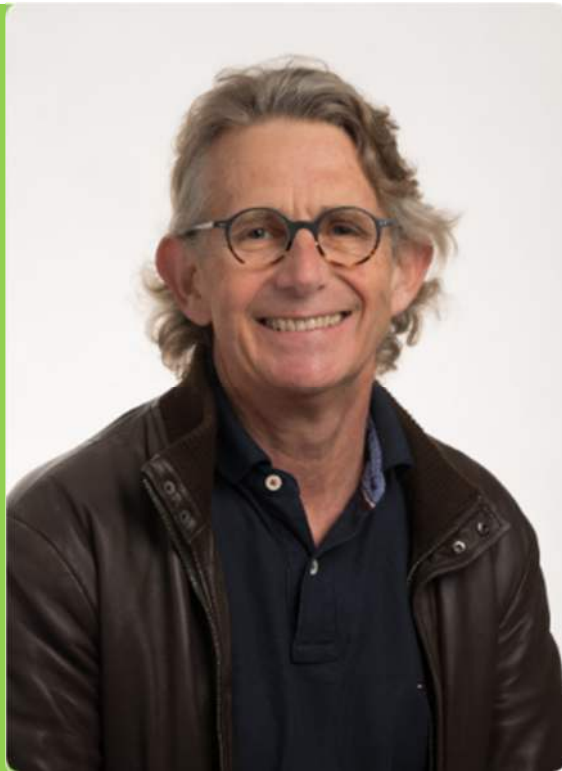


"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

NELSON MANDELA, JOHANNESBURG, JULY 2003

FOREWORD

A university is one of the few institutions a country can build that builds everything else



A university education stands behind every teacher who inspires a child, every nurse who cares for a patient, every engineer who designs resilient infrastructure and every public leader who serves their community. Yet across the Pacific, Asia and Africa, many universities struggle to access the senior academic expertise they need to build themselves.

Australian Academic Volunteers Abroad (AAVA) was established to help bridge that gap. We are a charity organisation that supports capacity-building across the Pacific, Asia and Africa by mobilising senior retired Australian academic and professional staff to work as volunteers at partner universities, advancing the teaching and research capabilities that drive national development.

Our model is simple. Universities identify their own priorities. We match these priorities with highly experienced Australian academic leaders who volunteer their time and expertise. We work alongside universities to help them achieve the goals they have already identified for themselves. The outcomes are stronger universities; and graduates better prepared to support their communities and build their nations.

Established in 2023, AAVA has now had 20 volunteers at seven universities in six countries. We have partnered with Australian Volunteers International (AVI) and mobilised volunteers through the Australian Government funded Australian Volunteers Program (AVP). We have demonstrated that the model works. Universities are requesting additional assignments. Volunteers continue to come forward.

With your support, we can extend this work and enable more universities and their students to benefit from the expertise of Australia's academic community.

Emeritus Professor Graham Schaffer, FTSE

Chair and Co-Founder, Australian Academic Volunteers Abroad

Strong Universities Build Strong Nations

Access to Leadership

Every profession on which a society depends begins in a university. Doctors, dentists, lawyers and accountants are educated by universities that also generate research, develop new knowledge and help solve national challenges. When universities are strong, nations are better equipped to improve health, governance, economic development and social wellbeing.

For many universities across the Pacific, Asia and Africa, the challenge is not buildings, laboratories or student demand. The challenge is access to experienced academic leadership.

A Critical Gap

Professors play a unique role in university life. They mentor emerging staff, lead curriculum renewal, guide accreditation processes, build research capability, strengthen governance and build partnerships with industry, government and the community. When this layer of expertise is missing, universities struggle to grow their own leadership capacity and sustain educational quality.

Consider the University of the South Pacific (USP), a supra-national university owned by twelve Pacific Island nations and serving approximately 20,000 students. Despite its importance to the region, USP has fewer than 20 professors and many disciplines have no professor at all. By comparison, Australia's Charles Darwin University, with a broadly comparable student enrolment, has more than 50 professors.

The Missing Piece in International Development

Many development programs focus on infrastructure and scholarships, and sending students overseas to study. While these are important investments, relatively few programs address the institutional capability required for universities to succeed over the long term: governance, accreditation, quality assurance, research management, leadership development and academic mentoring.

Universities become stronger when they develop the internal capability to lead, improve and sustain their own development.

AAVA - A UNIQUE SOLUTION TO A CRITICAL PROBLEM

AAVA does not provide aid. AAVA helps universities build their own capacity.



Professor Emeritae Marilys Guillemain and Liz Johnson with Veronica Parisi, University Librarian, on the USP campus in Suva, 2026

THE OPPORTUNITY

Across Australia, there exists an extraordinary and largely untapped resource: retired university leaders whose expertise has been accumulated over decades. They have the knowledge, experience and skills that universities across the Indo-Pacific require; and the time and capacity to volunteer.

The challenge is connecting this expertise with the institutions that seek it. That is the gap AAVA was created to fill.

01

Locally Led, Not Externally Designed

Every AAVA assignment begins with a request from a university. Partner institutions identify the priority, shape the assignment and determine the outcomes. AAVA's role is to provide the expertise that helps universities achieve their own goals and ambitions. This ensures that solutions are relevant, practical and owned by the institution itself.

02

Capacity Building

The goal is to leave behind lasting institutional capability, not to teach a class or undertake research or deliver a temporary service. Ambitious assignments typically result in governance frameworks, accreditation pathways, a new curriculum, leadership programs, staff development systems, research strategies and quality assurance processes that leave a legacy long after the volunteer has departed.

03

Peer-to-Peer Support from Experienced Academic Leaders

AAVA volunteers are former vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, deans, professors and senior professional staff who have led accreditation processes, governance reform, organisational development, research programs and curriculum transformation at major universities. They work alongside partner institutions as respected peers, bringing expertise, credibility and global networks.

IMPACT

What has been achieved

2024

1ST VOLUNTEER

6

COUNTRIES

7

UNIVERSITY PARTNERS

20

ASSIGNMENTS

95%

FILL RATE

7,000+

STAFF SUPPORTED

75,000+

STUDENTS IMPACTED

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

AAVA has to date partnered with:

University of the South Pacific	Fiji
Fiji National University	Fiji
Solomon Islands National University	Solomon Islands
International Institute of Health Sciences	Sri Lanka
German-Mongolian Institute for Resources & Tech	Mongolia
University of the Western Cape	South Africa
Cavite State University	Philippines



Extraordinary Professor Rachel Fensham with Professor Fiona Moolla, Dean, and Professor Christi van der Westhuizen, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, 2026

PARTNER TESTIMONIALS

The most important measure of AAVA's success is the assessment of the universities we serve

Our partners judge us not by the number of assignments completed, but by the capability, systems and institutional improvements that remain after an assignment concludes.

"Our collaboration with AAVA over the past few years has been one of the most rewarding and practical partnerships that we have been involved in. Your approach, centred on locally-led design, long term engagement and the mobilisation of highly experienced academics, creates real, long-lasting impact."

PROFESSOR TRANSFORM AQORAU
VICE-CHANCELLOR, SOLOMON ISLANDS NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

"We have greatly valued our partnership with AAVA and the tremendous benefit USP has received through the engagement of highly experienced retired professors from Australia."

PROFESSOR JITO VANUALAILAI
DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC



Professor Violeta Lopez with students at IIHS

"It was a privilege to host Prof. Violeta Lopez at IIHS. A heartfelt thank you to Prof. Violeta for empowering us with her expertise and inspiring us to push the boundaries of healthcare research!"

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH SCIENCES, SRI LANKA

CASE STUDY

Solomon Islands National University (SINU): Strengthening Quality and Governance



Professor Derrick Armstrong, Vice-Chancellor Professor Transform Aqorau, and Professor Angela Hill, Solomon Islands National University.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

When the first 17-month assignment ended in November 2025, the University requested an extension for a further 12 months.

THE CHALLENGE

As the Solomon Islands' national university, SINU has responsibility for educating many of the country's future leaders. As a young, resource-constrained institution, it faces the challenge of delivering high-quality programs while expanding educational access.

THE REQUEST

The Vice-Chancellor contacted AAVA to express his keen interest in filling a highly specialised assignment with governance, quality assurance and academic capacity-building responsibilities.

THE VOLUNTEER

The assignment was delivered by Emeritus Professor Angela Hill, former Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) at Edith Cowan University.

WHAT WAS DELIVERED

The project helped build the internal structures necessary to lift academic standards across the university's five faculties; and introduced comprehensive quality assurance mechanisms with clear pathways to meet the accreditation standards of the nation's regulator.

WHY IT MATTERS

Strong governance and quality assurance systems underpin educational quality and accreditation. The processes introduced through the assignment equip SINU to maintain standards independently while improving outcomes for students and staff.

WHAT COMES NEXT

The Model Works. The Opportunity Is to Scale It.



Emeritus Professor Kim Halford, AAVA volunteer in Psychology at the University of the South Pacific, and Professor Jioji Ravulo, AAVA board member, 2025.

Universities are requesting support. Volunteers are stepping forward. The challenge facing AAVA now is not proving the model. The challenge is responding to growing demand and building the organisational capacity required to serve it.

Funding to date has been provided by the Australian Government through the Australian Volunteers Program. However, our capacity for growth is limited because AVP is required to support multiple organisations and institutions. AVP also has a limited global footprint, currently restricted to operating in only 26 countries.

AAVA aims to become the leading specialist education volunteering organisation in our region, recognised for helping to build the leadership, governance and academic capability needed to educate future generations and contribute to national development.

WHAT PHILANTHROPY MAKES POSSIBLE

We are excited to partner with people and organisations that share our passion for education and support capacity building with our friends and neighbours



German Mongolian Institute for Resources and Technology (GMIT) Vice Rector Finance, Enkhbayar Bold meets with Emeritus Professor Julie Owens in September 2025 in the first week of her volunteer assignment.

WHY GIVE NOW?

- The partnerships have been established.
- The foundations have been built.
- The model has been tested.
- The evidence is emerging.

What is needed now is the capacity to grow.

An investment now can create decades of educational, professional and national development outcomes.

HIGHLY LEVERAGED

The AAVA model multiplies the value of every philanthropic dollar. Volunteers contribute their expertise pro-bono. The Australian Volunteers Program supports mobilisation and deployment. Philanthropy supports growth.

INVESTMENTS SOUGHT

Five ways to give

\$20,000

Houses one volunteer on assignment

An accommodation allowance provides volunteers with safe, secure housing that supports a modest lifestyle matching local standards. This is not a salary or wage but a practical support mechanism that enables our volunteers to live safely in-country without financial distress.

\$50,000

Mobilises one volunteer for six months

While our partner universities provide in-kind support and our volunteers provide their time and expertise pro bono, the program must cover the costs of deployment, including air fares, medical and travel insurance, visas, on-boarding briefings and a modest accommodation allowance.

\$100,000
per year

Introduces a new university partner

Demand from potential partner universities is growing and we have steady interest from prospective volunteers. We aim to grow the program to assist every university that requests our support but we are constrained by organisational capacity. A gift at this level can support a coordinated program of partnership development, volunteer recruitment, program coordination, and monitoring and evaluation.

\$200,000
per year

Introduces an additional education sector

We have partnered exclusively with universities to date because that is where our experience, networks and knowledge currently lie. However, demand for education capacity building is not limited to the higher education sector. Education across all levels is essential to national development. Our program is scalable to include primary, secondary and vocational education but to do this, we need to build our expertise across the whole education pathway, from primary to tertiary.

\$500,000
per year

Underwrites program sustainability

We are a fully volunteer-run and led organisation, completely reliant on un-paid support from the founders, board and volunteers. Together with our partnership with the Australian Volunteers Program, this has enabled us to establish the organisation and demonstrate the desirability, feasibility and viability of the program. However, this is not sustainable over the longer term. The next stage of AAVA's development is to complement this volunteer leadership with sustainable organisational capacity, ensuring that the model can continue to grow while remaining true to its founding principles.

GOVERNANCE SUMMARY

Experienced Leadership. Responsible Stewardship. Aligned with Mission

AAVA is governed by a Board whose members embody the expertise that underpins the AAVA model itself: accomplished academic leaders sharing knowledge, mentoring others and strengthening institutions. Several Directors have participated directly in volunteer assignments and maintain active relationships with partner universities across the Indo-Pacific. Those guiding the organisation understand universities, understand leadership, and understand the transformative power of education.

Chair and Co-Founder, Emeritus Professor Graham Schaffer FTSE

Former Executive Dean at The University of Queensland, Dean at The University of Melbourne and Pro Vice-Chancellor La Trobe University, Professor Schaffer has extensive experience leading major academic institutions. He is Emeritus Professor at The University of Queensland, Honorary Professor at the University of Melbourne and Adjunct Professor at the University of the South Pacific.

Director and Co-Founder, Dr Libby Mitchell

A former tenured Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Dr Mitchell combines a strong academic background with extensive experience in communications, stakeholder engagement and organisational leadership across the corporate and not-for-profit sectors.

Director, Professor Jioji Ravulo

Professor and Chair of Social Work and Policy Studies at the University of Sydney, Professor Ravulo is a recognised leader in educational leadership, social inclusion, community engagement and Pacific development. He also holds an Adjunct Professorship at the University of the South Pacific.

Director, Professor Sandra Kentish FTSE GAICD

Professor Sandra Kentish is a Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor at The University of Melbourne. Previously Head of the School of Chemical and Biomedical Engineering, she sits on the Board of the Bionics Institute and on the Science, Health and Engineering Advisory Committee of the EPA Victoria, and the Editorial Board of Melbourne University Press.

Director, Professor Emerita Marilys Guillemain GAICD

Professor Emerita at the University of Melbourne, Professor Guillemain has held senior academic leadership positions including Associate Dean and University Council representative. Her expertise spans organisational development, governance, learning and teaching leadership, ethics and gender equity.

As a registered Australian charity and Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR), AAVA is committed to high standards of governance, transparency and accountability.

Strengthening a university strengthens a nation.

CONTACT

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GIVING TO AAVA

Australian Academic Volunteers Abroad is a registered Australian charity and an endorsed Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR).

Donations are tax deductible in Australia.