



Australia Awards



Australia Awards Timor-Leste Graduate Internship Program

Review Findings

May 2022



Background

The Graduate Internship Program (GIP) provides Australia Awards alumni with work placements in institutions relevant to their area of study. **The GIP supports the successful re-integration of Australia Awards graduates after completion of study and return to Timor-Leste and aims to provide a pathway to future employment.**

Introduced by the Australia Awards Timor-Leste in 2012 the program provided recently returned alumni with internships in the public sector until 2015 when they terminated the scheme due to budget constraints.

In late 2020, in recognition of the challenging job market due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Timor-Leste Alumni Association (TL3A) reactivated the GIP for recently returned alumni and alumni looking for employment opportunities in their area of study. The scheme also extended internship opportunities to cover the public and private sectors.

The first placement commenced in January 2021. The Timor-Leste Australia Alumni Association, with the support of the Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste (WDPTL), manages the contractual, financial, and administrative arrangements for the internship placements. Through the GIP, alumni have been able to gain experience working with the Government of Timor-Leste, private sector institutions, Australian Aid implementing partners and civil society organisations in Timor-Leste.

Since January 2021, the GIP has supported internship placements for eight alumni (five women and three men):

- One intern within the public service (Ministry of Public Works)
- Four interns with DFAT-funded programs (Partnership for Human Development; WDPTL (3 placements))
- One intern with an international non-government organisation (NGO) (Conservation International Timor-Leste)
- One intern with a local Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) (Associação Halibur Deficiência Matan Timor-Leste)
- One intern within the private sector (Caltech)

The original budget allocation for the GIP from July 2021 to June 2022 was USD12,000 (~AUD17,000) and covered six internships.

Over the course of this period, the budget increased to AUD46,450 as more funds became available. The additional funds allowed for internship extensions (where needed) and two additional internships.

Internship placements were for an initial period of three months, with extensions of up to six months granted based on the host organisation expressing an on-going need and available funds.

Reviewing the GIP



*Jose do Karmo completed his internship with Australia's Workforce Development Program Timor-Leste.
Photo: WDPTL*

In early 2022, WDPTL's monitoring, and evaluation team interviewed six current and former interns and supervisors from their host institutions to understand:

- How effective the GIP had been in achieving the intended outcomes for host institutions and interns.
- How efficient the administration of the GIP had been for the TL3A Secretariat/WDPTL, the host institutions and alumni.
- What improvements can be made to the GIP in future; and,
- If there is an on-going need for GIP in future.

This report provides a summary of findings from those interviews, and some recommendations for the GIP in future.

Findings

Benefits of the GIP

A major benefit of the GIP to date has been connecting alumni to future employment. Two alumni spoke of the difficulties they had in finding a job upon returning home after their studies in Australia because of the limited availability of jobs related to their area of study and their lack work experience in those areas. For them, and other alumni in the GIP, the internships provided a valuable pathway to employment. To date, the reactivated GIP has resulted in **five interns securing on-going employment in their fields of study**: three women and one man were employed by their respective GIP host institutions, and one man was employed

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by a different organisation. At the time of this review, the remaining four alumni were completing their internship placements.

Alumni interviewed spoke of applying for jobs both within and outside their host institutions during their internships. Two alumni were offered more than one position they applied for and chose to stay with their host institution. Not all alumni interviewed were applying for jobs during their internship, as they wanted to focus on the job at hand and making the most the internship while at their host institution.

The GIP has provided opportunities for alumni to create new professional networks

Most interns noted the internship had provided them with an **opportunity to create and extend professional networks with individuals and organisations**. Interns reported that during the internship, they were able to connect with people within their host institution and people from other organisations such as government institutions across Timor-Leste, international non-governmental organisations, foreign embassies, and training centres that they have never worked with before. Internship supervisors also gave examples of opportunities for alumni to build networks internally with staff from other units/components namely field assistants, program coordinators, managers, and consultants. Alumni also spoke of the internship helping **connect them to potential job opportunities** related to their area of study **by giving them a platform to promote themselves within their host institution and to new organisations** they worked with during their internship. Moreover, the internship has assisted them in getting enough experience and providing them with stronger referees to apply for a new job. Host institution supervisors spoke of the value of being able to see an alumni in the workplace's 'way of working.' Except for alumni working in the public service (which can have lengthy employment processes), host institutions noted that employing an alumni with proven ability and skill sets was more straightforward than recruiting an external candidate.

A significant benefit of the GIP has been enabling alumni to apply skills and knowledge gained in Australia, alongside learning new skills.

Another significant benefit of the GIP has been enabling alumni to apply skills and knowledge gained in Australia, alongside learning new skills, such as financial management, organisational strategic planning and improving their English skills. Some alumni spoke of being given opportunities to attend training to get new skills during their internship.

Alumni and supervisors spoke of the alignment between the GIP internships and their areas of study in Australia. Alumni and their supervisors provided examples of the variety of tasks undertaken during the internships, including:

- developing plans for protected areas, protecting marine endangered species, and re-forestation work with communities, and sharing with government staff through training sessions.

- engaging with international consultants on workshops and working with field assistants on data collection.
- delivering inclusive education training to school leaders and teachers in the municipalities in cooperation with Ministry of Education and DPOs.
- developing leadership training materials to share with teachers' learning groups and adapting curriculum based on Timor-Leste's context.
- working with the technicians at the Department of Information, Geography and Infrastructure Registry, the Department of Study and Urbanism and the General Directorate of Habitation and Urbanism.
- working on urban planning projects and sharing ideas on urban and rural planning from other countries (for example, compact city concepts).
- supporting Australia Awards outreach in the municipalities, to help increase the number of people with disabilities and from rural areas that apply for an Australia Awards Scholarship.
- providing a disabled person's perspective on program activities and increasing team members awareness and knowledge of disability issues.
- providing guidance on the issues and actions required to be able to provide training to people with total vision impairment or hearing impairment in Timor-Leste.
- providing feedback on disability-accessibility modifications at training centres.
- guest lecturing at the National University of Timor-Leste.
- developing and delivering engaging and targeted communications products, in print and online, that raise awareness of program achievements and Australia's aid investment in Timor-Leste; and,
- supporting media publications, preparing press releases, inviting national media to do coverage of program activities, designing, and managing websites, producing in-house videos for events, and taking photos of the events.

In addition to the skills related to their studies, supervisors noted alumni brought skills related to communications, management and planning, networking, and partnership-building, coordination, problem-solving, adaptation and computer skills.



Host institutions actively supported alumni to apply their skills and knowledge gained in Australia.

The alumni interviewed spoke of the factors within their host institutions which enabled them to apply the skills and knowledge they gained while studying in Australia. The most crucial factors they identified were:

- being assigned responsibilities and tasks that related to their skills and knowledge gained in Australia.
- being able to deliver internal training for staff.
- being given the flexibility by the host organisations to determine their work priorities.
- high consideration of the interns' ideas to do their work; and
- trust from the host institution to work independently and contribute ideas.

Supervisors from the host institutions identified the following specific, tangible benefits for their organisation from participation in the GIP:

Participation in the GIP provided a range of specific, tangible benefits for host institutions.

- bringing in someone who is new and enthusiastic about topics relevant to the organisation.
- having an intern with strong background knowledge in technical areas relevant to the organisation (for example, primary teaching and international perspectives which really helps adapt the curriculum for basic education into local context and supporting school leaders).
- an intern with networking skills who helped connect the host institution with international NGOs and DPOs from other countries, improving work performance and raising the host institution's image and profile in the public.
- planning and developing terms of reference for land pooling study in response to habitation problem in Dili.
- strengthening the host institution's relationship with DPOs and providing a greater understanding of disabled people's issues.
- and having cost effective technical support from an alumni who is willing to learn and take direction.

Administrative and management arrangements

The administration and financial arrangements (operational costs, travel allowance, remuneration, and the provision of laptops, contracts) for the GIP were predominantly undertaken by WDPTL, with host institutions determining the terms of reference in consultation with alumni.

Host institutions noted the management arrangements ran



Suzana Henriques completed her internship with Australia's Partnership for Development. Photo: WDPTL

smoothly, with appropriate communication between WDPTL and the host institution. For the most part, arrangements have been efficient – particularly for host institutions, with one organisation noting that setting up the necessary employment arrangements for interns can sometimes be a burden for host institutions.

Interns were satisfied with the financial processes for arranging per diems and the timeline for collecting money appears to have been smooth. Interns reported that the salary provided was sufficient, with some organisations providing additional support (such as phone credit) to assist interns with their roles.

A key feature of success for the GIP has been the flexibility of the internship duration.

A key feature of success for the GIP has been the flexibility of the internship duration. While the internships were originally for a period of approximately three months (due to budget considerations), the majority were then extended for up to six months. For these alumni, the additional few months allowed them to gain enough experience to apply

for a permanent position. Supervisors from host institutions commented that the duration of the internship negotiated for each intern responded to their needs in general. Most thought a six-month duration is preferable as it allows sufficient time for the host institution and interns to get to know each other well - the host institution can get to see the skills, knowledge, and work ethic of the interns in practice, and the interns can understand the system and context of the institution to effectively deliver their work.

The need to balance the length of internships with the number of positions possible within the budget available will remain in future. Based on feedback from alumni and their host institutions, the optimal time would appear to be around 6 months.

Alumni and host organisations alike noted effective communication with the TL3A Secretariat Coordinator throughout the internship.

All those interviewed were highly satisfied with the communication between WDPTL, TL3A and themselves. In particular, alumni noted the effective communication with the TL3A Secretariat Coordinator throughout the internship. Communication was over the phone, in person and emails, which was easy for host institutions to respond. Information on documents required from the

host institution and the interns (for example, timesheets) was clearly provided. What started as ad hoc communications (checking in at various times) evolved into systematic and consistent follow-up (for example, reminding the interns of to submit monthly timesheets, and receipts for reimbursable items). All the supervisors noted they were aware of TL3A, either through individual networks, television, newspapers, and social media, before GIP internship took place in their organisation.

From the WPDTL side, the TL3A Coordinator managing the contact with the alumni during the internships resulted in efficient internal management practices.

A number of suggested improvements for the management arrangements are detailed in the section below.

Future suggestions

Alumni and host institutions provided suggestions for both continuing with the successful elements of the GIP and changing or improving some aspects. These included:

- promoting the GIP into the wider alumni channels because not all alumni are familiar with the program.
- flexibility for an internship to take place across more than one host institution (for example, 3 months with one organisation and another 3 months with another organisation) to gain a variety of work experience.
- consider a longer duration for internships with the public sector (for example, 12 months) as their recruitment processes can be lengthy.
- retain flexibility for extending the internships as needed.
- arranging the internship one or two months before the graduates complete their study in Australia so they can be immediately placed in host organizations upon return home.
- ensuring all information regarding the process for approvals and allowances is available during contract negotiation.
- provide opportunities for alumni participating in the GIP to meet and share their experiences.
- have a structured discussion (exit briefing) with each alumni at the end of their internship to gather feedback on their experiences, and suggestions for future improvements.

Conclusion

For a relatively small budget, there have been clear benefits from the GIP internships for both participating alumni and their host institutions.

Host institutions value the skills and knowledge interns and the ease of GIP arrangements, with all supervisors noting they would be happy to take part in the GIP again in future. Given the benefits noted by the organisations, and the ease of management arrangements, it is unsurprisingly that all supervisors also said they would be happy to recommend the GIP program to other organisations.

Overall, the GIP has also contributed to the delivery of the Australia Awards Gender Equity, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) strategy by supporting female alumni and alumni with

a disability to work in organisations where they can effectively utilise their area of study, whilst enhancing their networks and influence.

The GIP is proving to be an effective and cost-effective pathway to employment for alumni. In the likely event that alumni will continue to need support in gaining employment on their return to Timor-Leste after studying in Australia, consideration should be given to its continuation.



Scholarship and Alumni Support Manager, Joaninha Lu hands over a Certificate of Completion to GIP Delfina Barreto . Photo: WDPTL