

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Introduction Volunteerism plays a crucial role in Australian society, yet participation among adult white males aged 40-60 remains relatively low. This submission explores the key reasons for this reluctance, with a specific focus on Queensland. It examines economic, social, and cultural barriers and proposes strategies to encourage greater participation in volunteering among this demographic.

Key Factors Contributing to Low Volunteer Rates

- 1. Economic and Work-Related Pressures** Many men in this age group are in the peak of their careers, often holding senior roles that demand long hours and significant responsibility. High levels of job insecurity and the rising cost of living compel many to prioritise paid work over unpaid volunteer roles. Small business owners and self-employed individuals, particularly in Queensland's regional areas, often find it difficult to allocate time for volunteer activities.
- 2. Family and Personal Commitments** Many in this demographic have dependent children or are supporting older children in tertiary education, reducing their availability for volunteering. Others are engaged in caring responsibilities for aging parents, especially as Australia's population continues to age. Personal time is often limited, and when available, many prioritise leisure or family activities over additional responsibilities.
- 3. Shift in Volunteer Culture and Organisational Barriers** Many traditional male-dominated volunteering opportunities (e.g., firefighting, SES, and service clubs) have become bureaucratised and time-intensive, with compliance requirements that deter casual participation. A perception exists that many volunteer organisations have overly structured or politically influenced agendas, leading to disengagement. Changes in community structures have reduced the prominence of volunteering as a social norm, making it less common for men in this age group to engage unless they were previously involved.
- 4. Social and Psychological Factors** There is often a lack of peer encouragement—if a person's social circle does not actively engage in volunteering, they are less likely to consider it. Some men express discomfort with modern volunteering roles, particularly those focused on welfare or social support, which they may feel are outside their expertise or interests. Concerns about being undervalued or underutilised in volunteering roles, particularly if the work does not align with their professional skills.
- 5. Perceived Lack of Recognition and Incentives** Unlike younger volunteers, who may benefit from networking opportunities, or retirees, who often volunteer for social engagement, this age group perceives fewer tangible benefits from volunteering. Some men feel that their contributions are not sufficiently recognised, particularly in large, bureaucratic volunteer organisations. A perception exists that volunteer organisations primarily recruit younger or more diverse groups, leading to feelings of exclusion or irrelevance.

Strategies to Encourage Volunteer Participation

- 1. Flexible and Time-Efficient Volunteering Opportunities** Offer short-term or event-based volunteering that accommodates busy schedules. Develop more opportunities for online or remote volunteering. Reduce administrative burdens and streamline compliance requirements for experienced professionals who can contribute without excessive red tape.
- 2. Leverage Professional Skills and Interests** Create volunteer programs that allow professionals to apply their career expertise, such as mentoring, business advisory roles, or trade-based assistance. Encourage corporate volunteering initiatives that integrate community work into professional life.
- 3. Enhance Social and Networking Incentives** Promote volunteering as an opportunity for social engagement and networking, particularly for men looking to expand their social circles. Strengthen links between volunteering and sports clubs, professional associations, and community groups.
- 4. Improve Recognition and Inclusivity** Increase public recognition campaigns showcasing the impact of volunteers in this age group. Develop targeted outreach programs to make men in this demographic feel valued and

needed. Conclusion The reluctance of adult white males aged 40-60 to volunteer in Queensland is influenced by a combination of economic pressures, personal commitments, cultural shifts, and perceived barriers within volunteer organisations. Addressing these issues requires flexible, skills-based, and socially engaging opportunities, as well as improved recognition of their contributions. By implementing targeted strategies, Queensland can boost volunteer participation and better harness the experience and skills of this demographic for community benefit.