

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Introduction

As President of a small not-for-profit art group with 180 members, I have witnessed firsthand the decline in volunteer engagement. While many members express a willingness to help, few are prepared to take on committee roles or ongoing responsibilities. Since COVID-19, this issue has worsened, with retirees not re-engaging in community groups and artists prioritising their art as a source of income rather than a hobby. Our organisation relies heavily on council grants, business sponsorships, and volunteer contributions to sustain its events and activities. The increasing demands and financial pressures make it difficult to attract and retain volunteers, putting our future at risk.

Key Challenges in Volunteer Engagement

1. Declining Volunteer Participation

- Many members offer assistance but will not commit to committee roles.
- A lack of understanding about the workload and responsibilities of a not-for-profit organisation.
- The shift post-COVID, where retirees have not returned to community volunteering.
- Artists prioritising their art as a source of income rather than engaging in voluntary work.

2. Financial Pressures and Funding Challenges

- Heavy reliance on council grants and business sponsorships to run events.
- Events do not always generate a profit, making financial sustainability difficult.
- Increasing costs of advertising and marketing, with upfront payments required.
- Rising travel and petrol costs making volunteer participation harder.

3. Burnout and High Expectations

- Event coordinators are paid for part-time work but contribute significant unpaid hours.

- High expectations for professionalism and immediate results from members and participants.
- Volunteers experiencing burnout due to the increasing workload and pressure.
- Committee members contributing excessive hours (15–20 per week) with no replacements stepping forward.
- Difficulty retaining management committee members, with many leaving for paid work.

4. Changes in Business Practices

- Suppliers (e.g., printers, advertisers) now demand upfront payments and fast turnaround times.
- Financial strain from needing to pay deposits months in advance for services.
- Stress and trauma from dealing with financial and logistical pressures.

Impact on Our Organisation

Due to the lack of volunteers and financial constraints, we are unable to expand our activities beyond our two major events: **Open Studios Sunshine Coast** and **Sculpture on the Edge**. Our business plan includes workshops and exhibitions, but without volunteers to manage these initiatives, they remain unrealised.

Recommendations for Addressing Volunteer Shortages

1. Increased Support for Volunteer Recruitment & Retention

- Awareness campaigns to highlight the value of volunteering in the arts.
- Training and mentoring programs to encourage and support new volunteers.
- Financial incentives, reimbursements, or recognition programs for volunteers.

2. Sustainable Funding Models

- Greater access to long-term grants that support operational costs, not just project-based funding.
- Emergency relief or contingency funding for small not-for-profits struggling with upfront costs.
- More corporate partnerships with incentives for businesses that support arts volunteering.

3. Flexible Volunteer Engagement

- Task-based volunteering rather than long-term commitments.

- Paid honorariums for key volunteer positions to acknowledge their contribution.
 - Improved communication on volunteer expectations and impact.
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Conclusion

The volunteer crisis in small arts organisations is threatening their sustainability. Without action, vital community-driven events like ours will struggle to continue. Addressing this issue requires a collaborative effort between government, businesses, and the broader community to foster a more supportive environment for volunteering.

Submitted by:

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<https://artsconnectinc.com.au/>

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