

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Re: Queensland Legislative Assembly Local Government Small Business and Customer Service Committee
Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

The Balonne Shire is located in South West Queensland about 550 kilometres inland from Brisbane and shares its southern shire border with New South Wales. The shire covers over 31,000km² comprising seven communities of St George, Bollon, Dirranbandi, Hebel, Mungindi, Nindigully & Thallon, totalling around 4,320 residents. The 2021 Census indicates:

38.2% of residents are over the age of 50;
36% are between the ages of 20 and 49; the remaining
25.8% are under the age of 20.

Source: ABS data 2021 at February 2025.

Each of the seven towns are situated on waterways and are known for their productive agricultural & horticultural land (predominately cotton, wheat, cattle and sheep, onions, garlic, carrots and grapes) rich history, friendly locals, wide open spaces and relaxed country life-style all of which are contributing to an increase in Tourism numbers.

The current state of volunteering in Balonne Shire, Queensland.

More than 50 community organisations and clubs operate in the Shire. While there has been an overall decline in volunteering numbers since 2002, demand remains high. With an aging population and the following generation needing to work full-time longer, the decrease in volunteer numbers continues. However, the 2021 ABS data states 22.7% of people over the age of 15 participated in volunteer 'unpaid' work in the 12 months prior to the 2021 Census. In Balonne, the majority of volunteers are women, with more men seen assisting with events on the day.

Noting both an ageing population and declining volunteer numbers, a recent recruitment drive during Volunteer Week 2024 has seen interest growth in a couple of areas, namely SES assisted off the back of a couple of weather events. Additionally, in Bollon we are witnessing a younger group of County Women stepping up into executive roles.

The Balonne Shire currently recognises a 'Volunteer of the Year' as part of the Australia Day celebrations. The comments noted in the attached videos really speak volumes.

[BALONNE VOLUNTEER WEEK - Community Groups](#)

[BALONNE VOLUNTEER WEEK - Celebrating Volunteers across the Shire](#)

[BALONNE VOLUNTEER WEEK - Sporting Groups](#)

[BALONNE VOLUNTEER WEEK](#)

The Views of Volunteers, as summarised from the attached videos and conversations at a local level about

both the benefits and barriers to volunteering.

- Great way to meet people, meet a variety of people
- Contributing to society.
- Assisting in times of need.
- Provides a pathway to improve our community.
- Giving back to the community.
- Provides a sense of belonging.
- Creates Mateship and camaraderie.
- Sense of purpose
- Working with like-minded people
- Socialising with purpose.
- Involvement in exciting events that are meaningful.

The current challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations taken from conversations with active not-for-profit community groups and local survey results.

- Increase in bureaucracy, ie need for Blue Card, Food Handling certification & difficulty in achieving this in rural/remote areas etc
- Increasing administration time, regulations, accountability.
- Competing priorities
- Limited Childcare or totally unavailable during hours of volunteering (this is important to note as the majority of volunteers in Balonne are women.)
- Burnout.

Unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, and age groups.

- Limited time due to long working hours (PALM scheme workers and backpackers)
- Language barrier
- Youth are more attracted to digital lifestyle. **Volunteer organisations could actively 'recruit'** youth for their strong digital skills assisting with social media marketing, POS solutions and/or innovative ideas.
- Gender specific roles do not appear to be a challenge in Balonne, however it is noted the majority of volunteers in the region are female.

Effectiveness and efficiency of current government support.

Balonne Shire Council has a Communities Unit of 3-4 staff facilitating community organisations to be successful, from providing a community grants program, venues, marketing and training, to direct support for events. The general community perception is that Council is supportive.

Opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering:

Two recent recruitment drives worked well for raising awareness and increasing volunteer numbers.

1. the recent St George SES Open Day afternoon where the sheds and equipment were on display, personal invitations were disseminated throughout town and another volunteer group (St George Rotary Club) provided the sausage sizzle, and
2. the follow-up recruitment drive after the recent Dirranbandi fires. During the fire event, many locals assisted to fight the fire. Within a fortnight, the Rural Fire Brigade offered their thanks by way of a Barbeque and utilised the meet and greet to encourage signing up as a volunteer.
3. The Auxiliary Fire Brigade members required 20 training days, including time away. These could be assisted by trainers coming out to the Shire.

First Nations volunteering:

- Occurs more often at sporting events, netball, rugby, league, fishing and the arts etc., but also **cares for country and Indigenous People's councils and associated activity.**

Other relevant matters:

- Reluctance to become a volunteer due to liability concerns.
- Too busy / burnt out
- Unable to commit to volunteering expectations when they run their own business
- Lack of appreciation / abuse / exploitation
- Being taken for granted
- Feeling of being unqualified to do the tasks
- The digital generation may have many different options for short-duration volunteering, crowdfunding and supporting causes.

Potential Government initiatives:

Could include:

- a strategic approach to reduce bureaucracy for not-for-profits, making administration less tedious. For example, the Office of Fair Trade has increased the number of forms, police checks etc. While the time could be reduced some dedicated liaison staff could come out into regions to assist not-for-profits and clubs to understand and complete paperwork.
- Make some of the licences, blue cards etc Federal or at least acceptable to NSW as there are many shires with community organisations along the border wanting to engage personnel who have to get two State versions.
- incentivisation: public recognition, free admission to events, volunteer appreciation dinners,
- paid executive roles rewarding those volunteers who have worked their way into executive roles with financial/tax concessions,
- government agencies could **include 'volunteer leave' as part of the HR leave offering.** If paid sick leave per year is allowed, could there be the equivalent or similar for volunteer days? Perhaps 40 hours paid volunteer hours?
- High School / higher education students could earn credentials towards their studies with skills acquired through volunteering.

- BSC has explored clustering sporting codes into a multipurpose shared facility to reduce maintenance and upgrade costs.
- **Potential to subsidise an administration person shared by several clubs.**