

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

As an independent legal practice governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and operated entirely by volunteers, Bundaberg Street Law welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland. Our submission focuses particularly on the challenges faced by volunteer-run organisations in delivering professional services while managing extensive regulatory and administrative requirements with limited and inconsistent funding.

Our History

Bundaberg Street Law was established in response to a critical gap in legal support services for our regional community. Founded in 2022 by local lawyers and community advocates, our organisation was born from a shared recognition that many Bundaberg residents (in particular those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness) faced significant barriers in accessing legal information and support. Initially conceived as a pro-bono clinic operating one afternoon per week, we quickly identified the immense need for accessible legal guidance.

What began as a small initiative supported by a handful of volunteer lawyers from local practices has since grown into a vital community resource, expanding our services to multiple clinics held per week, as well as legal information sessions, referral support, and community legal education. Despite our growth, we have remained true to our original mission: to improve access to justice for vulnerable and underserved members of the Bundaberg community.

About Bundaberg Street Law

Bundaberg Street Law is an independent legal practice governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and staffed entirely by volunteers. Our operational costs are met through a combination of ad hoc grants, private donations, and fundraising activities. Our volunteers include lawyers, law students, and community members who are passionate about improving access to justice.

Key Issues and Challenges

We have summarised what we see as the key issues and challenges below:

1. Funding and Financial Sustainability

- Reliance on inconsistent funding sources (ad hoc grants, donations, fundraising)
- Challenge of maintaining operational continuity with variable income
- Competition for limited grant funding
- High costs of professional requirements and insurance
- Time-intensive nature of grant applications and acquittals
- Limited funding opportunities for core operational costs

2. Regulatory and Administrative Burden

The complex regulatory environment creates significant challenges for our volunteer Board and coordinators:

- Corporate governance requirements
- Insurance requirements
- Legal practice regulations and risk management
- Volunteer screening and background checks
- Workplace health and safety obligations
- Privacy and confidentiality requirements
- Record keeping and reporting obligations
- Fundraising regulations and reporting

3. Volunteer Management Across Multiple Levels

Managing volunteers at both governance and operational levels presents unique challenges:
Board Level:

- Recruiting directors with appropriate skills and experience
- Ensuring proper governance while respecting volunteer capacity
- Managing director succession planning
- Maintaining strategic oversight with volunteer directors

Operational Level:

- Coordinating professional volunteers (lawyers)
- Training and supervising law student volunteers
- Managing administrative volunteers
- Ensuring consistent service delivery with rotating volunteer teams

4. The Critical and Challenging Volunteer Coordinator Role

The volunteer coordinator role represents a critical yet often overlooked position of volunteer-run organisations:

Key Challenges:

- Extensive Time Commitment: The role demands significant unpaid hours for:

- Volunteer recruitment and screening
- Comprehensive onboarding and training
- Ongoing support and management
- Conflict resolution
- Maintaining volunteer engagement and motivation
- Tracking volunteer hours and contributions

- Skill Complexity: Requires a sophisticated skill set including:
 - Human resource management
 - Conflict mediation
 - Training and development
 - Compliance management
 - Psychological understanding of volunteer motivation
 - Advanced communication skills
- Emotional and Professional Burden:
 - Managing expectations of volunteers
 - Balancing professional standards with volunteer capacity
 - Preventing volunteer burnout
 - Maintaining organisational continuity with a transient volunteer workforce

5. Digital Presence and Technological Barriers

Maintaining an effective digital presence presents significant challenges:

Technological Challenges:

- Limited Digital Expertise: Most volunteers lack the specialised digital skills required for:

- Website maintenance
- Cybersecurity compliance
- Digital marketing
- Social media management
- Database management
- Online service delivery platforms

- Compliance and Security Requirements:

- Protecting sensitive client information
- Meeting privacy legislation standards
- Implementing robust data protection measures
- Managing complex digital consent processes
- Ensuring accessibility standards are met

- Resource Constraints:

- High costs of professional digital services
- Limited funding for technological infrastructure
- Constant need for software and security updates
- Training volunteers in digital platforms

- Complex Regulatory Technology Environment:

- Navigating legal tech compliance
- Understanding digital privacy regulations
- Implementing secure communication channels
- Managing digital record-keeping requirements

6. Resource and Infrastructure Needs

Operating costs that must be met through uncertain funding sources:

- Professional indemnity insurance
- Practice management software
- Volunteer management systems
- Marketing and communications
- Training and development
- Volunteer reimbursements

- Office supplies and equipment
- Fundraising costs

Recommendations

We provide the following recommendations for consideration of the Committee:

1. Sustainable Funding Framework

- Establish multi-year funding opportunities for volunteer-run professional services
- Create specific funding streams for governance and volunteer management costs
- Simplify grant application and reporting requirements for volunteer-run organisations
- Support core operational costs, not just project-based funding
- Develop dedicated funding for volunteer coordinator positions

2. Volunteer Recognition and Support Program

Young Volunteer Engagement:

- Develop a comprehensive media and awareness campaign
 - Highlight real stories of young volunteers
 - Showcase career and personal development benefits
 - Create influencer partnerships to amplify volunteer stories
 - Develop a digital platform showcasing volunteer opportunities

Queensland Youth Volunteering Certificate Program:

- Officially recognised certification for volunteer hours
- Tiered levels of achievement for example:
 - Bronze: 50 hours
 - Silver: 100 hours
 - Gold: 250 hours
- Certification benefits:
 - Inclusion in school achievement records
 - Valuable for university applications
 - Recognised in job applications
 - Professional portfolio enhancement

3. Individual Volunteer Support Grants:

- State-sponsored grants directly to volunteers
- Grant range: \$500-\$1,500
- Eligible uses:
 - Personal protective equipment
 - Training and skill development courses
 - Technology or equipment for volunteering
 - Travel and accommodation costs
 - Childcare support during volunteer commitments

4. Regulatory Relief

- Develop proportional compliance frameworks for volunteer-run organisations
- Create streamlined reporting requirements for small organisations
- Provide templates and resources for governance and compliance
- Establish a single portal for multiple compliance requirements

- Develop targeted support for digital compliance and technology integration

5. Support for Volunteer Boards and Coordinators

- Provide governance training specific to volunteer-run organisations
- Create mentoring programs for volunteer directors and coordinators
- Develop resources for board succession planning
- Support networking between volunteer boards
- Offer specialised training for volunteer management and digital skills

6. Digital Capability Building

- Provide grants for digital infrastructure and training
- Create technology mentorship programs
- Develop simplified compliance toolkits
- Offer subsidised digital security and skills training
- Support the development of shared digital platforms for volunteer organisations

Conclusion

Bundaberg Street Law demonstrates how volunteers can effectively deliver professional services when adequately supported. However, the current regulatory environment and funding landscape create significant challenges for volunteer-run organisations like ours. Strategic government support through sustainable funding, reduced red tape, and improved infrastructure would enable us to focus more resources on service delivery and volunteer engagement.

The upcoming Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games present an opportunity to develop more efficient volunteer management and governance systems that could benefit the entire sector. We encourage the Committee to consider how improvements made in preparation for this event could create lasting benefits for volunteer-involving organisations across Queensland.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make this submission.

I would be pleased to address the Inquiry in person to elaborate on any issues raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely



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