

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

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# Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Response from the Department of Sport, Racing and Olympic and Paralympic Games

## Contribution of volunteers:

The Department of Sport, Racing and the Olympic and Paralympic Games (DSROPG) recognises the vital role of volunteers throughout Queensland, particularly for the sport and active recreation industry (active industry), the Racing Industry and ultimately for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games (Brisbane 2032).

Volunteers are essential in delivering high-quality sport and active recreation experiences, from grassroots to elite levels, while also fostering community connection, promoting social inclusion, and supporting healthy lifestyles.

DSROPG recognises that volunteers make substantial contributions to the success and sustainability of a wide range of sport and active recreation programs, events, and activities across the state. Whether as local club administrators, coaches, officials, or organisers of community or large-scale sporting events, volunteers are a crucial part of Queensland's sporting landscape. Recent data from AusPlay (Australian Sports Commission 2024) estimates that 490,360 people (aged 15 years and over) volunteered for 'non-playing' roles across the active industry from July 2023 to June 2024 in Queensland.

Queensland's sport and active recreation and racing clubs and organisations are highly reliant on volunteer labour to support their day-to-day operations and, as a result, downturns in volunteering are strongly felt across the sector.

## Barriers to volunteer participation:

DSROPG acknowledges challenges with volunteer attraction and retention across several industries, including the active industry.

DSROPG understands that resolving these challenges will require a coordinated and systematic approach to volunteering across Queensland. DSROPG is committed to continuing to engage with relevant stakeholders to strengthen volunteering in the active industry in Queensland to support an ongoing legacy of volunteering before and after Brisbane 2032.

Volunteering Queensland (VQ) will be a key stakeholder on these matters. VQ is the peak body in Queensland responsible for advancing and promoting volunteering, whose 2024 *State of Volunteering in Queensland* (SoVQ) report (Volunteering Queensland 2024) highlights several barriers that inhibit participation in volunteering, such as time constraints, a lack of reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses involved with volunteering, and health reasons. These factors contributed to a significant reduction in volunteering rates in Queensland over the four years preceding 2024. The 2024 SoVQ report states that volunteering rates in Queensland among adults fell by over 10 per cent between 2020 and 2023 and that volunteering participation in Queensland fell from 75.7 per cent in 2020 to 64.3 per cent in 2023, which was below the national average of 66.2 per cent, and still significantly below pre-COVID-19 levels.

DSROPG also acknowledges the growing body of research, including from the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation (Government of Victoria), that points to several key barriers, specifically in the active industry, that hinder the recruitment, retention, and coordination of volunteers, and which are broadly consistent with the SoVQ report.



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The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) (2021) *Future of Sport Volunteering Insights Report* recognises the critical role that volunteering plays in supporting the viability of community sport, as well as the significant detrimental impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on volunteering.

The ASC (2021) identified the following factors which create significant challenges in maintaining volunteer engagement:

- *Time Commitment:* Many potential volunteers are reluctant to commit to the demanding schedules of certain roles, particularly those requiring regular training, travel, and event coordination
- *Volunteer Burnout:* Long-serving volunteers, especially at the grassroots level, often face burnout due to the heavy demands of their roles, compounded by a lack of recognition and support
- *Recruitment and Retention:* Attracting new volunteers, particularly from younger generations and diverse backgrounds, remains a significant challenge. Additionally, there are insufficient pathways for individuals to progress within volunteering roles or to transition into professional careers in sport and recreation and
- *Training and Development:* Gaps in accessible, relevant training opportunities often result in volunteers lacking the confidence or skills necessary to take on specific roles and responsibilities.

## Barriers to female volunteer participation:

Queensland specific AusPlay data (ASC 2024) from July 2023 to June 2024 on sport and active recreation participation rates showed that more than twice as many men had volunteered as coaches, instructors, trainers or teachers at sporting clubs during this period than women. More broadly, this data showed that men were volunteering more at sporting clubs, with 13.3 per cent of male respondents indicating they volunteered compared to 8.8 per cent of women.

This data aligns with research from the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation (Government of Victoria). Its report, *The Volunteer Capacity of Community Sports Clubs to Support Women and Girls in Sport*, highlights how gendered roles and stereotypes can discourage women from volunteering in specific positions, particularly within male-dominated sports with few female volunteers. Specifically, women expressed feeling unsupported by men when taking on leadership roles, such as club president or coach of a male sports team.

Recommendations from the Office for Women to address barriers to female volunteer participation in sport and recreation include:

- Developing specific strategies to increase the number of women in volunteer roles;
- Having policies to support women in leadership roles in the club
- Supporting younger women and girls to build their confidence and capability in taking up roles other than those traditionally occupied by women (e.g. Team managers)
- Creating a welcoming and inclusive club culture.

## Opportunities to overcome barriers to volunteer participation:

To overcome these challenges, the ASC (2021) highlights the following opportunities:

- *Building Partnerships Between Community Sport Clubs and Local Organisations*
  - Encourage collaboration between sports clubs and various community organisations to maximise shared expertise, experiences, and resources. These partnerships can enhance club diversity and strengthen community connections. Potential partners include charities, volunteer organisations, corporations, faith groups, local governments, veterans' associations, schools, universities, businesses, and service groups like Rotary.

- *Enhancing Collaboration Among Community Sport Clubs*
  - Beyond external partnerships, sports clubs can benefit from structured collaboration with one another. Establishing mechanisms for inter-club cooperation will create opportunities to share knowledge, resources, and best practices, fostering a more unified and efficient sporting community.
- *Modernising Sport Volunteering*
  - Redefine sport volunteering by implementing targeted engagement strategies, tailored messaging, and specialised promotional materials to attract a diverse range of volunteers. Integrating sport volunteering into the broader volunteering ecosystem—such as advertising roles alongside general community service opportunities—can highlight its wider impact beyond competition and gameplay.
- *Reimagining Volunteer Roles*
  - Make volunteer roles more accessible and inclusive by redesigning them to accommodate a diverse range of skills and backgrounds. This could involve breaking roles into smaller tasks, aligning them with volunteer types, and offering flexible participation options to encourage broader community involvement.

To further address the issues identified in its report, the ASC has developed a *Sport Volunteering National Plan* (National Plan) which sets out strategic priorities and a plan to achieve a stronger foundation in sport volunteering.

The National Plan sets out the following vision for sport volunteering: *People from all walks of life see and realise opportunities to contribute to individual, club and community goals in a way that suits them.*

Complementary to these findings, the Victorian State Government Office for Women in Sport and Recreation has also published recommendations on how to engage and retain volunteers in community sports clubs:

- *Breaking down volunteer roles*
  - Ensuring workloads are realistic for one volunteer or recruiting two coordinators to oversee one big team, will decrease the overall individual burden and risk of loss of capacity.
- *Consider payments for some skilled positions or reimburse volunteers*
  - To support volunteer recruitment and retention, payment for roles that require certain skills, such as coaches, game day operations and club administration, can drive capacity and professionalism given the expectations for quality service delivery that are associated with remunerated positions.
- *Provide incentives, subsidising or waiving registration fees*
  - Small incentives such as a club meal, financial contributions and apparel can be used to attract and retain volunteers.
- *Provide visible recognition and acknowledge the work of volunteers.*
  - Visible recognition of volunteers, particularly at club events such as presentation nights can strengthen volunteer retention.
- *Mentoring of volunteers.*
  - Mentoring and upskilling of volunteers for specific roles, such as coaches, can also support volunteer attraction and retention.

Additionally, the Active Queensland Industry Alliance (AQIA) developed a 10-year *Queensland Active Industry Workforce Plan* (Workplan) (AQIA 2024) covering the period 2024-34.

The Workplan recognises the critical importance of volunteers in supporting the viability of community sport and recreation across Queensland and seeks to implement a range of measures to better support and sustainably increase the workforce, including volunteers. This includes:

- a) improving collaboration, partnerships and co-ordination amongst stakeholders;
- b) developing stronger career pathways;
- c) improving workforce attraction and retention strategies;
- d) growing the workforce via diversity and the use of local labour pools;
- e) investing more in workforce skills and training; and
- f) embracing technology to improve efficiency and improve workforce engagement.

## Support for volunteers in the active industry:

DSROPG plays an active role in supporting improved volunteering outcomes in sport and recreation, given the fundamental importance of volunteering to the active industry.

Sport and Recreation grant programs support eligible sport and active recreation organisations, including not-for-profit clubs. More broadly, funding through such programs indirectly supports volunteers in delivering services for organisations and community. Examples of funding programs as well as resources that support the active industry in Queensland, include:

- *ClubIQ* – providing free, easy-to-use resources for Queensland sporting clubs. These resources help club committees and volunteers deliver quality services to their communities.
- *Active Clubs* – providing funds to local and regional sport and active recreation organisations to support volunteers and provide flexible and safe physical activity opportunities to increase sport and active recreation participation.
- *Active Industry Base Fund 2023-2025* – providing funds to state level active industry organisations and industry peak bodies to build and strengthen the capability of their activity or sector.
- *Active Women and Girls Program* – providing funds to boost sport and active recreation opportunities for women and girls in Queensland. The program is dedicated to encouraging greater participation across a range of focus areas, such as volunteer training, resources, equipment or creating more participation opportunities for women and girls within clubs, communities and organisations.
- *Sport and Recreation Sponsorship Program* – providing targeted investment and seeking to collaborate with key stakeholders to deliver and leverage major and community events and initiatives across Queensland, including supporting the volunteers who assist to plan and deliver many of these events.
- *Active Industry Project Fund* – provided funding to Queensland active industry organisations operating in Queensland, to increase participation opportunities and to build the capacity and capability of the sport and active recreation workforce in Queensland with Round 2 supporting upskilling volunteers in 22 industry organisations.

DSROPG also currently administers the following grant programs to support First Nations sport and active recreation participation across Queensland: Deadly Active Sport and Recreation Program, Torres Strait Community Sport and Recreation Program, First Nations Sport and Recreation Program, and the Discrete Communities Planning Funding. Programs and initiatives that are implemented through this funding may leverage volunteer labour to support their delivery.

In addition to the programs, resources and partnerships listed above, individual business units within DSROPG provide general support and guidance to volunteers within active industry clubs and organisations across the state.

## The need for collaboration and coordination:

DSROPG collaborates with key peak bodies regarding initiatives in the volunteering space as required. For example, an integral part of the National Plan is the creation of the Sport Volunteer Coalition (Coalition), which promotes a collaborative approach across the systems of government, industry, and academia to oversee the implementation of the *Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan 2022-26*. To deliver on the vision, the Coalition has identified a range of actions to celebrate, empower, reimagine and innovate in relation to the role of volunteering in the sport sector.

DSROPG is represented on the Coalition and this demonstrates an example of collaboration across key players to strengthen volunteering in sport at a system level.

In demonstrating our commitment to collaboration and coordination in 2024, DSROPG hosted a workshop to map the landscape of volunteering in the Queensland active industry, share findings of research and consultation and discuss opportunities for alignment and collaboration, with attendance including VQ, the ASC, and the Queensland industry peak bodies of QSport, AQIA and Outdoors Queensland in addition to other key stakeholders.

DSROPG recognises that understanding the specific challenges and opportunities for underrepresented groups in volunteering such as First Nations and people with disability will require a concerted approach that leverages the strengths and place-based knowledge of local councils and relevant not-for-profit organisations. DSROPG is committed to collaborative and deliberate engagement with these organisations to support greater participation in volunteering that is representative of Queensland communities.

## Racing Industry Volunteers:

DSROPG also recognises the vital role volunteers play in the racing industry across all regions of Queensland. The 2022/23 *Size and Scope of the Queensland Racing Industry* estimates that the Queensland racing industry is supported by close to 8300 individuals providing their skills, time and resources to the racing industry as a volunteer. Almost 81 per cent of all participants in racing are in regional communities, and for many of these people, local racing clubs are an important part of their community and provide valuable opportunities to stay active and engage with their community.

In support of volunteers within the racing industry, the statutory control body for racing, Racing Queensland (together with Neil Mansell Transport & Mittys) have implemented the *Cheer a Volunteer Award* to recognise volunteer hard work and dedication.

## Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games:

There are significant opportunities to leverage Brisbane 2032 to improve volunteering outcomes in the Sport and Active Recreation Industry.

*Elevate 2042* (Elevate) is a comprehensive legacy strategy for Brisbane 2032. Amongst a broad range of priorities, Elevate recognises the importance of volunteers to the success of Brisbane 2032 and seeks to develop a vibrant and diverse volunteer network, which includes opportunities for people with a disability, First Nations people and those from multicultural backgrounds.

Elevate objectives pertaining to volunteering include:

- *Building a vibrant and diverse volunteer network:* Creating more pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disability, older adults and multicultural communities to join in with the cultural and sporting life of their community.
- *Addressing wider inclusion in sport:* Supporting the attraction and retention of women in sport, including as coaches, officials and volunteers more broadly.

However, Elevate also has broader ambitions and sees Brisbane 2032 as providing an opportunity to reignite a culture of volunteering in the community by celebrating the contribution of volunteers, building their skills and providing inclusive environments to attract a wider range of people.



With approximately 50,000 volunteers needed to service the event, Brisbane 2032 can serve as a catalyst for increasing public interest in large-scale event participation, fostering a culture of volunteerism that extends beyond the Games. This surge in engagement can help build a skilled and experienced volunteer workforce, contributing to long-term benefits for industries reliant on event staffing, tourism, and community-driven initiatives.

Not only would this have wide ranging societal benefits, but it is also beneficial financially. The SoVQ report indicates that for every dollar invested in volunteering, there is a \$4.70 return on investment. This indicates that the legacy benefit of a flourishing volunteer sector would not only be social and cultural, but also economic.

For example, following the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, a survey was undertaken of London residents which indicated:

- 53 per cent were more aware of volunteering opportunities;
- 47 per cent were more interested in volunteering; and
- 42 per cent were motivated to volunteer for the first time or more often.

DSROPG sees particular importance in harnessing the opportunity for the volunteers required for Brisbane 2032 forming part of the broader volunteering network within the sport and recreation industry and providing capability uplift to the sector beyond the Games.

Ultimately the Brisbane 2032 Organising Committee will be responsible for the volunteering program for Brisbane 2032, which is expected to be released after the conclusion of the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

## Conclusion:

DSROPG is committed to enhancing the experience of volunteers in the active industry which contributes to positive sport and recreation experiences for participants. Furthermore, the delivery of quality, safe, accessible and inclusive participation opportunities requires appropriate training and development opportunities for volunteers. By collectively addressing key barriers and enablers to volunteering through a coordinated and collaborative approach, Queensland can ensure that its sport and active recreation volunteer workforce remains vibrant, sustainable, and reflective of the community it represents.

Volunteers are the heart of our communities, and it is critical that Queensland continues to attract, support, recognise, and engage them in meaningful ways to ensure a vibrant and active Queensland. DSROPG looks forward to collaborating with all stakeholders to foster a thriving volunteer culture across the state in the lead up to Brisbane 2032 and beyond.

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