

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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AUSTRALIA**
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Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

February 2025

28 February 2025

Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee

Queensland Parliament

Electronic submission

Re: Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Multicultural Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland.

Multicultural Australia commends the Queensland Government in setting up this Inquiry with broad terms of reference. We welcome this Inquiry as a significant opportunity to acknowledge innumerable volunteers across Queensland whose daily contributions bring benefits to our state and its people. It is also an opportunity to review the current state of volunteering in Queensland to address barriers that limit active volunteering. We are hopeful that this Inquiry will identify avenues for increasing volunteering in Queensland and ways to support the engagement of volunteers across diverse areas of community needs.

Multicultural Australia emerged from a community-based social movement to advance multiculturalism and build communities where everyone belongs. Since 1998, we have welcomed tens of thousands of individuals from refugee, asylum seeker, international student and migrant backgrounds and worked with First Nations communities, with the goal of creating a more equitable and prosperous society. Today, we are a multicultural for-purpose organisation and settlement provider with a strong and connected physical presence across metropolitan and regional Queensland.

Our clients and community are at the heart of everything we do, and we are passionate about providing care and services in person-centred and compassionate ways. We are also playing our part in influencing the multicultural landscape across Australia. Our journey over the past 25 years has been driven by our unwavering commitment to creating welcome, promoting inclusion, and fostering belonging for all. We achieve this through client service delivery, community development, advocacy, building cultural capability and community events, working with people, community, business, and government. We are proud of the difference we make, and we are committed to delivering real impact.

Multicultural Australia is a volunteer-involving organisation. Volunteers support our work and our mission in numerous ways – from assisting new arrivals to Queensland with one-on-one support in their settlement journey, to being part of our community events and festivals. Our organisational volunteering program makes a huge impact for our clients, communities and our organisation. We acknowledge the significant contributions our volunteers bring in creating belonging across Queensland's communities and their commitment to create real change for a better Queensland and Australia.

In turn, Multicultural Australia is committed to supporting our volunteers – ensuring meaningful volunteering roles and opportunities, ease of engagement and process for all volunteers as well as, ongoing recognition and celebration of the value of volunteering and its impact on our organisation. We have invested in building our support and evidence base on volunteering. Multicultural Australia volunteer team continues to develop 'volunteer insights' – understanding

the motivations and skills our volunteers bring (to better support them within our organisation). Recently, we also commissioned a research project on *Volunteer Engagement in Professional Settlement Services in Queensland* (as a partnership between Multicultural Australia, Centacare Far North Queensland, and the Multicultural Communities Council Gold Coast) – through the Global Change Scholars Program at the University of Queensland. This research has helped identify good and best practices across the volunteering sector – to provide actionable recommendations for enhancing service delivery through volunteering in the settlement sector. These insights are harnessed in our submission to the current inquiry – across key (inquiry) terms of reference.

Multicultural Australia is strongly committed to working with the Queensland Government, volunteers, services involving volunteers and the broader community to ensure the growth of the volunteering sector in Queensland - and appropriate support and recognition for our volunteers in Queensland. We would be keen to work with Queensland Government to develop a considered proposal around growing volunteering in Queensland – growing opportunities presented through Brisbane Olympics and Paralympic Events 2023 as well as, opportunities to build community wellbeing and resilience through disaster preparedness and community recovery programs. We would be happy to assist with any additional information or clarification regarding this submission. Please contact Jeril Thomas, Regional Manager Ipswich, at [REDACTED]

Sincerely



Christine Castley
CEO, Multicultural Australia

Introduction

Volunteers play a significant role in supporting Multicultural Australia's vision and mission. They are an important part of commitment to create welcoming, inclusive communities where everyone belongs. Volunteering, by its very definition ('time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain' – Volunteering Australia 2015) - suggests an important role for volunteers in building strong and resilient communities. Multicultural Australia (MA) is a leading for-purpose organisation dedicated to advancing multiculturalism and fostering inclusion across Queensland. MA provides person-centred, culturally responsive services, guided by an unwavering commitment to creating spaces of welcome, promoting inclusion and fostering belonging for all. Our mission is brought to life through our diverse areas of work— client service delivery, community development, economic participation, advocacy, cultural capability building and large-scale community events. In collaboration with people, services, businesses, communities and government, we strive to shape a multicultural landscape that benefits everyone. Our volunteers are critical stakeholders in our work.

MA's submission to the current Inquiry, responds to key Inquiry terms of reference, including:

- The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State
- The views of volunteers, prospective volunteers and the volunteering sector on the current barriers to volunteering, including excessive legislative and regulatory burdens and other restrictions adversely limiting active volunteers
- The current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations and their recommendations for addressing challenges and improving the volunteering experience
- The unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations, and opportunities to improve volunteering participation, accessibility and experience for these groups

MA submission further references the following Terms of Reference in our response for opportunities for Queensland government to supporting the growth of volunteering in Queensland:

- Opportunities for the Queensland Government to leverage all portfolios to support growth in volunteering across Queensland, including through hosting the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering in Queensland, including how to optimise the engagement, support and integration of volunteers assisting with natural disasters and community recovery.

MA submission is based on our extensive service experience over decades. It includes relevant MA program (including our volunteer program) experiences and evidence in framing our response - detailed in the following sections.

Volunteering – Current State, Value and Contributions

In Australia over five million people engaged in voluntary work through several organisations in 2020 (Volunteering Australia, 2022). However, volunteering activities were greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of the pandemic were significant in the context of a long-term decline in the proportion of the Australian population undertaking formal volunteering (a fall of about 20% between 2010 and 2018 – ABS 2020)¹. Further, evidence suggested a fall of over 25% between late 2019 and April 2021. Despite a small (yet significant) increase in a 12-month period (as at April 2023), volunteering numbers had not returned to their pre-pandemic levels. Further, analysis suggests those who volunteered in the period leading to the April 2023 survey, volunteered for fewer hours than those who volunteered in the 12 months preceding².

This trend is reflected in Queensland as well – with a decline in volunteering in both, the number of people volunteering, and the overall time volunteered. Participation rates are down (10%) from pre-2020 levels across formal and informal volunteering – as well as lowered number of hours volunteered each month (down 20%)³. Nevertheless, volunteers are represented significantly, in their contributions across Queensland – with an estimated 64.3% of Queenslanders (2,800,000 people) aged 15 years volunteering between July 2022 and July 2023. These figures include both formal volunteering (through an organisation) and informal volunteering (through spontaneous, self-organised, non-affiliated individual or group activities)⁴.

The value and benefits of volunteering to Queensland are immense. Evidence points to the economic value of volunteering in Queensland (over \$117 billion in 2022-23 FY with each dollar invested in volunteering generating a 470% return in added value) – as a sum of commercial benefits, individual benefits and civic benefits (with civic benefits including the cost to replace the labour that volunteers contribute to Queensland)⁵.

Multicultural Australia's experience also reflects the current trends in volunteering nationally. Currently we have around 590 volunteers across various roles in our organisation (and another 110 prospective volunteers currently in the onboarding process). Our volunteer numbers (and hours volunteered) have varied over years – reflecting changes in volunteer availability as well as our organisational capacity for volunteer program administration and volunteer engagement. However, the value and benefits to Multicultural Australia (MA) from volunteering have been significant. While MA has not quantified the (unit) value of volunteering hours, the direct benefits to our clients and communities as well as, value addition to MA's overall mission is easily evident. Our analysis shows that volunteers bring a rich diversity and diverse skills into our work. Through a combination of multilingual abilities, cultural awareness, professional expertise, and personal attributes, volunteers make significant contributions to MA's mission. The variety of skills they offer, support a wide range of MA programs and services (from direct client support to organisational development and community engagement). Typically, MA volunteers bring the

¹ Biddle, N., Gray, M. (2023). Ongoing Trends in volunteering in Australia. ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, ANU. <https://csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/ongoing-trends-volunteering-australian>

² *Ibid.*

³ Volunteering Queensland (2024). The State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024.

<https://volunteeringqld.org.au/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland-2024-report/>

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

following skills and benefits to MA:

1. **Interpersonal Skills:** Including, communication skills, empathy, cultural awareness, teamwork and people skills
2. **Language Skills:** Multilingual capabilities
3. **Organisational and Management Skills:** This grouping includes leadership, time management, project coordination, administrative skills, and customer service, indicating strong potential for operational support.
4. **Counselling / Mentoring:** This category represents volunteers with skills in providing personal support, coaching and guidance.
5. **Community Engagement:** This category represents skills specifically mentioned for connecting with and mobilising communities such as outreach, cultural event participation and previous volunteering experience.
6. **Social Work / Support Services:** This category includes volunteers with professional backgrounds in social work and related support services, including case management and advocacy.
7. **English Language Teaching:** Separated from general language skills, this shows a significant number of volunteers capable of supporting English language learning – with specific mention of TESOL, ESL teaching and English tutoring.
8. **Event Planning and Coordination:** Kept separate to organisational and management skills, this skillset is valuable for MA's community engagement and major events.
9. **Creative Arts Skills:** This category represents volunteers with visual arts, performing arts, and craft abilities which can be used in cultural programs and events.
10. **IT / Digital Literacy Training Skills:** This includes various computer, software and technical skills that can support the organisation's technological needs⁶.

Barriers to Volunteering

Multicultural Australia acknowledges there are varying barriers to volunteering – both individual/personal as well as organisational processes and requirements that may impede volunteer engagement or their satisfaction with the volunteering experience.

At an organisational level, we agree with the following overarching issues identified through our

⁶ Multicultural Australia (2024). *MA Volunteer Insights Report: Community and Social Support Volunteers*. Internal Multicultural Australia document. This report provides an analysis of volunteer expressions of interest (conducted between 2023 and 2024). Participants responded to an open-ended question asking, 'What skills do you have which you feel can benefit Multicultural Australia?'

service delivery, and in literature:

- **Addressing the ‘true cost’ of engaging and managing volunteers.** Research indicates that one in three organisations in Australia does not allocate a specific budget for volunteer management (Volunteering Australia, 2011). Reasons include oversight of the need for a dedicated budget, the perception of volunteer management as a component of broader management expenses, and a lack of endorsement from leadership (Volunteering Australia, 2011). In Multicultural Australia commissioned project on Volunteer Engagement in Settlement services, project participants identified this as a critical issue, with one participant noting *‘Resourcing as a system challenge and the general misunderstanding of what it takes to manage a volunteer program’*. Another noted, *‘Getting a volunteer isn’t free, and it’s sometimes not easy. But it seems to be perceived as easy, and therefore when it doesn’t happen quickly, questions are asked’*⁷. The issue of appropriate resourcing/true cost of volunteer engagement and management was also tied to a broader need for awareness and understanding of the benefits of volunteering itself. For example, a participant noted – *‘in general, as a society, we are not fully literate regarding the benefits of volunteers’* and another noting this particularly for the not-for-profit sector *‘there is an inability of the settlement and not-for-profit sector to articulate the true costs (of volunteer management) to funding bodies as volunteering is not free’*⁸.
- **Administrative, financial and compliance barriers:** A range of organisational barriers can strain volunteer engagement. While individual organisations will have their unique approaches and associated challenges, there are some common barriers identified. These can start at the process of initial contact with volunteers (such as processes and costs associated with background checks of volunteers), to their ongoing engagement (such as appropriate training programs and supports). Effective human resources management is crucial for enhancing volunteer satisfaction, commitment, and retention. While good volunteer management practices are known to improve these outcomes, there is a lack of evidence-based literature explicitly addressing volunteer management as a key component of engageability⁹. The process of volunteer management encompasses planning, recruitment, onboarding, retention, clearly defined job roles, job design, and strategies for recruitment, screening, and matching volunteers¹⁰. Bureaucratic obstacles and compliance procedures can hinder volunteer engagement rather than facilitate it – for example, unclear delineation of roles between Human Resources and volunteer management can increase administrative burdens and inefficiencies.

Multicultural Australia’s own experience reflects the broader sector challenges and barriers to volunteer engagement. This includes – administrative burden (e.g. the onboarding process) and resourcing challenges – including resourcing to celebrate and show appreciation of volunteers for contributing their time and skills. The on-boarding process especially, (applying for blue cards,

⁷ Rajagopal, A., Bharwani, D., and Van Tinh, T. (2024). *Volunteer engagement in professional settlement services in Queensland*. Brisbane, QLD Australia: The University of Queensland.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Arnon L., Almog-Bar M., Cnaan R.A. (2023) *Volunteer engageability: A conceptual framework*. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly 52:1633-1659, as cited in Rajagopal et.al (2024).

¹⁰ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (2019) *Volunteer Management Cycle - Americas* Regional Office, as cited in Rajagopal et.al (2024).

police and probity checks) is time consuming. There is real risk that these processes could lead to prospective volunteers discontinuing with their interest to volunteer. However, there is also need for rigour in these processes to ensure safety and wellbeing of clients and community members. Other areas of consideration for MA include creating 'additional opportunities' for our active volunteers to participate in programs that can afford them a rewarding experience and/or learning/upskilling opportunity (in addition to their overall satisfaction with the volunteering experience).

MA manages our volunteer streams and programs by sourcing resources from within our organisation as there is no dedicated pool of funding to support the overall volunteering program. We have a comprehensive approach to supporting volunteers within this constrained resourcing and funding environment. We utilise *Rosterfy* as a system to recruit, onboard, retain, manage, communicate and link our volunteers. We have a dedicated (.8 FTE) Volunteer Program Coordinator that supports the program reporting to the Volunteering Program Manager. MA has also commenced an internal Volunteering Program Working Group to enhance our overall volunteering program. We have developed dedicated Volunteer Management Policy and Procedure and are currently working towards a Volunteer Management Framework for the organisation.

Given the impact of the program and how flexibly we can benefit from volunteers supporting our clients and community – we understand the need for more support and resourcing dedicated to our volunteering programs. This would help us build capacity to manage volunteers and their expectations and experiences, support our staff and volunteers to upskill and overall, be able to learn and implement current trends in volunteer management.

Experiences, Motivations and Challenges for Volunteers and Volunteer-involving Organisations

Individuals have varying motivations to volunteer and how they choose to contribute their time and skills to different causes or services. Multicultural Australia has tried to understand why individuals are drawn to contribute their time and skills to our mission, and the underlying reasons that prompt our volunteers to engage with us. We have found that the motivations for volunteering with Multicultural Australia often intersect with personal experiences, professional goals, and a genuine desire to contribute to a more inclusive society¹¹. Our organisation attracts a wide range of individuals, from recent migrants to long-term Australian residents, each bringing unique perspectives and skills to support the mission of creating a welcoming and inclusive community for all.

MA's volunteer pool is diverse. Our recent Volunteer Insights Report included interested volunteers who are Australian citizens (47.8%), permanent residents (17%), international students and other visa holders. While Australia was the most common country of origin for most volunteers (17%), there were 55 countries distinctly mentioned – with China, India, Colombia and Afghanistan following Australia. Across this diversity, there were 53 unique languages represented (linguistically, assuming some level of English proficiency, 74.2% of volunteers speak one or more languages other than English).

¹¹ Multicultural Australia (2024). MA Volunteer Insights Report: Community and Social Support Volunteers. See n.6

Multicultural Australia volunteers are motivated by¹²:

- **Cultural Exchange and Learning:** This includes - an opportunity to learn about different cultures and promote cultural understanding; a chance to share own cultural background as well as the prospect of broadening ones' perspectives. This was a recurring theme across age groups and nationalities of volunteers. Our analysis showed that while females represent the majority in both the overall dataset and within the Cultural Exchange and Learning theme, males are proportionally more likely to express interest in this theme. This suggests that while cultural exchange and learning is a popular motivation across genders, it is resonates in particular, with male volunteers.

'I would like to be a multicultural volunteer for the diversity appreciation that Australia offers and contribute to the multicultural environment. I would like to contribute to the construction of an inclusive community that is strengthened by cooperation. I would like to grow personally under the positive impact of sharing great values'. [Respondent – Male, 46-year-old, from Colombia].

- **Helping Others:** Many volunteers expressed a strong desire to help and support others who are newcomers in Australia. They expressed interest in assisting new arrivals around their settlement challenges – providing practical, tangible, hands-on assistance. They wished to share their skills (including, English language), local knowledge and local (social) connections. People with language skills that can assist interpretation and translation, individuals with experience in education or mentoring or people with knowledge of local services and systems are particularly interested in such roles with MA.

'I have worked with NGOs and the UN in the past mainly in East Africa and SE Asia. I would like to use my skills in the humanitarian sector and as an immigrant myself would like to offer assistance to others in this cultural assimilation process'. [Respondent - Female 53-year-old from the UK]

- **Community building and social inclusion:** This is closely linked to the desire to help others. Volunteers desire to contribute to community building and promotion of social inclusion. This was prevalent in individuals who have benefited from similar support themselves as well as individuals who express a desire to create a welcoming environment. Volunteers with a background in social justice and community work bring this motivation to MA.

'As a former migrant myself, I understand the social and economic barriers that are faced by people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds'. [Respondent – Male 38-year-old from Russia].

- **Personal connection to the migration experience:** Personal experiences with migration, either as migrants themselves or through family history, are often cited as motivations for volunteering. The firsthand understanding of the challenges faced by newcomers drives many to want to help others in similar situations. Many migrants wish to give back to the community that welcomed them. Children of migrants who understand

¹² *Ibid.* Participants were asked to respond to an open-ended question asking, 'Why would you like to volunteer with Multicultural Australia?'

the challenges of integration and individuals who have lived or worked abroad also seek to volunteer to assist other migrants.

'I wanna give back to the community. I came to Australia as a refugee and Multicultural Australia helped me all the way. They helped me with the applications, helped at the airport, on the plane and helped settle in Australia. They were part of my journey and it's time to give back to them and help others the same I was helped'. [Respondent – Male 28-year-old from Bangladesh (Rohingya)].

- **Professional development and skill application:** Many respondents view volunteering as an opportunity for professional development or to apply their existing skills in a meaningful way. Others see volunteering as a means to gain work experience, especially in fields related to community services, social work, or working with diverse populations. We see this motivation is common among – students, professionals (looking to transition into the non-profit or multicultural sector) or retirees wanting to utilise their skills and experience. Volunteers are looking to apply their skills or develop other skills and approach MA about opportunities to utilise their bilingual or multilingual abilities or teach English as a second language. Many approach us with skills in social work or counselling, event management, general office and organisational skills, skills in business, career counselling, and professional networking, helping with technology and digital skills, and including research and advocacy etc.
- **Personal fulfillment and social connection:** This motivation, while common across all age groups, is particularly strong among older volunteers and retirees seeking meaningful ways to spend their time, young adults seeking to expand their social networks and individuals seeking a sense of purpose outside of their work or study.

'I'm passionate about promoting inclusion and making everyone feel welcome, and I think this organization does amazing work in that area. Plus, it's a chance to make a real difference in the community and meet like-minded people who share the same values'. [Respondent – Female 25-year-old from Australia].

As noted in the previous section (under the TOR barriers to volunteering), appropriate resourcing and supports are essential to support volunteer-involving organisations. For Multicultural Australia, volunteers contribute in significant ways to our service delivery and overall mission. Their assistance covers a range – including, supporting new arrival settle in their communities (e.g., supporting social groups, playgroups, youth groups, English conversation classes, transport assistance), sharing their skills (e.g., corporate volunteering, mentoring support supporting job readiness) and at events (sporting events or major MA events). Given the important roles for volunteers across diverse streams of our service delivery, the effective engagement of volunteers become critical to ensure the success of our own service delivery. Appropriate engagement and investment in supporting volunteer contributions is critical to the ongoing support for the communities our volunteers support – and our organisation as a whole.

Challenges to volunteering for people from diverse backgrounds

Volunteering participation may be impacted by a range of personal and practical reasons for individuals. It is important to understand the varied barriers that can prevent people from volunteering, and ways to assess and address these, towards improving volunteering rates

overall, and volunteering effectiveness across organisations.

MA acknowledges the many ways individuals contribute to their local communities – which unfortunately are not always recognised as formal volunteering, despite representing a significant contribution to community cohesion and requiring many hours of personal volunteering time. MA is privileged to work with individuals and groups that place a very high emphasis on family and community support. This support (offered outside formal or organisational volunteering settings), is offered with similar motivations like altruism, sense of duty or need for social connectedness – often motivating others within formal volunteer settings.

There is significant literature on volunteering within diverse individuals and groups. All volunteering peak bodies in Australia commissioned a report (2023), to identify barriers to volunteering and ways to improve access and inclusion for particular groups – including, First Nations people, people with disability, and newly arrived migrants¹³. The report provides key findings on barriers to volunteering and considerations across each group – as well as suggested recommendations for overcoming these barriers.

The report identifies the many barriers that Multicultural Australia notes within its own service delivery to newly arrived migrants (including, a lack of understanding of the term “volunteering” in a Western context, a lack of clarity about the processes associated with formal volunteering). New arrivals and new migrants find similar barriers to volunteering as other groups in community (a lack of time, care giving roles etc.) Here we would note the significant cost of living pressures being felt acutely across communities – limiting time and capacity to volunteer. For diverse, multicultural communities, however, these barriers are compounded when individuals may lack existing networks in the broader community or confidence in their English proficiency. Experiences of racism or bias in community, and structural barriers to accessing services (including, volunteering services) may further compound issues.

MA’s direct service delivery with new arrivals helps us address many of these barriers. Our work focuses on supporting new arrivals (migrants, refugees and international students) understand service access (including, into volunteering services). Our focus is two-fold - allowing individuals to contribute and benefit from their volunteering experience. MA’s values and commitment to are aligned with what is recognised as good practice and recommendations¹⁴ for engaging with diverse communities, including:

- Creating a welcoming environment (for current and prospective volunteers)
- Strengthening connections with diverse communities and local communities and community leaders (to strengthen pathways and opportunities for individuals and communities to contribute)
- Offering flexible roles and opportunities – allowing volunteers to contribute based on their skills, experience and confidence.
- Promoting diversity – this is central to Multicultural Australia’s mission. Our volunteers come from diverse backgrounds, and they work with us to promote diversity, inclusion and belonging.

¹³ See <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/resources/barriers-to-volunteering/>

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Opportunities for Queensland Government in promoting the Growth of Volunteering

MA welcomes the current Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland for the opportunity it presents for the growth of volunteering across our State, and consideration of ways to support our community of volunteers.

MA has chosen to respond to two key Inquiry terms of reference in one response, namely:

- Opportunities for the Queensland Government to leverage all portfolios to support growth in volunteering across Queensland, including through hosting the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering in Queensland, including how to optimise the engagement, support and integration of volunteers assisting with natural disasters and community recovery.

MA believes events like Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games and natural disaster/community recovery events are critical markers in Queensland to coordinate state planning and development activities, as well as opportunities for growing community wellbeing, resilience and social cohesion. Major events like the Olympics as well as events like natural disasters and community recovery bring people together in strong, unified purpose. Under such circumstances, people seek to offer their support and assistance to the wider community, share joy and optimism (in case of events like the Olympics) or offer assistance and hope (through disaster and community recovery).

Multicultural Australia is keen to work with Queensland Government to build a dedicated volunteering pipeline around these key markers for the State. We believe this could be done through:

Olympics:

- Creating volunteering opportunities across sporting, arts and skills-building opportunities for our communities across the State
- Uniting our communities to showcase Queensland as a welcoming, culturally capable and diverse destination
- Uniting our communities to benefit our State through increased cultural learning and cultural exchange opportunities.

Natural disasters and community recovery

- Creating regional partnerships across Queensland - building strong engagement across government departments, services and communities
- Building comprehensive community involvement across preparedness, response and recovery activities in natural disasters and community recovery.

MA has key sporting, arts, and community partnerships across Queensland. These partnerships are engaged to deliver direct services to communities, events and activities that promote

opportunities for community interactions, cultural experiences and cultural exchange – as well as opportunities to promote inclusion and belonging for diverse communities in our state. We also have a strong volunteer arm that brings these partnerships together to deliver key events and activities across the state. For example, we deliver the iconic *Luminous* festival in Queensland. This festival has grown from a small gathering 18 years ago into Queensland's largest annual multicultural event, with over 35,000 attendees in 2024 at South Bank. It has also expanded to regional areas such as Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Dalby and Toowoomba. We are committed to growing *Luminous* to foster belonging across Queensland communities.

We also work closely with key services and stakeholders like the QPS, QFES around our state disaster planning, preparedness and recovery – especially trying to support diverse cultural communities and vulnerable community members with information, advice and support in negotiating natural disasters and community recovery. We also hold significant community partnerships and extensive links with community groups, community leaders and representatives and local elders across Queensland. We have experience and expertise in engaging our community networks – and are especially sought out by local government and community stakeholders for these connections and network (particularly relevant in times of natural disasters and community need). We are able to stand up volunteers from various cultural backgrounds and diversity, to respond to community need. We also work to build community capacity across community disaster recovery needs. For example, MA provided Cultural Training to Suncorp Disaster and Community Recovery team members. This included team members as first responders and phone responders to disaster events as well as volunteers.

There is significant interest across the for-purpose organisations and community services to build community support across key events like the Olympics and natural disaster and community recovery. However, current resource constraints and capacity issues across different services requires planning for a comprehensive and considered approach that could activate our volunteers and volunteering resources across these key events. Multicultural Australia believes this is necessarily a partnership approach across key volunteer-involving organisations across the state. With volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations individually already delivering strong benefits and impacts across Queensland (with a reported \$117.8b value to community and a 470% return on investment for every dollar invested in volunteering¹⁵) support for bringing them together in a partnership approach could assist in amplifying the value, benefits and impacts of their contributions even further.

Concluding statement:

MA strongly welcomes the current Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland. We are committed to supporting Queensland Government as it explores options to grow and support volunteering across our state. We are keen to develop a considered program of volunteering opportunities and support for Queensland Government – to foster opportunities for social cohesion and wellbeing in our state. MA is keen to develop a considered proposal around the Brisbane Olympics and Paralympic Events 2023 as well as an overarching program of disaster preparedness and community recovery that could energise volunteering across Queensland. We would be happy to develop this proposal for detailed consideration by the Queensland Government.

¹⁵ See Volunteering Queensland (2024). The State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024. N.3