

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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**Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee
Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland**

Animal Welfare League of Queensland Submission – 24/02/2025

As Queensland's voice for animal care, we prioritise the wellbeing of every animal entrusted to us. Founded in 1959, the Animal Welfare League of Queensland (AWLQ) is a donor-supported, not-for-profit charity dedicated to animal welfare. Through our comprehensive programs, we reunite lost pets with their families, find loving homes through successful adoption initiatives, and rehabilitate animals in need. Beyond our shelters, we extend vital support and resources to ensure pets, and their people can stay together in times of crisis. At AWLQ, compassion and dedication drive every effort, making a lasting impact on the lives of pets and their people across Queensland.

We are privileged to be supported by an extraordinary team of over 1,150 active volunteers who form the heart of AWLQ. This team's unwavering commitment is crucial to our success, and we cannot overstate how integral they are to our mission. From hands-on roles like feeding, cleaning, and walking animals to indirect contributions such as washing laundry, sorting donations, and organising fundraising activities, our volunteers play an essential role in every aspect of AWLQ's operations.

Their dedication stretches across every function of our organisation —whether it's our Op Shop teams ensuring excellent customer service, our Event volunteers making our outreach efforts a success, or our Volunteer Coordinators helping new volunteers integrate into the team. At our Ipswich, Warra, and Willawong Animal Rehoming Centres, our onsite Volunteer Coordinators facilitate inductions and provide training to ensure volunteers have the support they need. Our Gold Coast centre has a dedicated Volunteer Administration Officer and Coordinator to manage volunteer engagement across multiple locations, including the Gold Coast and Brisbane Community Vet Clinics.

At AWLQ, we often tell our volunteers, "We couldn't do this without you." This is not just a throwaway line; it is a genuine acknowledgment of the selfless service they provide every day. Their commitment ensures that AWLQ can continue to care for the animals entrusted to us and offer support to the wider community. We are constantly inspired by the dedication and passion of our volunteers, who show up—rain or shine, on holidays or weekends—because they care about the animals and the difference they make.

Volunteering is about giving time for the common good, and our volunteers exemplify this spirit every day. Many report that their involvement at AWLQ not only helps animals but gives them a sense of purpose and enhances their personal wellbeing. Volunteers are the foundation of AWLQ, and we are forever grateful for their ongoing support. Together, we continue to make a significant impact on the lives of animals in need, ensuring that AWLQ remains a compassionate and thriving organisation dedicated to animal welfare in Queensland.



As part of our submission, AWLQ draws on over 60 years of experience in coordinating volunteers, along with insights gathered from a survey conducted with a sample of our current volunteer base across South East Queensland, which received 120 responses.

1. The Current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State;

Volunteering is an essential component of Queensland's social and economic fabric, providing invaluable support to organisations, communities, and the broader state economy. At the AWLQ, volunteers contribute over 170,200 hours annually, which translates into an estimated wage saving of approximately \$4.5 million (*Animal Welfare League Queensland 2024*).

These figures represent only a fraction of the total impact of volunteering across Queensland, as many volunteer contributions go unrecorded, particularly those involving informal community support and event participation.

Beyond economic value, volunteering enhances social cohesion, improves mental well-being, and fosters a sense of belonging among participants. Studies show that volunteers experience higher levels of happiness and lower rates of anxiety and depression due to their sense of purpose and connection to the community. Additionally, AWLQ volunteers not only support direct animal care—feeding, cleaning, bathing, playing, and rehabilitating animals—but also engage in fundraising, administrative assistance, and retail work through AWLQ's Op Shops, which in turn help sustain essential programs. The reach and impact of volunteering extend far beyond the immediate work carried out, as it strengthens community engagement and generates long-term benefits for Queensland's broader society.

2. 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;

Despite the significant benefits of volunteering, many individuals and organisations face considerable barriers that limit participation. Excessive regulatory and compliance requirements create obstacles, particularly for smaller organisations that lack the administrative capacity to manage extensive background checks, workplace health and safety training, and insurance obligations. These bureaucratic hurdles discourage potential volunteers, especially those who may only have limited time available to contribute.

Workplace and logistical challenges also act as barriers to effective volunteering. Some AWLQ volunteers have reported a lack of structure in volunteer coordination, with one stating, "*There is a clear lack of organising of volunteers at times.*"



Environmental conditions can further limit engagement, particularly for roles requiring outdoor work. One respondent explicitly noted, "*The heat is a challenge*," emphasising the need for better scheduling or infrastructure improvements to mitigate physical strain.

Training and support gaps were also highlighted. While many volunteers found AWLQ's induction process effective, some suggested that ongoing support could be improved. One volunteer mentioned, "*It was two years ago that I started volunteering, and I don't remember any follow-up training*," signalling the need for continuous learning opportunities, and for organisations to be resourced to provide this.

Financial constraints are another critical factor, as some volunteers struggle with transport costs, uniforms, or other incidental expenses associated with volunteering. Many prospective volunteers cite personal time constraints due to work, family responsibilities, or study commitments as further barriers to participation. Additionally, lack of structured pathways for skill development and career progression through volunteering deters individuals who might otherwise engage in long-term volunteer work.

Government-level support could also be enhanced to improve the volunteering experience. Some volunteers suggested infrastructure and facility improvements, with one stating, "*Better facilities would improve not only my work but also the well-being of the animals*." Increased funding for volunteer spaces, amenities, and support services could significantly boost volunteer retention and satisfaction.

To improve accessibility, AWLQ recommends a review of legislative burdens, financial assistance for volunteers, ongoing training and development programs.

3. The current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations and their recommendations for addressing challenges and improving the volunteering experience;

AWLQ volunteers are deeply motivated by their passion for animal welfare and their commitment to giving back to the community. Survey responses indicate that the most common motivations for volunteering include passion for animal welfare (108 mentions), giving back to the community (53 mentions), gaining new skills and experience (39 mentions), and social connection (33 mentions). For some, volunteering also serves as a career stepping stone, with a few respondents noting they needed experience for future jobs.

However, volunteers also face several challenges in their roles. Commonly cited issues include time constraints (23 mentions), lack of support or training (16 mentions), and physical or accessibility challenges (13 mentions). Some volunteers expressed frustration over occasional shortages of resources, lack of clarity in volunteer and employee roles, and difficulties working with other volunteers who are less committed. High temperatures and insufficient shaded areas for both volunteers and animals were also mentioned as obstacles, particularly during the summer months.



Despite these challenges, volunteering at AWLQ has had a profound positive impact on personal well-being. Many respondents shared that their involvement in volunteering provided them with a sense of fulfilment and improved mental health. One respondent stated, "*Volunteering at AWLQ has made my life feel more balanced... it gives me purpose outside of work and family life.*" Another noted, "*I miss it when I take breaks. I've made a lot of new friends here.*" Volunteers overwhelmingly feel that their contributions are meaningful and impactful, with one adding, "*I believe my input has improved the lives of the animals we care for.*"

To further support volunteers, AWLQ recommends increasing mental health and emotional support resources, ensuring sustainable workloads by expanding the volunteer base, and improving recognition programs to highlight volunteer contributions within the broader community. Support to address training gaps and resource shortages would also enhance the overall volunteer experience.

4. 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;

Volunteering should be an inclusive opportunity, but people from diverse backgrounds, age groups, and abilities often face unique challenges. Older volunteers may find physically demanding roles, such as cleaning animal enclosures or lifting heavy supplies, difficult to sustain over time. Conversely, younger volunteers, including students, frequently struggle with balancing their volunteering commitments alongside their academic and work responsibilities.

People with disabilities or those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds may encounter accessibility barriers, including inadequate training resources or limited support structures to accommodate their specific needs. Survey responses also highlighted challenges such as the need for better facilities, flexible shift arrangements, and increased inclusivity in training programs. One respondent noted, "*More support for volunteers who don't speak English as a first language would help.*" Others emphasised the importance of offering roles that align with diverse physical abilities to ensure all volunteers feel valued and included.

AWLQ recommends support for the development of inclusive training programs, the provision of transport assistance where needed, and the creation of flexible volunteering opportunities that cater to a broader demographic. By adopting an inclusive approach, the Queensland Government can ensure that volunteering remains accessible and welcoming for all.

5. The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement;

The Queensland Government provides various forms of support for volunteering, including grants and training programs. However, these initiatives can be difficult to access, particularly for smaller organisations with limited administrative resources.

Existing volunteer grant opportunities are often shared with our organisation shortly before the due date, making it difficult to complete applications in time. Additionally, we find current state volunteer grant requirements to be quite restrictive, as they do not always allow our organisation to allocate



funding in ways that would meaningfully contribute to better support and outcomes for volunteers. For example, while funding for fuel vouchers is helpful for an individual volunteer, it does not facilitate improvements that benefit the entire volunteer workforce.

AWLQ recommends streamlining application processes for funding, expanding financial assistance for volunteer recruitment and retention programs, and improving collaboration between government agencies and volunteer-driven organisations.

6. 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;

The Brisbane 2032 Olympics presents an unparalleled opportunity to promote and expand volunteer engagement across Queensland. The Queensland Government should consider implementing volunteer legacy programs, offering skills training, and ensuring that volunteers recruited for the Games transition into long-term community roles. Establishing partnerships between Olympic organisers and community organisations like AWLQ could help create lasting volunteer networks that benefit multiple sectors beyond the event itself.

7. 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;

Queensland frequently faces significant natural disasters, such as floods, bushfires, and cyclones, highlighting the essential role of emergency response volunteers. Increasing the effectiveness of volunteer engagement and support in these crises can have a profound impact on disaster recovery and community resilience.

One of the key opportunities is streamlining volunteer registration and deployment processes to ensure a quick response when disasters occur. By creating a more user-friendly and efficient registration system, volunteers can be quickly mobilised, minimising delays during emergencies. In addition, offering clear communication about available volunteer roles can help match volunteers to tasks that align with their skills and physical capabilities.

Training is another vital area for improvement. Ensuring that volunteers receive comprehensive training before disasters strike will enable them to respond more effectively when they are needed most. This training should not only cover emergency response procedures but also include disaster preparedness, and trauma-informed care to ensure that volunteers are mentally and physically prepared for the challenges they may face.

Volunteer retention and wellbeing should also be prioritised. Volunteers often experience emotional and mental strain after participating in disaster relief efforts, so providing access to mental health resources, including debriefing sessions and ongoing psychological support, would be beneficial. Creating a volunteer support network to share experiences and build camaraderie can also help reduce burnout and ensure volunteers feel appreciated for their contributions.



Lastly, enhancing public recognition for volunteers' contributions during and after a disaster would encourage more people to get involved and ensure that those who do volunteer feel valued. AWLQ, alongside other organisations, can play a key role in advocating for better coordination, support, and recognition of volunteers, thus strengthening Queensland's emergency response system and fostering a more resilient community.

8. First Nations peoples volunteering, including in remote and discrete communities, and the role of First Nations volunteering in Closing the Gap;

First Nations communities in Queensland, especially in remote and discrete areas like Thursday Island, have long-standing traditions of volunteering, often deeply rooted in cultural practices that promote community resilience and wellbeing. These communities have a unique approach to volunteerism, where contributions are not only about service but also about strengthening cultural ties, supporting local knowledge, and ensuring the survival of vital community networks.

Drawing from our experience working in Thursday Island and other remote northern Queensland communities, we understand the importance of co-designing volunteer programs in close consultation with Indigenous leaders. This ensures that roles are culturally appropriate, empowering local people and respecting their customs, traditions, and needs. AWLQ strongly recommends that any volunteer initiatives be developed in partnership with Indigenous leaders to create sustainable, community-driven solutions that reflect the values and priorities of First Nations peoples.

Moreover, investing in remote volunteering opportunities is essential for further supporting First Nations-led initiatives, particularly in areas that face geographic isolation or resource constraints. Our experience in these communities shows that access to volunteering roles and resources is often limited, which can contribute to gaps in opportunities for meaningful involvement in community recovery and development. Increasing the availability of remote volunteering programs and ensuring they are accessible to First Nations peoples would help bridge this gap, fostering a sense of empowerment, pride, and ownership in the programs.

By investing in First Nations-led volunteer programs and ensuring they are culturally safe, AWLQ believes we can contribute to Closing the Gap, improving the social, economic, and health outcomes for Indigenous communities, while acknowledging and preserving their significant cultural contributions. These efforts will support long-term, self-sustaining change and provide the platform for Indigenous volunteers to take a leading role in shaping their communities' futures.

9. Any other relevant matters, including academic and other diverse sources, and any relevant reports and reviews at the national level and across other states and territories.

From AWLQ's perspective, it is essential to continuously evaluate national and international best practices to identify strategies that can enhance volunteer retention, engagement, and overall effectiveness in Queensland. Volunteerism is critical in addressing the growing challenges posed within our community. However, ensuring the long-term sustainability of Queensland's volunteer sector requires a deeper understanding of volunteer motivations, barriers, and the factors that contribute to successful volunteer experiences.



Drawing from reports from organisations like Volunteering Queensland, we recognise that volunteer retention and engagement are influenced by several key factors, including recognition, support, and alignment of volunteer roles with personal values. National and international case studies, particularly from disaster-prone regions and animal welfare organisations, show that volunteers are more likely to remain engaged when they feel their contributions are valued, when they are adequately supported both mentally and physically, and when their efforts lead to tangible, meaningful outcomes in their communities (Omoto & Snyder 2002). This knowledge should inform the development of volunteer programs that not only attract individuals but also maintain their commitment over time. Research on volunteer motivations and barriers is also crucial for informing policy adjustments that can create a thriving and sustainable volunteer sector.

AWLQ supports the need for policies that remove common barriers to volunteering, such as time constraints, lack of training, and physical or logistical challenges, particularly in remote communities. In addition, policies should support the flexibility of volunteer roles to accommodate diverse lifestyles, including those of working individuals, carers, and retirees, so that volunteering remains accessible to all.

At a national level, a review of reports from the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and similar bodies provides valuable insight into the broader trends affecting volunteerism across the country. Lessons from other states and territories, especially those with strong volunteer networks in rural and remote areas, offer practical examples that can be adapted to Queensland's unique needs. Implementing volunteer strategies that reflect the diversity of Queensland's population—whether through culturally safe practices, tailored outreach programs for underserved communities or strengthening the integration of volunteers into emergency response systems—will be key to sustaining volunteer engagement and fostering community resilience in the long term.

In summary, a holistic approach, informed by research and national best practices, is essential for developing a sustainable and engaged volunteer sector in Queensland. AWLQ is committed to advocating for policies that support both the recruitment and retention of volunteers, ensuring they are well-equipped, valued, and integrated into the vital work they support within our Queensland community.



References

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