

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submitted by:	Rotary International Districts 9620, 9640, 9560
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Submission – Queensland Parliament Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Contributing Parties	Lisa Hunt, Rotary International District Governor 9640 (2024-2025) Andrew Gillespie, Rotary International District Governor 9560 (2024 – 2025) Sue Mulraney, Rotary International District Governor 9620 (2024-2025)
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Executive Summary

Rotary is an international membership-based service organization with its core values of service, fellowship, diversity, integrity, and leadership. Befitting the motto ‘Service Above Self,’ the Rotary clubs of Queensland have a proud history of support for community, national and international causes.

For over one hundred years, Rotary in Queensland (which includes our family of Rotary, Rotaract and Interact clubs) has been a vibrant contributor to the community. As well as local community involvement, it has developed programs that have been adopted internationally. It has also readily adopted programs from elsewhere that are relevant to local needs.

There are currently over 260 active Rotary and Rotaract clubs in Queensland. The Rotary Club of Brisbane was the first club in Queensland (and third in Australia), chartered in May 1923.

Given the size and diversity of Queensland, we have three (3) Rotary Districts in Queensland, to provide support and governance for our clubs. We have collaborated as the current District Governors for 2024-2025 in compiling this submission.

Clubs organise around Rotary’s Five Avenues of Service: Club; Community; Vocational; International; and Youth.

We also have seven areas of Rotary focus: Basic Education and Literacy; Peace and Conflict Prevention/Resolution; Disease Prevention and Treatment; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene; Community and Economic Development; Maternal and Child health and Support for the Environment. These are an integral part of Queensland Rotary club activity.

Value that Rotary Volunteering contributes to Queensland

Rotary members log a lot of volunteer hours which are often undervalued. These volunteer hours provide economic value to their communities. If the community had to pay for the services Rotary provides, the costs could be significant, depending on the scale of the volunteer activity. By volunteering their time and skills, Rotary members make an economic, social, and humanitarian impact, which is often undervalued or underestimated in the traditional economic measures.

Rotary clubs aim to provide service to their local community and globally around the world in many ways including:

1. Direct participation in community projects;

2. Volunteering time on Boards and organising committees for club or multi-club projects and initiatives; and / or
3. Fundraising for charitable organisations which in turn provide services where they are needed.

As an example, Rotary and Rotaract members actively volunteered during both Commonwealth Games (Brisbane 1982 and Gold Coast 2018). We look forward to volunteering opportunities for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Volunteer perspective #1

“Our club has around 30 members, around half who do volunteer for various activities in the club.

We primarily volunteer raising funds for charities or helping other charities with their work.

Those that do volunteer say they generally enjoy the tasks, the comradery it fosters and that we are helping those that need help.”

Challenges and Barriers

Insurance and Risk Management

Volunteering in general is becoming harder due to insurance requirements and risk management.

Finding willing and able people who want to give back to community is becoming more challenging in what seems to be a more self-focused society.

Costs of being a volunteer in some organisations, including Rotary, is becoming more of an impost.

Inconsistent approaches to working with children (as volunteers) from state to state/territory is another impediment.

The challenge for volunteering organisations to appeal and attract new members is becoming an increasing issue.

Work Health and Safety and Insurance

For volunteers to be able to operate successfully, there's a fine line between Workplace Health and Safety issues and the 'over' insurance that volunteers now seem to require just to be on premises or in contact with people. Our clubs are receiving increasing premiums to cover liability insurance for our volunteer activities. Regulation is stifling volunteerism, which is worth a huge amount to our local communities.

Volunteers are often expected to adhere to the same health and safety standards as paid employees. While ensuring safety is important, this requirement can create unnecessary hurdles, particularly for informal volunteer roles or small-scale volunteer projects.

Unless regulations for volunteers are streamlined, then volunteers may simply stop volunteering. Reduce the complexity and administrative challenges!

Volunteer perspective #2

“We visited Arcare to see if our members could work with them to visit patients, provide Christmas presents, etc. The feedback from Arcare was that we would need to have members obtain a NDIS card (not a blue card) and complete courses before this could happen. We judged this not to be feasible for our members.”

Volunteering with Youth

Many members join Rotary to leverage their commitment to supporting young people. The onerous insurance regulations around young people joining us for volunteering at events in the community are extremely unhelpful in giving young people opportunities to volunteer, build their confidence, develop and understanding of community. The rules are making it tenuous.

All our Rotary members are volunteers and most have Blue Cards. This becomes even more limiting and onerous, should there be students involved in activities, where there is now an almost pathological fear that something could go wrong. A small but frustrating example from a Rotarian: *“I have two sporty grandsons in Brisbane, 18 and 16, and I believe that our Japanese Rotary exchange student could benefit from meeting them and spending time with them...my younger grandson also studied Japanese at High School level, and he accompanied me last year to Japan. However, because of the uncertainty around youth protection if I drive to Brisbane where he could spend a weekend with the boys and attend their sporting events, this will not happen.”*

We understand that Rotary's Youth Protection guidelines interact with Queensland regulations and our insurer's requirements. However, we need a comprehensive review to ensure safety for all.

Other barriers

Lack of incentives or recognition – while intrinsic motivation is a driving force for many, lack of recognition can leave volunteers feeling undervalued. We can recognise with our Rotary environments, but broader recognition is lacking.

Volunteer fatigue and burnout – volunteers often face physical and emotional burnout. Rotary volunteers partner with other organisations in times of disaster relief. The challenge of appealing to and attracting new members means the same volunteers are continually being called upon.

Ideas for addressing barriers

1. Simplify regulatory requirements.
2. Clearer definitions under WHS legislation.
3. Encourage collaboration.
4. Promote volunteering through public awareness campaigns.
 - a. Regular spotlight on the work of volunteers. Showcase how Rotary is responding to community needs. For example, Rotary's campaign – **Say No to Domestic Violence**.

Conclusion

Volunteers are the backbone of Queensland communities and for over 100 years, Rotary has been an active contributor in this space.

Our organisation, like many others, faces increasing challenges include funding constraints, member attraction and retention, and growing community needs. Cost of living pressures is directly impacting cost and capacity to volunteer in our communities.

As mentioned earlier, Rotary members make an economic, social, and humanitarian impact, which is often undervalued or underestimated in the traditional economic measures. By prioritising support for volunteer organisations, including Rotary, it will make it easier for individuals to contribute their time and skills to causes they care about.