

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

By email: lgsbcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Members

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the above.

About QCOSS

Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) is Queensland's peak body for the social service sector. Our vision is to achieve equality, opportunity, and wellbeing for all Queenslanders.

QCOSS is part of the largest employer group in Queensland, with almost 220,000 people employed in more than 7,000 charities across the state. The sector's essential work is supported by more than 413,000 volunteers.

QCOSS' position

QCOSS welcomes the Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland ('the Inquiry'). Our response is informed by engagement with QCOSS members who are delivering social services within communities across Queensland and are actively engaging volunteers.

In developing our response to the Inquiry, QCOSS also consulted with Volunteering Queensland (VQ) as Queensland's state peak body and lead voice for advancing and promoting volunteering in Queensland. QCOSS endorse the VQ recommendations outlined in their submission.

The current state and value of volunteering

As per the State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 report, the economic and social value generated from volunteering, and its role in building stronger, more inclusive and connected communities is significant.¹ Although volunteering is defined as time willingly given without financial gain, the cost to replace the labour that volunteers contribute to Queensland is estimated at \$31.3 billion, and the total economic value of volunteering in Queensland was estimated at over \$117 billion in the 2022-23 financial year.¹

QCOSS' undertake an annual survey of community organisations to identify and understand emerging issues that impact on service delivery (the 'Survey'). Survey results highlight that the social services sector plays a vital role in generating the benefits of volunteering. This is because volunteers are recognised as a key component and supplement to the paid workforce. Of survey respondents, 32 per cent indicated they rely heavily on volunteers. This was often the result of funding that prevented an organisation from increasing the number of paid staff.

¹ Volunteering Queensland. (2024). State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024. Accessed 25/2/25. [State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report – Volunteering Queensland](#)



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In many cases, community organisations were relying on volunteers to respond to issues that volunteers may not have appropriate training for. This raises additional risks for community organisations, such as the safety and wellbeing of their volunteer workforce.

I look at our Community Centre, it's funded to have one paid person. So, it relies on one paid staff and lots of volunteers. We recently met with one of the DGs, she came to visit the centre and on that particular day, we had lots of volunteers. But what they don't see is what goes on in the background. So, there was a significant incident with a community member becoming quite agitated. And I wouldn't say violent, but definitely a concern where we had to put the centre into lockdown. And if that paid employee isn't at that centre, that relies on volunteers to handle that situation. And as an organisation, how do we continue to support and build the skills of our volunteers? And is that an expectation? You know, we really need to have some hard conversations with the department about those smaller centres and how they're funded.

As well as supplementing the paid workforce, community organisations commonly highlighted that a benefit of volunteering is the strong connection with community development. This is because volunteers were provided opportunity to build skills that would support them to gain paid employment. This often aligned with the goals of an organisations community programs.

...a lot of our staff have come from volunteer positions. So, they might come here as a community member volunteering and building their capacity. The advantage of doing that is that they get to link in with our support services. So, whilst they're building their skills, we're also supporting them to build their own capacity as an individual, as a family and also within the community.

Lastly, when considering the value of volunteering, recognition must also be given to those who are volunteering their time as a Board Director or on the Management Committee of a social service organisation. There are more than 7,000 charities operating across Queensland. The significant majority of these organisations are operating with a governing board of volunteers. These volunteers perform roles that hold significant responsibility and liability for decisions made, as community services cannot legally operate without these roles being filled.

Current barriers to volunteering

QCOSS members commonly indicate the number of people volunteering at social service organisations is reducing. Of survey respondents who were CEOs or Senior Managers:

- 37 per cent stated it is becoming more difficult to find volunteers
- 49 per cent indicated managing volunteers is not an activity funded by government
- 20 per cent reported using volunteers to meet service demand.

The following provides an overview of the most common barriers to volunteering, as identified by QCOSS members.

1. *Cost-of-living.* Increasing pressures from the rising cost-of-living and its impact on out of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers is a significant barrier to people becoming or staying involved in volunteering. This has an impact on the ability of organisations, particularly smaller organisations, to provide ongoing services in their communities.
2. *Time and resources of community organisations.* The investment of time required for a community organisation to recruit and retain a pool of volunteers is significant.
3. *Insurance and other costs.* Volunteering has unrecognised costs that are incurred by community organisations. Most significantly, public liability and insurance presents significant regulatory burdens and cost for hosting organisations. It is important to note that there is now a code of practice on managing the risk of psychosocial hazards at work, under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (WHS Act). All organisations covered by the WHS Act must manage risks to both physical and psychological health of workers, volunteers, and

service users, so far as is reasonably practicable. An increasingly complex regulatory environment increases costs associated with managing volunteers.

4. *Project based / short term funding for community organisations.* Government funding to the community sector is commonly project based and/or short term. Without adequate long-term operational funding for community organisations who rely heavily on volunteers, an organisations ability to recruit and appropriately support volunteers will be limited.

Conclusion and recommendations

QCOSS reiterate and support recommendations outlined in the VQ submission to the Inquiry. Specifically in response to the identified barriers, it is recommended that:

- a) A cost-of-volunteering reimbursement fund is established to assist volunteers to cover out-of-pocket expenses that arise from their volunteer activities.
- b) Establish and provide ongoing operational funding for an integrated network of Regional Volunteering Hubs.
- c) Conduct an internal feasibility study to examine the possibility of a statewide volunteer insurance framework.
- d) Continue implementation of the social service procurement principles. In 2024, QCOSS outlined a series of procurement related reform priorities identified by the community sector that would strengthen its sustainability and improve efficiency and effectiveness, as well as an organisations ability to promote volunteering and provide appropriate volunteer supports.

These included:

- providing longer contract agreement terms
- appropriate lead in time for contract renewals
- providing grants that reflect the real cost of delivering quality services.

The Procurement Principles will be a key enabler of productivity across the social service sector. To achieve productivity gains, the Queensland Government must allocate appropriate resourcing for the continued and timely implementation of the Procurement Principles.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our submission. If you have any questions, please contact Annette Schoone, Chief Executive Officer (Acting) at [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely



Annette Schoone
Chief Executive Officer (Acting)