

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission: Volunteering in Queensland Rugby League – 2024 Overview

Introduction: In 2024, Queensland Rugby League (QRL) had a total of 20,596 registered volunteers who play an essential role in supporting the growth and development of the sport across the state. As part of our ongoing commitment to understanding and enhancing the volunteer experience, a survey was sent to all volunteers at the end of the year, resulting in an impressive response rate of 8.26%. The survey sought to capture insights on motivations, challenges, skills development, and recognition, with a focus on improving volunteer engagement and satisfaction.

Survey Findings:

The key survey questions asked volunteers to reflect on the following areas:

- Motivations for volunteering
- Enjoyment and fulfillment from volunteering
- Skill development
- Challenges faced as a volunteer and by clubs
- Opportunities for growth and leadership
- Recognition and appreciation of their contributions

Key Motivators for Volunteering: Based on the survey data, the primary reasons volunteers choose to contribute to rugby league were ranked as follows:

1. **Support Family Members**
2. **Social Connection / To Be Part of Something**
3. **To Help Others**
4. **Ex-Participant Giving Back**
5. **For Enjoyment**
6. **Gain Skills and Experience**
7. **To Be Active**
8. **To Have a Purpose**

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These motivations highlight a strong desire among volunteers to connect with their community, give back to the sport, and gain a sense of fulfilment through their involvement.

Volunteer Experience – Insights and Benefits: Volunteering in rugby league offers numerous benefits that positively impact both the community and the volunteers themselves. Key outcomes from the survey revealed that:

- Volunteers enjoy **spending time with family and friends**.
- They appreciate the **community impact** and **being around the game of rugby league**.
- Volunteers find value in the **learning opportunities** provided, contributing to their **personal growth**.
- Most notably, **88.52% of volunteers** reported that they see **opportunities for growth and leadership** within the organisation.

These responses highlight that volunteering in rugby league fosters both personal development and community engagement, creating a rewarding experience for all involved.

Challenges Faced by Volunteers: While volunteering offers a wide range of benefits, it is not without its challenges. The survey revealed that **67.81% of volunteers** have faced difficulties in their roles, while **31.74%** reported no significant challenges. Some of the key challenges identified include:

- **Conflict management** (particularly with parents and other volunteers)
- **Time constraints**
- **Insufficient resources and support**
- **Volunteer recruitment and retention**
- **Organisational standards and practices**

Additionally, volunteers have encountered stressful situations involving negative behaviours such as **verbal abuse, physical abuse, bullying, racism, and conflict**. These issues impact the volunteer experience and underscore the need for effective conflict management strategies and a supportive environment.

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Key Challenges Faced by Clubs: Sports clubs across Queensland also face various operational challenges that can hinder their growth and success. Key issues identified include:

- **Volunteer recruitment and retention:** Issues such as time commitment, burnout, lack of recognition, and inadequate recruitment strategies.
- **Facility conditions:** Financial constraints, increasing usage, and the need for local government support.
- **Financial stability:** Unpredictable revenue streams, high operational costs, and limited sponsorship and grants.
- **Membership dynamics:** Competing interests, member expectations, and lack of engagement.
- **Governance practices:** Internal conflicts, limited governance experience, and volunteer governance challenges.
- **Diversity and inclusion:** Cultural and financial barriers, and lack of representation.

These challenges highlight the need for strategic solutions that address volunteer retention, financial sustainability, and governance improvements.

Volunteer Recognition: Recognising the efforts of volunteers is critical to maintaining motivation and fostering continued engagement. Various recognition initiatives are implemented by clubs, including:

- Volunteer of the month
- Milestone celebrations
- Certificates of appreciation
- Special events and social media spotlights
- Public recognition and awards
- Simple expressions of gratitude like "thank you"
- Gifts or tokens of appreciation

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Additionally, QRL hosts an **annual Community Volunteer Awards Program**, celebrating the invaluable contributions of volunteers to the sport.

Volunteer Education: Position descriptions for volunteers are critical in ensuring clarity, accountability, and effective contributions. They outline specific tasks, expectations, and necessary skills, which helps attract the right individuals and set clear boundaries to prevent over-commitment. A well-defined description not only makes it easier to track performance but also aids in training, providing a reference for ongoing support, and ultimately enhancing volunteer satisfaction and retention. Role induction courses complement this by equipping new volunteers with the knowledge and confidence they need to succeed. By focusing on essential topics relevant to their roles, these courses ensure that newcomers are integrated smoothly, shortening onboarding time and boosting overall productivity and engagement. Moreover, providing the right resources is vital for fostering growth, learning, and development. Access to tools, information, and support enables individuals to overcome challenges, innovate, and reach their full potential. Resources help people make informed decisions, improve efficiency, and contribute to long-term success, both for themselves and for the organisation. Position descriptions, induction courses, and resource access work together to create a structured, supportive environment.

Conclusion: Volunteering in rugby league is an integral part of the sport's fabric in Queensland. It provides both tangible benefits to the community and enriching experiences for the individuals involved. However, there are challenges that need to be addressed, particularly regarding conflict management, volunteer retention, and resource support. By continuing to recognise volunteers and offering opportunities for growth and leadership, QRL can ensure a positive and fulfilling environment for those who dedicate their time and energy to the sport. We are grateful for the contributions of our volunteers and remain committed to supporting their ongoing development and success.

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