

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering on part of ICPA Qld (Inc)

ICPA Qld is an apolitical, not-for-profit, volunteer parent organisation that has been the voice for increasing awareness of and advocating for the unique needs of rural and remote (geographically isolated) students for more than 50 years. ICPA Qld advocates for equity of access to quality education and educational opportunities for all students (early childhood to post-school) who live in rural and remote Queensland.

Funding

ICPA Qld has more than 1300 member families across 45 branches in Queensland. Branches work in their districts to support their communities, for example, their School of Distance Education through running sports camps, offering financial support through bursaries or scholarships and supporting local community events through catering. This community work is also on a purely volunteer basis: it is time-consuming, and is often at significant personal cost, including but not limited to funding their own travel, donating goods, taking time away from necessary work on their properties or other employment.

Each year, branches send delegates to State Conference, bringing the motions which form the policy and advocacy framework for State Council to represent members and their rural and remote communities. This is funded by branches and so in order for their voices to be heard, branches must raise the funds to enable members' attendance. Whilst some branches are able to gain support from local sponsors, this is a limited pool of funds given the small size of isolated communities and the demands on funding.

State Council is the voice of the members and consists of up to 16 members. State Council is elected at State Conference each year. As a purely volunteer organisation with no paid administration or other positions, ICPA Qld receives no funding from government and must source funding from sources including but not limited to the following, to fund its advocacy:

- State Conference net funds
- Sponsors of State Conference
- Other sponsorships, partnerships and grants and small total of member donations
- Member fees

These are not always ongoing, so the huge challenge is for ICPA Qld to raise sufficient funds to undertake advocacy on behalf of rural and remote communities which are vital through their significant contribution to the Queensland economy. They are also often forgotten due to geographic isolation, so it is imperative that the voice of these Queenslanders is represented, and their issues raised. This is hugely time-consuming and so a review of funding for volunteer organisations such as ICPA Qld is long overdue.



To represent members, State Council requires funding for:

- Travel to Brisbane and other centres for Delegations where government and other stakeholders are met,
- Travel to meetings in rural areas to support branches and local members,
- Accommodation
- Administration expenses such as printing, postage, and the purchase of laptops
- Ever-increasing insurance costs, for the organisation and its branches which are in rural and remote areas
- Auditing expenses (to meet legislative requirements)
- Training for State Councillors e.g. Governance, Media Interaction

ICPA Qld is the only parent representative organisation that does not receive funding from state government – our counterparts in Independent Schools Parents Network, Catholic School Parents Network and P and Cs Queensland all receive funding. Funding is the provision that would make the greatest difference for our volunteers to assist with representation of members.

Attracting Volunteers

Like other volunteer organisations, ICPA Qld is increasingly challenged to attract members (volunteers) who are able to give time to the organisation, both at Branch level and State Council. Many of our families are required to work on properties, work in small towns, support the education of their children in the geographically isolated home schoolroom and work through natural disasters – leaving increasingly little time to contribute as volunteers and a decline in volunteer rates. Cost of living pressures also contribute to declining participation and the costs of running the organisation.

Additionally, the pool of volunteers in rural and remote areas is small due to small population numbers. Volunteers, including ICPA Qld members, actively volunteer in a number of community organisations to keep vital services and support operating in these small communities. Volunteers are “spread thin”, leading to volunteer “burnout”. This is unsustainable. Increased funding and incentives for the provision of services in rural and remote areas is required to ensure equitable access to services for these communities just as they are available for their urban counterparts.

Barrier to volunteering

The very nature of ICPA Qld in representing geographically isolated families means that very isolation is a challenge for members in participating in advocacy activities. Distance and isolation often preclude members from taking on more active roles within the organisation and can be a discriminating factor for those who would otherwise participate as volunteers. Again, support through funding may enable the organisation to support its volunteers and facilitate increased participation.



ICPA Qld is often represented at stakeholder meetings, round table discussions, parliamentary enquiries and management meetings, contributing rural and remote perspectives – a presence that is highly valued. ICPA Qld representatives are the only volunteers present. We take great pride in being the representative voice in education for rural families, but we do have concerns about the sustainability of remaining a highly regarded volunteer organisation given the challenges outlined in this submission.

As a registered not-for-profit organisation, ICPA Qld State Council is subjected to governance requirements, legislative requirements, and other responsibilities we have to the state and community. For volunteers, addressing these can be time consuming and burdensome. Further, good Governance is vital, however, the degree of personal responsibility can be confronting for volunteers. The degree of responsibility placed on volunteers with respect to Governance could be reviewed and some obligations alleviated. This may attract more volunteers whose intention is to volunteer to make a difference, without legal burdens.

ICPA Qld thanks the Queensland State Government for the opportunity to present this submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering and representatives are available to contribute further should the opportunity arise.



Secretary
ICPA Qld

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