

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to Queensland Government 2025 Inquiry into Volunteering

Focus on role of older adults in sporting clubs

Summary

This submission addresses the vital role of older adults (55+) in Queensland sporting clubs, both as volunteers and participants. Older Queenslanders contribute a significant proportion of all volunteer hours in community sporting organizations while facing unique challenges and opportunities. With Queensland's aging population, developing strategies to engage, retain, and support older sporting volunteers is essential for club sustainability and community cohesion. This submission proposes targeted recommendations to strengthen older adult participation in sporting club volunteering.

Introduction

Older adults represent a cornerstone of Queensland's sporting volunteer workforce, bringing valuable experience, reliability, and commitment to community clubs. They serve in diverse roles from governance and administration to coaching, officiating, and facility maintenance. Additionally, the growing "active aging" movement presents opportunities to engage older adults as both sporting participants and volunteers. This submission explores how to maximize the potential of this demographic while addressing barriers to their participation.

Current State of Older Adult Sporting Volunteers in Queensland Strengths

- High dedication and retention rates among older volunteers
- Extensive institutional knowledge and organizational memory
- Availability during weekday business hours when working-age volunteers are unavailable
- Strong community networks and connections
- Willingness to commit to regular, ongoing volunteer roles
- Transferable professional skills valuable to sporting organization management
- Intergenerational mentoring capabilities

Challenges

- Physical limitations affecting certain volunteer roles
- Digital literacy barriers impacting engagement with new club management systems
- Risk of burnout due to concentration of responsibilities
- Limited succession planning in many clubs
- Health and mobility constraints for some older volunteers
- Perceived age discrimination in certain sporting environments
- Access and transportation issues, particularly, but not only, in regional areas
- Limited recognition of the specific needs and contributions of older volunteers

Key Recommendations

1. Encourage sports clubs to develop age-inclusive volunteer frameworks
 - Develop an "Experienced Volunteers Program" recognizing the specific capabilities of older adults
 - Create adaptive volunteer role descriptions accommodating varying physical capabilities
 - Establish flexible scheduling options
 - Implement "job-sharing" models for key positions to distribute workload and prevent burnout
 - Develop intergenerational volunteer teams pairing older and younger volunteers
2. Skills Development and Digital Inclusion
 - Create targeted digital literacy programs for older sporting volunteers
 - Develop simplified technology interfaces for essential club management systems
 - Establish "Technology Buddy" programs pairing tech-savvy volunteers with less confident users
 - Provide training in contemporary governance practices and compliance requirements
 - Create opportunities for older volunteers to share valuable institutional knowledge
3. Recruitment and Engagement Strategies
 - Develop a "Second Career in Sport" campaign targeting recent retirees
 - Create pathways for older participants to transition into volunteer roles
 - Partner with retirement communities and seniors' organizations to promote membership and sporting volunteering
 - Implement "Come and Try" volunteer days specifically marketed to older adults
 - Develop specific recruitment messaging highlighting the health and social benefits of volunteering
4. Health, Wellbeing and Accessibility
 - Provide accessible facilities and environments for older volunteers
 - Implement volunteer health and wellness programs as volunteer benefits
 - Create transportation assistance programs for older volunteers
 - Develop modified volunteer roles accommodating changing physical capabilities
 - Provide & promote opportunities for social connection through volunteer activities
5. Recognition and Valuing Experience
 - Establish a "Lifetime Contribution" recognition program for long-serving volunteers
 - Create mentoring programs where experienced volunteers can share knowledge
 - Develop case studies highlighting the impact of older sporting volunteers
 - Implement "Wisdom Keeper" positions valuing institutional memory and experience
 - Create pathways for experienced volunteers to contribute to state-level sporting policy

Implementation Strategy

We propose a three-tiered implementation approach addressing immediate needs while building long-term sustainability:

Immediate Actions (0-12 months):

- In conjunction with state organisations & clubs, conduct comprehensive audit of current older volunteer participation and barriers
- Develop the "Experienced Volunteers Program" framework and guidelines
- Implement digital literacy training programs in partnership with Libraries Queensland
- Create adaptive volunteer role descriptions for key club positions

Medium-Term Initiatives (1-3 years):

- Establish transportation assistance programs for older volunteers
- Develop additional club facilities accessibility upgrade grants
- Implement intergenerational mentoring programs
- Create the "Second Career in Sport" recruitment campaign
- Develop technology solutions addressing digital literacy barriers

Long-Term Development (3-5 years):

- Integrate older volunteer strategies into all state sporting organization planning
- Develop comprehensive evaluation and impact assessment frameworks
- Create sustainable funding models supporting older volunteer participation
- Establish Queensland as a national leader in age-inclusive sporting volunteering
- Develop policy frameworks supporting lifelong contribution to community sport

Eildon Croquet Club

Facing volunteer burnout among its aging committee, Eildon Croquet Club is implementing an interest- and skills-based volunteering model. The club will conduct a skills & interests audit of members, identifying specific expertise areas ranging from bookkeeping to gardening to desktop publishing. By breaking down traditional committee roles into smaller, skills-matched tasks, they hope to create flexible volunteering opportunities requiring just 1-2 hours per week.

Conclusion

Older adults represent both Queensland's most valuable current sporting volunteer resource and a significantly underdeveloped potential workforce. By implementing age-inclusive strategies, recognizing the unique contributions of older volunteers, and addressing specific barriers to participation, sporting organizations can harness this vital demographic to ensure sustainability.

With Queensland's population aging, developing effective approaches to engage older adults in sporting volunteering is not merely beneficial but essential for the future of community sport. The recommendations in this submission provide practical frameworks to maximize the potential of older volunteers while enhancing their own health, wellbeing, and community connection through meaningful contribution.

We welcome the opportunity to expand on these recommendations and contribute to the development of comprehensive strategies supporting older adult participation in Queensland's sporting volunteer workforce.