

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

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<b>Submitted by:</b>	Community media researchers within the Griffith Centre of Social and Cultural Research
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Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

## **Submission to Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland**

Dear Committee Members,

Volunteering is a vital component of Queensland community life. While volunteering is central to many sectors, this submission focusses on the role of volunteering in one of our most valued local media sectors, community radio. Community radio stations across Queensland rely heavily on volunteers who dedicate their time and expertise to providing diverse, locally relevant content. These volunteers bring unique skills and perspectives, foster community connections, and ensure that underrepresented voices are heard. The contributions of community radio volunteers not only enhance social cohesion but also provide vital training opportunities, foster media literacy, and support local culture and identity. Drawing on our extensive research into the community radio sector, this submission discusses the benefits that individuals and communities derive from volunteering and the challenges facing Queensland community radio stations.

### ***About community broadcasting***

Community radio is Australia's largest independent broadcasting sector with more than 500 broadcasting services across the country and an average weekly listenership of approximately 5 million Australians (McNair Ingenuity, 2024). Community radio plays a vital role in enriching the diversity of Australia's media landscape and providing more egalitarian access to media production: it provides a space for everyday people to have a voice on the local issues that matter to them. Australia's community broadcasting sector relies heavily on the work of volunteers: paid staff make up less than five percent of community media workers in Australia with 17,800 volunteers contributing more than \$250 million in value each year<sup>1</sup>.

There are 70 community broadcasting services across Queensland, covering a wide range of geographic areas from the Torres Strait to inner city Brisbane and serving diverse communities including First Nations communities, multilingual and multicultural groups, young people, older people, people living with disability, and those with special

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<sup>1</sup> CBAA & CBF. (2023). *Roadmap 2033*. Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (Sydney); and the Community Broadcasting Foundation (Melbourne). <https://www.roadmap2033.org.au/s/FINAL-Roadmap-2033-digital-viewing.pdf>



interests in particular arts and musical genres. These services rely heavily on the labour and passion of volunteers to stay on air and continue fulfilling their invaluable community functions. Community radio is often overlooked in discussions of volunteering but this large, diverse, and vibrant sector plays a vital role in serving local communities and, as such, must be considered in future planning and policy-making focussed on volunteering in Queensland.

### ***Benefits of volunteering in community radio***

There is an extensive body of research that supports the value of volunteering in community radio for both the volunteers themselves and communities more broadly. Our recent work focussed on the Australian sector found that volunteering in community radio offers significant and long-term value in terms of career development, fostering personal growth, skill-building, and developing social connections. Community radio is an important training ground for those hoping to work in the creative and cultural industries<sup>2</sup>. Volunteering in community radio provides fluid but direct and tangible contributions to employment opportunities, skills development and training across a broad suite of industry-relevant skills, connections and networks that are central to shaping personal and professional pathways, and also contributes to developing a sense of social responsibility which was found to influence both personal and professional lives.

Further research highlights how community media training not only supports career pathways but also nurtures a sense of belonging, provides networking opportunities, and encourages lifelong learning<sup>3</sup>. Volunteers gain diverse skills that enhance employability while contributing to a sector that values creativity, inclusivity, and community engagement. However, challenges such as workload stress and burnout emphasize the need for stronger mentoring, mental health support, and investment in training initiatives. These challenges are not unique to community broadcasting volunteers, as recognised by Volunteering Queensland's most recent State of Volunteering report<sup>4</sup> as well as in the *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032*<sup>5</sup>. The prevalence of these

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson, H., Backhaus, B., Bedford, C., & de Souza, P. (2021). *Community media destinations: spotlight on creative industries*. Brisbane: Griffith University. <https://apo.org.au/node/313962>

<sup>3</sup> Backhaus, B., Anderson, H., & Bedford, C. (2023). *Community media destinations: spotlight on training*. Brisbane: Griffith University. <https://apo.org.au/node/323491>

<sup>4</sup> Volunteering Queensland. (2024). *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024*. Brisbane: Volunteering Queensland.

<sup>5</sup> Queensland Government. (2024). *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032*. Brisbane: Queensland Government, Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts.



issues highlight opportunities for a broad-scale approach to providing support for volunteers and volunteer-dependent organisations.

### ***People from diverse backgrounds and community radio volunteering***

Ethnic community broadcasting is the largest media sector that specifically services ethnically diverse and multicultural communities. Queensland is home to one full-time ethnic broadcaster -- 4EB in Brisbane -- and several other stations that broadcast ethnic programming throughout their schedule including Townsville's Triple T, Cairns FM, and 4DDB in Toowoomba. These stations offer an important service to the roughly 23 per cent of Australians who speak a language other than English at home <sup>6</sup>, particularly for new and emerging migrant communities. Again, ethnic broadcasters rely heavily on volunteers to create programming and engage their communities. This is often an issue for the ethnic community broadcasting sector: research found that attracting and retaining volunteers is the major challenge facing the sector, followed by funding shortfalls, and attracting younger broadcasters <sup>7</sup>. While this is an acute issue for the sector, it also represents an opportunity for government to provide further support to these stations so as to better support migrant settlement experiences, ensure that emergency broadcasting is accessible to diverse communities, and to engage young people from diverse backgrounds in active community life.

### ***First Nations community broadcasting and volunteering***

There are currently more than 230 radio broadcast sites coordinated by 35 licensed, community-owned, not-for-profit organizations, reaching around 320,000 First Nations people in Australia. In Queensland, there are two Remote Indigenous Media Organisations – the Queensland Remote Aboriginal Media Association and the Torres Strait Islander Media Association – that manage a total of 26 Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services (11 on the mainland and 15 in the Torres Straits). There are also an additional nine First Nations community radio stations across the State<sup>8</sup>. Volunteer labour plays a significant role in sustaining this sector; however, its impacts are a neglected area of research. First Nations broadcasting contributes directly to the Closing the Gap agreement, in particular, Priority Reform 2, 'Building the Community-Controlled Sector', with a focus on Outcome 16 ('Cultures and Languages are strong, supported and

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2022). **Cultural diversity of Australia**. Canberra: ABS.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, H., Forde, S., Rane, H., Alexander, B., & de Souza, P. (2024). **Connecting communities in a digital media era: Australian ethnic community broadcasting in the 21st Century**. Brisbane: Griffith University

<sup>8</sup> First Nations Media. (2001 – 2025). **Radio Services**. <https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/our-industry/radio-services>



flourishing') and Outcome 17 ('People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives'). Research conducted by Griffith University in 2023/4<sup>9</sup> found that Australian First Nations broadcasting is a highly valued service across all communities, particularly in remote and very remote areas where it is often the primary media source. In remote areas, First Nations broadcasting is credited for making people feel proud of their communities and their identity; hearing positive stories about their communities and mob; a First Nations focus on content and presenters; and accessing content in traditional languages. The role of volunteers in achieving and sustaining these outcomes needs to be thoroughly investigated, led by First Nations researchers.

### ***Community radio and emergency response volunteering***

Our research has highlighted the pivotal role that community radio volunteers play during times of disaster and emergency response<sup>10</sup>. National disaster events such as the Black Summer bushfires and the East Coast floods highlighted the importance of community broadcasters in providing hyperlocal, up-to-date information communities that had lost other channels of disaster information<sup>11</sup>. Community radio volunteers also significantly contribute to disaster preparation and recovery. A more recent example of this comes from Townsville's Triple T and their ongoing efforts to disseminate information both in preparation for the flooding event and now in the recovery phase<sup>12</sup>. Volunteers, who are already deeply embedded within their communities, are instrumental in disseminating critical information during times of emergency, thereby enhancing community resilience. However, disaster and emergency broadcasting has a number of challenges for stations and volunteers. Resourcing limitations including inadequate funding, reliance on aging equipment, and a lack of formal training in emergency broadcasting hinder the effectiveness of community radio volunteers in times of emergency. Equally, managing volunteer fatigue and ensuring adequate mental health supports are available during and post-event are crucial. Targeted funding programs, increased investment in broadcast equipment and technology, and structured training initiatives would greatly contribute to

<sup>9</sup> Forde, S., van Issum, H., Bargallie, D., Meston, T., Anderson, H., de Groot Heupner, S. & Barnett, L. (2024). *Radio, Television and Digital Media in 21st Century Indigenous Broadcasting: A place of old and new ways*. Brisbane: Griffith University. <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/radio-television-and-digital-media-21st-century-indigenous-broadcasting-place-old-and-new-ways>

<sup>10</sup> Foxwell-Norton, K., Backhaus, B., & Leitch, A. (2022). *Warming Up: Building the capacity of community broadcasting to communicate climate change*. Brisbane: Griffith University.

<sup>11</sup> Binskin, M., Bennet, A. & Macintosh, A. (2020). *Royal Commission into national natural disaster arrangements report*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia  
CBAA. (2022a). *Submission to the 2022 Flood Inquiry*. Sydney: CBAA.

<sup>12</sup> Triple T. (2025). *Triple T Facebook page*.

the efficacy of community radio volunteers working in the disaster broadcasting space and, in turn, increase the resilience of local communities. Community radio stations have a vital role to play in disaster preparedness and those critical periods between events where early planning and action can help reduce disaster impacts

To summarise this submission, we strongly encourage the Committee to consider the volunteer work that takes place through Queensland's diverse and vibrant community broadcasting sector. While most community radio funding comes from the Federal Government in the form of competitive grants, many stations have strong and mutually beneficial relationships with local councils and community organisations. The Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland offers a distinct opportunity to identify areas for growth and collaboration between volunteering organisations, the Queensland Government, emergency services and Queensland's community broadcasters. There are myriad opportunities for meaningful partnerships that have significant potential for community impact across a range of priority areas from emergency and disaster preparation and recovery, through to supporting social cohesion and civic participation. Our multiple research projects carried out over the past decade, and detailed within this submission, confirm the immense value that the thousands of volunteers involved in community broadcasting derive from their participation, as well as the innumerable community benefits that proliferate from this work.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you'd like to discuss further.

Warm regards,

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