

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission to Parliamentary Committee on Inquiry into Volunteering Queensland

The small town of Gin Gin in the Bundaberg district of Queensland holds an annual agricultural, industrial and pastoral show run by the Gin Gin Show Society (the Society). This Society comprises a team of 12 committee members, 263 members and 15 current life members. The Gin Gin Show is only able to be enjoyed each year because volunteers dedicate significant time and energy towards making it a success.

The volunteers who form the Society span from people in their 20s to men and women in their 70s, from vastly different careers, from lawyers to farmers. This allows the Society to cater to viewpoints that are unique and diverse for a cross-section of society in a small town.

There are a number of challenges that the Society and other volunteer-run community groups face when recruiting volunteers to their organisations, and we have outlined these below.

Administrative and Compliance Burdens

Volunteers in leadership roles face increasingly complex administrative and compliance requirements, which discourage participation. Local government requires excessive permits, risk assessments, and approvals, often applying commercial-level compliance to small community events. Small volunteer groups are expected to meet the same governance standards as corporations, leading to frustration and burnout. Volunteers now spend more time completing paperwork than engaging with their communities, undermining the purpose of volunteering. Without reducing bureaucratic red tape, fewer people will take on volunteer leadership roles, putting more community organisations at risk of closure.

Risk and Liability Concerns for Volunteers

Many people are reluctant to volunteer, particularly in committee and leadership roles, due to fears of personal liability and legal exposure. Events have become overly risk-averse, with traditional activities cancelled not because of genuine safety concerns but due to insurance and liability fears. Volunteers worry about being held personally responsible for financial or compliance issues within organisations. Rising insurance costs for volunteer-led events place further financial strain on organisations. Without stronger legal protections and subsidised insurance options, fewer people will be willing to step into volunteer leadership roles.

The Declining Social Perception of Volunteering

Volunteering is no longer seen as an integral part of life, as it was for previous generations. Changing work commitments, social expectations, and a shift towards individualism have deprioritised community service. Many people do not understand the personal benefits of volunteering, such as skill-building, social engagement, and improved mental well-being. Volunteering is often viewed as too time-consuming or without direct reward, leading to disengagement. Younger generations, in particular, are less exposed to volunteering opportunities and do not always consider it a meaningful option. In Gin Gin, there are few young adults in the community available to volunteer as high school graduates usually leave the town to pursue further opportunities in education and work. A targeted government-led media campaign to reframe volunteering as rewarding, valuable, and modern is needed to reignite interest and change public perception.

Gin Gin is a tight-knit community and people volunteer as they love their small rural town and want to make a difference to the community. The volunteers on the Society feel a sense of pride working together to achieve common goals.

Lack of Time and Work Commitments

Many people want to volunteer but struggle due to work and personal commitments. Dual-income households and increasing work pressures make unpaid community work difficult. There are many families with young children who are unable to donate their time to the community as they are busy with school, work, sport and raising children. Gin Gin is a farming community and finding time to volunteer around a full-time farming enterprise is understandably difficult for community members. People who do volunteer often burn out quickly because the same small group ends up shouldering most of the workload. Without financial incentives or dedicated time off work, many employees are unable to commit to volunteer roles. A government-funded paid volunteer leave scheme (at least two days per year) would significantly increase participation.

Financial Benefits, Tax Offsets and Travel Deductions for Volunteering

To further incentivise volunteering, a tax offset could be introduced for:

- Individuals who volunteer a certain number of hours per year, providing a modest deduction in their personal tax return
- Businesses that support employee volunteering, offering tax benefits for companies that provide paid volunteer leave
- Travel deductions for volunteers, allowing individuals to claim travel-related expenses incurred while volunteering (e.g., fuel, public transport, accommodation for regional events)
- Not-for-profit organisations, ensuring they receive financial support to offset operational costs related to volunteer programs.

Volunteers in the Society rely on grant funding to achieve their future development goals. Additional grant funding will provide for new infrastructure in the Gin Gin Showgrounds which will encourage community members to attend events held by the Society. The wider Gin Gin community and other volunteer-run groups also hire the Gin

Gin Showgrounds for their own events and improved infrastructure will also assist these other community groups in making their events a success, which, in turn, will foster a sense of belonging and community in the town of Gin Gin.

Regards,
Gin Gin AP&I Society Inc
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