

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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| On | Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland |
| By | Queensland Rural, Regional and Remote Womens Network |
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Introduction

We appreciate the opportunity to make this submission to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee on the on the inquiry into volunteering in Queensland.

Rural, Regional and Remote Women (RRR Women) is an independent, not-for-profit membership organisation, operating since 1993 to connect, develop and inspire Queensland women. We are, and always have been, volunteer founded and run.

Our current board has eight members, from across the state and bringing a variety of personal and professional skills and experiences to the organisation. Similarly, our event and program committees, of about 10, are entirely volunteers, made up of our members and wider network across the state.

Our impact:

- Biennial leadership programs for professional and personal development
- Conference
- Networking events
- Advocacy and policy recommendations (like this submission)
- Audience research and data collection and reporting
- Bursary funds
- Community organisation support and sponsorship
- Webinars and member communications
- Awards program

- Board member training and development

Every outcome of RRR Women over the past 31 years has been delivered by volunteers.

Our submission

The Rural, Regional and Remote Queensland Women annual Study investigates conditions impacting rural, regional and remote women in Queensland, alongside their wants and needs.

The study is supported with industry advisory group insight consisting of media, agricultural professionals, industry leaders and experts, RRR Women life members and organisational members to validate and test the data and provide a rich layer of insight and expertise.

The 2025 RRR Women Study found:

- 26.33% of respondents volunteered their time to work in their industry (the majority in the agricultural industry in Queensland)
- 24% of respondents performed a mix of paid and unpaid work
- 36.3% of respondents volunteered more than 10 hours a week to committees, helping someone out, their community or other organisation or person

We have combined this qualitative and quantitative research with more than three decades of insight into Queensland women, insight from our founding members and consultation with our peer organisations to form these recommendations.

Our consultations found volunteering presented many personal and professional benefits to the individual, in many cases far beyond the investment we make as volunteers. However in the most effective examples, volunteers are motivated by collective values, with limited regard for their own personal benefit. To be personally motivated in a volunteer role does not deliver outcomes for the organisation or their impact in Queensland in the same way being motivated by collective values would.

In the case of RRR Women, our volunteers are motivated by a collective drive to connect, develop and inspire rural, regional and remote Queensland women. The personal benefits we gain in that process, of an expanded network, connections, skills and experiences, are simply an added bonus of being a volunteer, and not our primary motivation.

There is so much to gain from volunteering, and more often than not, that gain is to the benefit of others more than ourselves.

This submission has three priority areas:

- Policy and economic challenges
- Australia's insolvency and directors' duties
- Skills development

This submission addresses matters of the inquiry most relevant to RRR Women and our members, stakeholders and network and extends beyond the traditional volunteering barriers for individuals.

Policy and economic challenges

Many volunteer-run organisations in Queensland are not-for-profits, like RRR Women, and operate in similar ways or in similar markets as for-profit businesses. We therefore face similar policy and economic challenges, specifically:

- Increasing operating costs, especially insurance
- Regulatory burden
- Government inefficiencies
- Political and economic instability

To be viable and sustainable, not-for-profits must navigate these challenges but without the full-time workforce or budgets some other businesses have.

Recommendation:

We encourage the committee to consider broad economic policy reform for businesses (including regulatory and cost reform) as of benefit to wider organisations operating in similar markets and regions, specifically volunteer-run and not-for-profit organisations. Broad economic policy reform directly benefits volunteer-run and not-for-profit organisations and allows them to provide ongoing benefit to Queensland.

Australia's insolvency and directors' duties

Our data shows a willingness for Queensland women to volunteer in both a professional industry (eg agriculture) but also to community and social activities like committees or neighbours.

Anecdotal feedback indicates professional volunteers particularly are deterred by Australia's insolvency and directors' duties legislation which sees directors of not-for-profit organisations have a legal duty to prevent their organisation from trading while insolvent. These overly onerous laws mean volunteers who are willing, skilled and able to meaningfully contribute in volunteer roles on boards are cautious in the face of financial or legal risk. This is in addition to overarching legal obligations many volunteers must meet, for example data security, insurance, contracts and confidentiality (see skills development).

Recommendation:

Volunteers and volunteer organisations must be exempt under this legislation and a comparable legal protection applied respective of the nature of volunteers, volunteer committees and the work they perform. This is especially important given not-for-profits are generally not financially motivated.

Skills development

Volunteers bring a variety of skills and experiences which are fundamental to volunteer organisations. However, some committees lack professional skills required to work efficiently and effectively. Upskilling volunteers in critical areas can improve the volunteer experience and organisation outcomes, and reduce legislative, safety and compliance risk for the organisation and individual. This value-add can also significantly increase volunteer attraction and retention. We acknowledge the important role of private board training programs like Australian Institute of Company Directors in professionally upskilling board directors.

In addition, critical skills gaps exist in:

- First Aid and Workplace Health and Safety
- Social media and marketing
- Bookkeeping and tax
- Governance and conflict of interest management
- Leadership and public speaking
- Grant writing and acquittals
- Digital, cyber security and AI capability
- Computer and administration skills
- Legal obligations like insurance, contracts, confidentiality and data security

Recommendation:

Fund micro credential courses for volunteer organisations to provide their volunteers across critical areas.

Summary

This submission, the data and consultation forming it, was developed entirely by volunteers. We do this because we care about the communities we volunteer in and the impact we can, collectively make. It does not address every challenge and opportunity of the volunteer economy in Queensland, but those most relevant to RRR Women, our members, networks and stakeholders.

Where reformed, our key priority areas of policy and economic challenges, Australia's insolvency and directors' duties and skills development can provide significant impact to volunteer individuals, their organisations and Queensland.