

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No:	416
Submitted by:	Surf Life Saving Queensland
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	



INQUIRY INTO
VOLUNTEERING
IN QUEENSLAND

SURF LIFE SAVING QUEENSLAND SUBMISSION

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Queensland

Executive Summary

Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ) is committed to sustaining and growing its volunteer base despite national trends showing a decline in volunteerism. Through strategic recruitment and retention efforts, SLSQ has achieved a 2% growth in volunteer membership and a 4% increase in junior participation.

However, volunteer turnover remains a challenge, particularly among junior and youth members, impacting long-term sustainability.

Key areas requiring support to strengthen Queensland's volunteer base include:

1. Reducing Administrative and Compliance Burdens

Volunteers face excessive administrative requirements, particularly club administrators who manage compliance, grants, and regulatory obligations. Additionally, the cost and reporting requirements for operating marine rescue craft create barriers to volunteer participation. Reducing these burdens would allow volunteers to focus on core lifesaving activities.

2. Improving Onboarding Practices

Inconsistent onboarding across clubs leads to disengagement and early attrition. A standardised, user-friendly onboarding system would improve volunteer retention and create efficiencies across clubs.

3. Cost Reduction Measures for Volunteers

The financial burden on volunteers is increasing, with rising costs for uniforms, equipment, training, and patrol-related expenses. Addressing these financial pressures would enhance recruitment and retention.



4. Streamlining Training and RTO Requirements

Training is vital for volunteer confidence and effectiveness, but administrative demands create barriers for both trainees and coordinators. Simplifying these processes and recognising prior learning would improve volunteer satisfaction and participation.

5. Building a Stronger Volunteering Culture

A positive, inclusive volunteering culture is key to recruitment and long-term engagement. SLSQ's investment in leadership development and member pathways supports this goal, but further efforts are needed to grow Queensland's volunteer base.

6. Workforce Sustainability and Retention

High turnover rates, particularly among youth and regional volunteers, threaten workforce sustainability. Addressing burnout, improving engagement strategies, and reducing barriers to participation will ensure a resilient, long-term volunteer workforce.

SLSQ remains committed to fostering a sustainable, engaged volunteer base to deliver critical lifesaving services and positively contribute to the broader Queensland community.



Introduction:

Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ) is a volunteer-based organisation dedicated to saving lives and ensuring the safety of all Queensland beachgoers. With more than 36,000 volunteer members and 58 surf lifesaving clubs spanning 8,000 kilometres of coastline, SLSQ plays a crucial role in coastal safety from Port Douglas to Rainbow Bay. In addition, over 462,000 Queenslanders are members of affiliated supporters' clubs, helping to sustain our mission.

Since the first recorded rescue in 1909 and the formal establishment of SLSQ in 1930, our organisation has grown into an innovative and dynamic leader in lifesaving services. Our vision is simple but powerful: zero preventable deaths in Queensland public waters. To achieve this, we continue to strengthen our capabilities, brand, and reputation while equipping, empowering, and developing our people to deliver essential aquatic rescue and safety services.

But we know our impact as a volunteer organisation stretches well beyond the service provided on beaches. The Surf Life Saving Australia mission states that Surf Life Saving exists to save lives, create great Australians and build better communities. The wider individual benefits and positive community impacts of surf lifesaving volunteering is significant.

SLSQ operates across several key areas, including:

- **Lifesaving services** – providing patrols and emergency response operations.
- **Community education** – delivering vital beach and water safety programs.
- **Membership services** – supporting our volunteers and surf clubs.
- **Surf sports** – fostering athleticism and skill development in lifesaving disciplines.
- **Member & Commercial training** – providing accredited and non-accredited training.
- **Youth and junior development** – providing surf safety and development opportunities as the largest youth volunteer organisations in Queensland.

As a not-for-profit organisation, SLSQ relies heavily on government funding, community support, and donations to sustain our critical work. This support enables us to provide essential lifesaving services and prevent drownings across Queensland's beaches.

Under the current SLSQ Strategic Plan, there are four key pillars for focus our efforts – the first of these is centred around Our People. Under this pillar (Strategic Wave 1) we are working towards the following:

- All decisions at SLSQ will be member and volunteer centric.
- We focus on a state-wide and region-specific recruitment campaign annually.
- Continue to build our regional capability to support the Clubs and Branches.
- Innovate to ensure efficient and effective systems.
- Listen and respond to our Members so they have a sense of belonging within a collaborative culture.
- Communicate effectively and efficiently with our Members to ensure they receive the correct information.
- We encourage and advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion to create a welcoming culture for our diverse lifesaving community.

SLSQ remains committed to protecting lives, preventing drownings, and fostering a strong volunteer culture. Through this submission, we seek to highlight the critical role volunteers play in our success and advocate for measures that will strengthen, support, and sustain Queensland's volunteer workforce across the State.



Overview of volunteering in Surf Life Saving Queensland

Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ) views membership recruitment and retention as a critical strategic priority, especially in light of the broader decline in volunteerism across Australia. While the national volunteering rate has seen a downward trend, with participation falling from 36% of Australians in 2010 to just 27% in 2021 (according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics), SLSQ has managed to buck this trend by maintaining consistent membership growth and strong retention rates by comparison.

The key focus has been on implementing a refreshed membership strategy, which has been underpinned by an in-depth understanding of our longitudinal membership trends and insights from the state-wide member satisfaction survey. These actions have led to positive growth trends, with SLSQ's volunteer membership growing by 2% in the past season. The organisation's commitment to supporting younger members is evident through the continued growth of the junior activities program, which saw a 4% increase in junior membership last season.

While our overall membership figures are positive, the organisation continues to have a significant membership churn. Our retention rate has remained stable at 70%, however each year SLSQ turns over almost one third of our total membership. While a large percentage of those leaving the organisation are from our junior activities (nipper) ranks and are not current patrolling lifesavers, this is still of concern as we know 80% of our patrolling lifesavers come through our nipper ranks or associated with nippers in some way i.e. parents. This 'churn' leads to long term increased demand on time and resource from the organisation to train new members joining the organisation.

Over a number of years, SLSQ has invested in understanding longitudinal membership trends and a breakdown of membership by age, gender, member type and location. This statistical data is extracted twice a year (mid-season and end of surf lifesaving season) and is broken down to a club, regional and state level and includes recruitment and retention information.

In general, regional clubs (those north of Noosa) are impacted the most by low numbers of volunteers and declining volunteering trends. Isolation and distance of these clubs has a significant impact on their volunteers.

Our youth membership base 13 – 18 years has continued to fluctuate over the past five years with an overall slightly downward trend with the main impact in regional areas (clubs north of Noosa). Volunteer retention often drops in the 19 – 25 year age group which is likely due to lifestyle pressures, juggling volunteering with work and potential university studies which for regional volunteers often means a move from their home locations.

SLSQ has a healthy base of senior volunteers undertaking patrolling and non-patrolling roles with high retention. Actively engaging this sector of the community is part of our membership recruitment and engagement strategy with a particular focus on the diversity of opportunities within the movement that don't involve patrolling the beach. Senior volunteers usually contribute higher numbers of hours to clubs than others and bring a wealth of knowledge and experience.

A significant SLSQ initiative for recruitment was the launch of the state-wide, regionally targeted “Join the Club” campaign. This campaign effectively reached over 4.6 million people, bolstered by a tailored resource package that enabled clubs to promote membership within their local regions.

To further support both recruitment and retention, SLSQ has placed a strong emphasis on creating a positive member experience. This includes committing to a comprehensive review and enhancement of the onboarding process, from sign-on to the completion of the first season, as well as highlighting available pathways for progression within the organisation. Retaining members remains a priority, and the ongoing focus is on achieving a sustainable membership base across all surf clubs.

SLSQ also heavily invested in youth programs and leadership development programs at all levels of the organisation supporting member growth, promoting pathways and creating stronger leadership for our clubs and branches.

SLSQ is working to position itself for continued growth, engagement, and the nurturing of its volunteer base, ensuring the long-term success of its clubs and programs. We are also committed to the SLSA mission to develop our members' capabilities so that they positively contribute more broadly within the Queensland community.

SLSQ Membership Statistics



1. Reducing administrative and compliance burdens for volunteers and clubs

Volunteers are the backbone of Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ), yet before they even set foot on the beach, they are often burdened with excessive administration. The current compliance and reporting requirements create significant challenges for both individual volunteers and clubs, diverting valuable time and resources away from recruitment, training, and core lifesaving operations.

At the club level, administrative burdens are a major barrier to volunteer retention and sustainability and contribute heavily to member burn out. Clubs spend an excessive amount of time navigating complex compliance frameworks, applying for essential grants, and ensuring they meet regulatory obligations. Given that most club administrators are volunteers themselves, they often lack the time, expertise, and knowledge to efficiently manage these requirements. Instead of focusing on saving lives and fostering a strong volunteer culture, clubs are forced to navigate layers of bureaucracy.

In terms of compliance, Surf Life Saving operates a number of marine craft in non-typical environment in the performance of preventative and surveillance and rescue environments. Specialist training is provided by Surf Life Saving Queensland in accordance with strict protocols. These Inflatable Rescue Boards and Rescue Water Craft (Jet Skis) operate generally within the surf break and within close proximity to the general public during normal operations.

The craft come under the rules of the maritime services and as such the mandatory reporting requirements are required should the craft be damaged or a member injury. Due to general nature of operations and the use of the craft in rescues that normally occur when conditions are not ideal leads to both damage and member injuries which require mandatory reporting.

This has resulted in a high visibility for the authorities in terms of the operations of the craft with intense scrutiny on the use of the craft without a full understanding of the application.

This use is significantly different from a general maritime vessel used by the general public.

This reporting and investigation process is having an effect on the recruitment of members to operate the craft to provide the rescue services. This extends to the current cost for members to obtain the necessary mandatory marine licence for both boat and jet ski. This cost and compliance requirements is becoming a burden on both the individuals or clubs.

Key areas that require urgent attention include:

- **Streamlining compliance and reporting requirements for volunteer organisations –**
Reducing duplication, simplifying reporting structures, and aligning regulations across different government bodies to reduce the burden on volunteers and club administrators.
- **Simplifying Working with Children Blue Card and other background check processes**
– Reducing delays in the approval process and ensuring a smoother, more efficient system to allow new volunteers to begin lifesaving duties sooner.
- **Reducing unnecessary paperwork associated with grants and funding applications**
– Creating simplified, standardised applications that acknowledge the volunteer nature of clubs and lessen the administrative workload required to secure essential funding.
A recent example of this was the roll out of Fair Play vouchers, while this initiative was extremely beneficial in helping to attract new members (youth and their parents) to surf lifesaving, the administrative processes associated with this at a club level were overwhelming for many surf clubs particularly smaller, regional clubs.
- **Allowing clubs to seek grant funding to engage administrative assistance should also be considered** – generally wages and human resource support are outside of the scope of many grant programs.
- **Improving digital tools and automation** – Investing in user-friendly online systems to streamline compliance, reporting, and application processes, allowing clubs to focus more on their core lifesaving activities.

Without meaningful reform, the growing administrative burden will continue to deter potential volunteers and strain club resources, ultimately impacting our ability to save lives on Queensland's beaches. Addressing these challenges will ensure that clubs and their members can spend more time where they are needed most – protecting the community.

2. Improved onboarding practices

A well-structured onboarding process is critical to ensuring that new volunteers feel welcomed, informed, and engaged from the outset. Unlike in paid roles, volunteers join an organisation because of their passion and commitment to a cause—but without an effective onboarding experience, this enthusiasm can quickly fade.

From our SLSQ member research, we know inconsistent onboarding processes across clubs and regions can lead to confusion, disengagement, and even attrition before volunteers have had the chance to contribute meaningfully. Establishing a standardised, user-friendly onboarding system for core elements of volunteering would not only improve the volunteer experience but also create greater efficiencies across clubs and opportunities for collaboration with other volunteer organisations.

Key recommendations for improving onboarding:

- **Standardised, user-friendly digital onboarding systems** – Developing a centralised online platform that allows new volunteers to seamlessly complete necessary training tied to government requirements. A uniform system across volunteer sectors would enhance collaboration, create more consistent standards and reduce duplication where individual organisations now have to create their own courses and content. As an example, a training package around the new cyber laws for youth for volunteer leaders and for youth could be developed and provided to volunteer organisations to embed as part of their member on-boarding package. Currently volunteer organisations are looking to create their own training to meet this need which is inefficient across the volunteering sector.

- **Mentorship programs linking new volunteers with experienced members –**
Pairing new volunteers with seasoned lifesavers, or like-minded volunteers from other organisations, can help them feel supported, gain practical knowledge faster, and develop a sense of belonging within their community. These types of programs could be networked across the volunteering sector.
- **Clear role descriptions and expectations –** Ensuring that volunteers understand their roles, responsibilities, and training pathways from day one, reducing uncertainty and fostering greater confidence in their ability to contribute effectively. Recognising that many roles are organisation specific, key leadership roles could have consistent role descriptions ie president, secretary, treasurer etc with requirements and responsibilities stepped out that organisations can then contextualise – this would also encourage mobility across volunteer organisations.
- **Governance training and inductions –** Good governance is a key pillar for all volunteer organisations. Access to governance training for Boards and management groups is limited and often costly to bring in external providers. Support in critical governance functions such as strategic planning and budgeting is needed across many surf lifesaving clubs. Access to simple but informative governance training that is consistent across organisations will support clubs in meeting their requirements but also empower volunteers to be more confident in their roles.

A well-funded, centralised onboarding system would not only benefit SLSQ but also create opportunities for efficiencies across the broader volunteer sector. By investing in stronger onboarding, we can ensure that more volunteers stay engaged, feel valued, and ultimately contribute to safer Queensland beaches.

3. Cost reduction measures for volunteers

In general, volunteering in Australia comes with notable out-of-pocket expenses, and several studies highlight the financial strain this can place on individuals. According to the 2024 Queensland Volunteering report, volunteer expenses rose 300% from 2020 from \$4.97 an hour to \$15.57 an hour. This includes costs for transport, uniforms, phone bills, and training-related expenses. A 2021 study by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) further shows that over 2.8 million Australian volunteers experience financial costs tied to their voluntary activities, with some areas, such as emergency services and community sport, being particularly costly.

When reviewing cost reduction measures for volunteers in Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ), it's important to understand the financial burdens placed on volunteers who play a vital role in the organisation. Volunteering with SLSQ requires personal financial investment including for club membership, travel to patrol locations, uniforms i.e. rash shirts, hats, swimwear, etc and personal patrolling equipment i.e. whistles, bumbags, sunscreen, etc. These costs can sometimes deter new volunteers or lead to burnout among existing ones, as they are expected to cover expenses out of their own pockets while committing significant hours.

Key cost reduction strategies include:

- **Tax incentives for volunteers** – Expanding tax deductions for fuel, uniforms, equipment, and other out-of-pocket expenses directly related to volunteering.
- **Subsidies or reimbursements** – Providing direct financial support for essential costs such as travel, accreditation fees, required training and uniforms. This would ensure that financial barriers do not prevent people from volunteering or continuing their service.
- **Financial support for clubs** – Increased funding to clubs to help offset volunteer-related expenses, ensuring they have the necessary resources to operate efficiently and retain members.
- **Corporate partnerships** – Employers should be incentivised to support volunteering by offering paid volunteer leave or matching employee contributions to volunteer organisations.

- **Workplace programs** – Government-led initiatives could encourage businesses to include volunteering opportunities as part of their employee benefits, fostering a workforce that is engaged in community service.

A happy, engaged workforce is one that gives back to the community, and with the right financial support and employer engagement, we can reduce the cost barriers to volunteering and strengthen Queensland's volunteer culture.

4. Streamlining training and RTO requirements

Research has shown that training plays a significant role in increasing volunteer satisfaction, confidence, and engagement. Volunteers who feel confident in their abilities are more likely to remain involved and take on leadership roles within their communities. Volunteering Australia emphasises that well-trained volunteers are more likely to continue volunteering, as competence in their roles leads to increased confidence and reduced stress.

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In the context of SLSQ, training helps volunteers feel more capable and secure when responding to emergencies, which is crucial in a lifesaving environment. Volunteers who are well-trained are more likely to feel empowered to take initiative in high-pressure situations, enhancing both their personal confidence and their sense of belonging within the broader SLSQ community. Additionally, volunteers who undergo regular training are more likely to form stronger bonds with their peers, as shared experiences during training can foster a sense of camaraderie and teamwork. However, feedback from across the surf lifesaving movement is that the administrative requirements for training coordinators/ leaders who are volunteers and volunteer trainees are significant and are often a barrier to upskilling and for training coordinators often lead to volunteer burn out.

By streamlining training requirements, recognising prior learning, and expanding access to training, SLSQ can create a more supportive environment for its volunteers, enabling them to feel better equipped, more confident, and more connected to the organisation's mission and community. This can ultimately lead to improved volunteer retention and a stronger, more engaged volunteer workforce.

Key areas for improvement:

- **Recognising Prior Learning (RPL)** – Volunteers with existing qualifications and experience should have streamlined pathways to recognition, reducing the need for repetitive training. This would:
 - Recognise skills gained through professional roles (e.g., nurses, paramedics, teachers).
 - Minimise unnecessary coursework for returning or transitioning volunteers.
 - Speed up accreditation processes, ensuring experienced individuals can contribute sooner.
- **Increased Government funding for training** – Access to fully funded or subsidised training is critical to ensuring all volunteers can receive the necessary qualifications without financial strain.
 - Training should be affordable and accessible, particularly for young people, regional volunteers, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
 - Funding should be allocated to Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) that specialise in volunteer education.
- **Expanded access to online and regional training** – Many volunteers, especially in regional and remote areas, struggle to access training due to location, time constraints,

5. Creating a stronger volunteering culture to grow Queensland's volunteer base

A thriving volunteering culture is essential for the long-term sustainability of lifesaving and other community services. Volunteers must feel valued, supported, and inspired to become volunteers and then continue their service while also encouraging others to get involved.

Key areas for improvement:

- **Public awareness campaigns highlighting the impact of volunteering**
 - A strong statewide media campaign showcasing the real-life impact of volunteers on Queensland communities.
 - Demonstrate the personal benefits of volunteering ie connected to community, sense of self-achievement, mental health benefits
 - Highlight personal stories of volunteers, the lives they've saved, and the difference they make.
 - Utilise social media, television, and digital platforms to reach a broad audience.
 - Align messaging with major events (e.g., in surf lifesaving this would be Surf Life Saving Championships, disaster response efforts) to demonstrate the crucial role of volunteers.
 - Partner with high-profile ambassadors and influencers to promote volunteering as a valued community role.
- **Incentives and recognition programs for long-term volunteers**
 - Retaining volunteers requires formal recognition and reward systems that celebrate their contributions. Introduce volunteer service awards with meaningful benefits, such as discounts on goods and services, travel incentives, or community grants for their club.
 - Expand government-backed recognition programs (e.g., life membership awards, years-of-service milestones).
 - Increase public acknowledgment at local and state levels, including ceremonies, certificates, and digital recognition campaigns.
 - Offer exclusive networking and development opportunities for long-term volunteers.

- **Enhancing engagement with younger demographics**

- Targeted campaigns to attract youth audiences to volunteering
- Targeted programs designed to attract and retain younger volunteers, ensuring that future generations remain engaged in lifesaving and community service. Develop a volunteer culture for youth.
- Develop school-based volunteering programs that provide pathways for young people into volunteer organisations and through these organisations into career pathways. Demonstrate the benefits of volunteering in springboarding future careers ie skills development, networks, etc.
- Advocate for volunteering to be recognised in school curriculums and university programs as part of structured learning.
- Support volunteer organisations to offer career pathways through work-place placements/ graduate programs, etc to give volunteers the opportunity to move from volunteer to professional work.

- **Build Corporate Employer-Supported Volunteering**

- Develop programs encouraging corporate partnerships and state-run initiatives to integrate volunteering into workplace culture can help ease the burden on volunteers while strengthening corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts.
- Strengthen relationships with corporate partners to provide financial and in-kind support for volunteers.
- Develop a "Corporate Volunteering Day" initiative, allowing employees to volunteer as part of their workplace's social responsibility program.
- Offer branding opportunities for corporate sponsors, ensuring financial contributions directly benefit volunteer retention and development programs.
- Provide tax incentives for businesses that actively support volunteering through sponsorship, direct funding, or in-kind contributions.

- **Support Seniors volunteering**

- Targeted recruitment campaign aimed at seniors to encourage engagement in volunteering – profile the benefits personal and community of becoming a volunteer as a senior.
- Encourage and support programs that encourage intergenerational volunteering, where younger members can learn from experienced volunteers.
- Provide support for seniors to volunteer to reduce barriers such as access to transport.

By strengthening the culture of volunteering, we can increase engagement, enhance retention, and ensure that SLSQ and other organisations continue to have a strong and motivated volunteer base well into the future.



6. Workforce sustainability and retention

SLSQ, like many volunteer-based organisations, is experiencing a significant drop in volunteer numbers, with many members leaving within their first few years. High turnover rates make it increasingly difficult to maintain a strong and experienced volunteer base. Burnout is a major factor, as volunteers juggle patrolling, training, administrative duties, and fundraising, all while balancing personal and professional commitments. Without proper support, this workload becomes overwhelming, leading to disengagement.

Traditional volunteering structures also present challenges, as they often require set hours and long-term commitments that don't always align with modern lifestyles. Additionally, many volunteers are exposed to physically and emotionally demanding situations, from critical rescues to confronting incidents, yet structured mental health support is often lacking. Communication gaps further contribute to frustration, with many volunteers feeling disconnected from decision-making processes and that their feedback isn't valued or acted upon. Without targeted retention strategies, SLSQ and other volunteer organisations risk losing years of experience and knowledge, weakening the overall capacity to deliver essential services.

- **Better understanding behaviours, attitudes and beliefs of volunteers**
 - Increased investment in volunteer social and behavioural research broken down by demographic and sectors to better understand how to recruit, retain and support volunteers. Ensure this research is readily accessible to volunteer organisations and abroad base of volunteers are encouraged to take part is essential. Linking research conducted within individual organisations is also important ie member surveys.

- **Proactive burnout prevention and retention strategies**
 - Implement structured support systems to reduce individual workload pressures.
 - Introduce rotation-based rostering to prevent over-reliance on core members.
 - Recognise and reward long-term commitment through benefits, recognition events, and incentives.
- **Improved mental health and well-being support**
 - Provide more funded access to professional mental health support, including counselling services for volunteers exposed to traumatic incidents.
 - Develop peer-support programs, connecting experienced volunteers with newer members for guidance and emotional support.
 - Partner with mental health organisations to deliver resilience and well-being workshops tailored to the challenges faced by frontline volunteers.
- **Enhancing communication and volunteer feedback loops**
 - Introduce regular check-ins and forums where volunteers can raise concerns and provide feedback.
 - Establish a digital communication platform, ensuring volunteers receive real-time updates, training opportunities, and recognition.
 - Encourage volunteer advisory committees, giving volunteers a voice in decision-making and ensuring leadership remains connected to frontline experiences.

Retention is crucial—without investing in volunteer sustainability, organisations like SLSQ risk losing years of skills, experience, and dedication.

7. Diversity, inclusion, and accessibility

Queensland has experienced significant population growth in recent years, largely driven by both international migration and interstate movement. In the year ending 30 June 2024, overseas migration contributed a net gain of 446,000 people to Australia's population.

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This influx presents a valuable opportunity for volunteer organisations to engage with a diverse range of individuals eager to contribute to their new communities and embrace the Australian way of life.

Diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in volunteering

To effectively harness this potential, it's essential to address barriers to volunteering for diverse groups, including those based on age, ability, and cultural background. Implementing tailored recruitment and retention strategies can help engage underrepresented communities, ensuring that volunteer programs are inclusive and reflective of the broader population.

Upskilling volunteer leaders in how to effectively engage and welcome diversity in their organisation is essential to success in recruiting more diverse membership.

Volunteer organisations sharing and engaging on their DEI strategies and approaches is also an essential part of uplifting diverse volunteer engagement.



Supporting first nations volunteering and remote community engagement

Supporting First Nations volunteering and remote community engagement is crucial. By fostering inclusive practices and providing accessible opportunities, volunteer organisations can strengthen community bonds and promote social cohesion.

By focusing on these areas, volunteer organisations can tap into the diverse skills and perspectives of new migrants, enhancing their programs and fostering a more inclusive society.

Additional resourcing support to programs that are engaging volunteers particularly in regional areas is essential – a great example of this within surf lifesaving is the Beach to Bush program that promotes surf safety but also promotes a volunteering culture in these regional areas.

8. Emergency response volunteering

Emergency service volunteers are unique – these volunteers are trained and commit to operating in challenging and often dangerous environments, at times putting their own lives at risk to save others. Supporting volunteers operating in the emergency response space presents additional challenges.

As Queensland experiences an increasing number of extreme weather events, the need for a strong, coordinated emergency response workforce is more critical than ever. Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ) plays an essential role in the state's emergency response network, particularly in times of natural disasters and community recovery. To better support Queensland's growing vulnerability to climate change and severe weather, SLSQ must expand its emergency volunteer workforce and enhance its capacity to respond swiftly and effectively.

- **Solutions for strengthening emergency response volunteering:**
 - **Strengthen coordination between emergency services and volunteer organisations:** Foster closer collaboration and communication channels with emergency services, ensuring a unified approach to disaster response and recovery and more consistency in how volunteer workforces are engaged.
 - **Optimise volunteer engagement:** Streamline the recruitment, training, and retention processes for emergency service volunteers, ensuring they are well-prepared and integrated into emergency response efforts.
 - **Provide sustainable funding and resources for volunteers:** Secure consistent and long-term funding to support emergency response volunteers, covering training, equipment, and operational costs. Emergency service volunteers often have to have additional equipment to safely operate ie wetsuits, high vis apparel, etc which volunteers fund themselves.
 - **Expanding the volunteer workforce:** Increase volunteer recruitment and retention strategies to build a resilient, diverse pool of volunteers who can respond to Queensland's escalating emergency needs. Recruitment campaigns demonstrating volunteer pathways into and through the emergency management sector is needed to boost the volunteer base.
 - **Enhancing training and preparedness:** Provide ongoing training and upskilling for volunteers, ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to manage increasingly complex and large-scale emergencies.

9. Government support

For volunteer organisations like Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ), government support is pivotal in ensuring the growth, sustainability, and effectiveness of volunteering programs. As the landscape of volunteering continues to evolve, there is a need to review the existing policies and funding mechanisms to ensure they are adequately supporting volunteer organisations and their volunteers. In addition, leveraging major events like the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games presents a unique opportunity to increase volunteer participation and engagement. A collaborative approach between sectors is also essential for driving sustained volunteer growth and impact.

Recommendations for strengthening government support for volunteering:

- **Reviewing the effectiveness of current government programs supporting volunteering:** Evaluate and improve existing government programs to ensure they meet the needs of volunteer organisations and volunteers, focusing on impact, accessibility, and effectiveness.
- **Advocating for long-term, sustainable funding models:** Push for the creation of sustainable funding models that provide long-term support for volunteer organisations, ensuring financial stability and resource availability for future needs.
- **Leveraging the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games to increase volunteer participation:** Use the Brisbane 2032 Games as a platform to showcase the value of volunteering, attract new participants, and engage communities in volunteerism through targeted campaigns and opportunities. Link volunteering opportunities at the Games to current volunteer organisations ie volunteers from current Qld organisations will have better opportunities to volunteer as part of the Games support network.
- **Encouraging cross-sector collaboration to drive volunteer engagement:** Foster partnerships between government, business, nonprofit, and community sectors to create a more integrated and collaborative volunteer ecosystem, enhancing overall engagement and support.

By implementing these policy recommendations, governments can strengthen the volunteering sector, ensuring that volunteer organisations like SLSQ are equipped to meet growing demands and thrive in the future.

9. Networking the volunteer sector

Organisations across the volunteering sector in Queensland experience similar challenges. Creating more opportunities for organisations to work through challenges, share learnings and profile successful practices will help to build capability across the sector. These networking opportunities need to link up various cohorts, for example:

- **Volunteer leaders** – leaders who are volunteers within their organisations
- **Volunteer managers** – professionals who manager volunteers as part of their paid work
- **Volunteers from like organisations** – broad base of volunteers from similar organisations who would benefit from working through similar challenges.

