

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No:	430
Submitted by:	Volunteering Gold Coast
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	



Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland



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Submission prepared by: Volunteering Gold Coast
Date: 26 February 2025

Executive Summary

For over 25 years, Volunteering Gold Coast (VGC) has served as a cornerstone of community engagement, empowering individuals and organisations to create meaningful change through volunteering.

Established in 1998 with the mission of connecting people to purpose, VGC has facilitated tens of thousands of volunteer placements across diverse sectors, including aged care and disability support, youth programs, environmental initiatives, and disaster response. Our expertise extends beyond volunteer recruitment—we are leaders in shaping best practices, providing training, and championing policies that strengthen the volunteer sector.

Volunteering Gold Coast is uniquely positioned in having a 360-degree view of volunteering as we not only recruit volunteers for our own programs directly, we also recruit volunteers for over 100+ Gold Coast member organisations. VGC feels the issues firsthand and can see the pain points for all stakeholders.

Volunteering in Australia is at a crossroads. VGC has seen participation decline due to policy settings that have not sustained community engagement, funding reductions that have limited support structures, and a lack of unified decision making that under valued the critical role that volunteers play in our society. This has resulted in a shrinking volunteer workforce, organisations feeling unable to deliver on their purpose, and communities left without the support they need and rely on.

While the current statistics may look grim, the sentiment for volunteering is still strong and the future of volunteering can be turned around relatively quickly. VGC is here to help turn the tide - we are committed and passionate for the development of the sector.

VGC recommends the Queensland Government:

1. Act with urgency to protect the base capability across Queensland by making an urgent and strategic investment into regional volunteering infrastructure;
2. Apply the Gambling Community Benefit Fund be applied as a source of funds able to stimulate and support core volunteering infrastructure or other funding envelope;
3. Use co-design principles to define and implement solutions supported by the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Panel;
4. Measure the success of the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics by the volunteering outcomes achieved in the lead up to the event, and not by the oversupply of volunteers that will stand up for this event;

5. Require the provision of volunteer services for the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics be performed by Queensland based organisations with expertise in volunteer management. An assessment of capability to deliver these services should precede a strategic investment by the Queensland Government to develop and deliver this capability in the lead up to mega events.
6. Support the monitoring of the status of volunteering and utilise the data to inform policy.
7. Allow for the reasonable inclusion of organisational overheads for VRCs and VIOs.
8. Frame policy, planning and funding within a place-based approach to ensure diversity and inclusion are addressed.
9. Invest in a well-planned public campaign highlighting the benefits of volunteering, and showcasing how it strengthens communities, improves mental health outcomes, and creates pathways to employment.
10. Further collaborate with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that all parts of the community are empowered to participate in volunteering, regardless of demographic or socioeconomic status.
11. Requires the provision of volunteer services for the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics be performed by Queensland based organisations with expertise in volunteer management. Furthermore, an assessment of capability to deliver these services should precede a strategic investment by the Queensland Government to develop and deliver this capability in lead up mega events.
12. Create quicker safeguards and vetting processes for stand-up programs.
13. Provide localised Cultural Awareness and Education opportunities for volunteers and VIO's.

By advocating for smarter policies, strengthening volunteer pathways, and ensuring organisations are equipped to engage and retain volunteers effectively, we are committed to rebuilding the sector.

The future of volunteering must be strategically re-designed, well-supported, and valued as an essential pillar of community resilience. VGC stands ready to help lead that change.



Mr Brad Cooper
CEO – Volunteering Gold Coast



Mr Behr-Nadav
Chair – Volunteering Gold Coast

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Figure 1. A VGC volunteer supports an Accessible Beaches Participant in and out of Tallebudgera Creek

Introduction

For over 25 years, Volunteering Gold Coast (VGC) has served as a cornerstone of community engagement, empowering individuals and organisations to create meaningful change through volunteering.

Established with the mission of connecting people to purpose, VGC has responded to more than 60,000 requests from people wanting to volunteer into diverse sectors, including but not limited to aged care and disability support, youth programs,

environmental initiatives, and disaster response. Our expertise extends beyond volunteer recruitment—we are leaders in shaping best practices, providing training, and championing policies that strengthen the volunteer sector.

VGC operates in two distinct formats within the volunteering space. Firstly, VGC is a Volunteer Resource Centre (VRC) for the Gold Coast region, seeking to connect people who want to volunteer with any of our 110 members who are local not-for-profit / charity organisations running programs, delivering services, or hosting events powered by volunteers. Through this important work we enable and empower numerous organisations to serve the community.

Secondly, VGC is a significant Volunteer Involving Organisation (VIO) that delivers the largest community transport program on the Gold Coast, as well as an Aged Care Community Visitor Program (ACCVS) known as 'Chatterbox,' and a beach access program for people with a disability.

Prior to 2020, VGC received around \$100,000 per annum from the Commonwealth Government in funding to deliver a VRC that supported everyone wanting to volunteer. In 2020, the Commonwealth Government made significant policy changes that redirected all VRC funds across Australia to the relevant State Peak for volunteering in a particular VRC's region – in our case this was redirected to Volunteering Queensland (VQ). Despite proactive lobbying and numerous requests to the Queensland Government and Local Government for funding, VRC's remain unsupported financially.

Volunteering in Australia is at a crossroads. VGC has seen participation decline due to policy settings that have not sustained community engagement, funding reductions that have limited support structures, and a lack of unified decision making that under valued the critical role that volunteers play in our society. This has resulted in a shrinking volunteer sector, organisations feeling unable to deliver on their purpose, and communities left without the support they need and rely on. Volunteering struggles in the

space created by current and past policy, a paucity of funding, and needs a complete overhaul.

The status of Volunteering today is the result of past decisions. VGC are here to help turn the tide. By advocating for smarter policies, strengthening volunteer pathways, and ensuring organisations are equipped to engage and retain volunteers effectively, we are committed to rebuilding the sector. The future of volunteering must be strategic, well-supported, and valued as an essential pillar of community resilience. VGC stands ready to lead that change.

1. Current State of Volunteering in Queensland and its value

Volunteering is not just about giving time; it is about building connections through both deepening existing relationships and forming new ones. Social capital, the web of trust and reciprocity that holds communities together, comes in two key forms: bonding and bridging. Volunteering strengthens both in ways that are essential for resilient, inclusive societies.

Bonding social capital is about reinforcing close-knit relationships—those with family, friends, and people who share similar backgrounds or values¹. When individuals volunteer within their own communities, they create stronger ties with those around them. A sports club, a local charity, or even a neighbourhood clean-up project that brings people together with a common purpose, fostering trust and a sense of belonging. These deeper connections enhance emotional support and wellbeing, making communities more cohesive and resilient in difficult times.

Bridging social capital, on the other hand, extends people beyond their familiar circles. It connects people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences, whilst also fostering diversity and understanding². Volunteering in broader community initiatives—such as helping newly arrived migrants, working with intergenerational programs, or engaging in disaster response—creates opportunities to interact with people we might not ordinarily meet. These connections build empathy, reduce prejudice, and open doors to new opportunities, thus strengthening our broader social fabric.

Volunteering is one of the most effective ways to develop the close bonds that sustain us and help societies to thrive. Whether reinforcing trust within familiar networks or reaching across divides, every act of service is an investment in a more connected and compassionate world. Every action taken by a volunteer in Queensland impacts a Queensland community in a multitude of ways – extending the reach of limited program funds; facilitating wellness and therefore reducing the reliance of health services; building social cohesion and inclusion; connection community through events that also deliver economic benefits across regions. It is reasonable to expect the Queensland Government to fund the necessary volunteering infrastructure that assist VIOs unable to undertake their own recruitment and retention activities.

The value of volunteering has been well documented in recent times by each of the State Peaks for Volunteering³. The State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 report determined:

- The labour costs to replace volunteers across Queensland is estimated at \$31.3 billion;
- The total value of volunteering is \$117.8 billion;
- Every \$1 invested in volunteering returns \$4.70⁴.

¹ <https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/what-is-bonding-social-capital/>

² <https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/what-is-bridging-social-capital/>

³ <https://volunteeringact.org.au/get-involved/state-of-volunteering-in-the-act/>; <https://volunteeringtas.org.au/policy-advocacy-research/state-of-volunteering-report/>; <https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/about/advocacy-and-policy/western-australias-state-of-volunteering-sovr>; <https://vsant.org.au/state-of-volunteering/>; <https://stateofvolunteering.org.au/victoria/>; <https://www.volunteering.com.au/2023-state-of-volunteering-report-launch/>

⁴ <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland-2024-report/>

Volunteering delivers direct benefits to both volunteers and the recipients of services / programs delivered by volunteers. The impact of volunteering is being recognised for its health benefits and therapeutic value to individuals through social prescribing⁵ in countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and the UK - with early signs of interest here in Australia. General Practitioners and Primary Health Practitioners are seeing the value of volunteering as a form of social prescribing to address loneliness, anxiety, and a way to build personal resilience without the use of medications or medications alone⁶.

These headline numbers hide the truth that volunteering is in free fall. Between 2020 and 2023, volunteering in Queensland contracted by 11.4%⁷ with only 2.8 million people volunteering. In people terms, just under 500,000 fewer people volunteered over this time. In any other sector this would signal a market failure.

In contrast, in 2024 the Australian Government projected an aged care worker shortage of 285,000 people⁸ which has seen record levels of investment⁹ (most recently \$3.8b) to ensure the future workforce meets the community's need¹⁰. The Queensland Government commitment has been for \$1b to secure the existing workforce and increase workforce participation by 2032.

The Volunteering ecosystem is similar to the provision of water as an essential service. The water does not end up at our taps by chance. It needs infrastructure, dams, pipes and valves. It takes planning and coordination. The Volunteering Sector has been taken for granted, neglected for far too long and now requires urgent attention.

The collection of rain across strategically placed reservoirs and dams begins the process. The choice of where to place these resources reflects the roles of government, peak bodies and regional planners. The taps are the outlets where water as a resource and service is provided – these are the Volunteer Involving Organisations. The infrastructure that sits in-between – the pipes, pumps, valves – reflects the value created through Volunteer Resource Centres. All three components are necessary for the system to deliver the resources needed.

Volunteering data shows that:

- a. Our dams are not full;
- b. Our pipes are not supported, filtered or valued; and
- c. The taps are not freely flowing to meet the needs of VIOs and the causes they are trying to support

⁵ [https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/supporting-healthy-ageing-through-social-prescribing#:~:text=Social%20prescribing%20is%20a%20means,Noncommunicable%20diseases%20\(NCDs\)](https://www.who.int/westernpacific/activities/supporting-healthy-ageing-through-social-prescribing#:~:text=Social%20prescribing%20is%20a%20means,Noncommunicable%20diseases%20(NCDs))

⁶ <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/resources/social-prescribing-volunteering-guide/>

⁷ <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/resources/social-prescribing-volunteering-guide/>

⁸ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/draft-national-strategy-care-and-support-economy/goal-1-quality-care-and-support/building-capable-skilled-sufficiently-large-workforce>

⁹ <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-anika-wells-mp/media/investing-another-38-billion-in-quality-aged-care#:~:text=The%20Australian%20Government%20is%20investing,workers%20from%201%20January%202025.>

¹⁰ https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0040/1339996/Health-Workforce-Strategy_Investment-Plan_Digital.pdf



VGC recommends the Queensland Government support the monitoring of the status of volunteering, utilising the data to inform policy.

2. Current barriers to volunteering

Broad based volunteering across Queensland has been constrained by the absence of strong and effective policy, inadequate levels of investment that can support and sustain volunteering, and the need to adopt workforce planning principles that ensures effective sector leadership. People who wish to volunteer that are not members of marginalised groups are not supported under existing program guidelines from the Commonwealth Government. This ignores the local (place-based) solution that serves the community.

The shortage of volunteers places pressure on the existing, shrinking volunteer workforce to repeatedly step up to fill gaps in ways that cannot be sustained. The result is volunteer burnout.

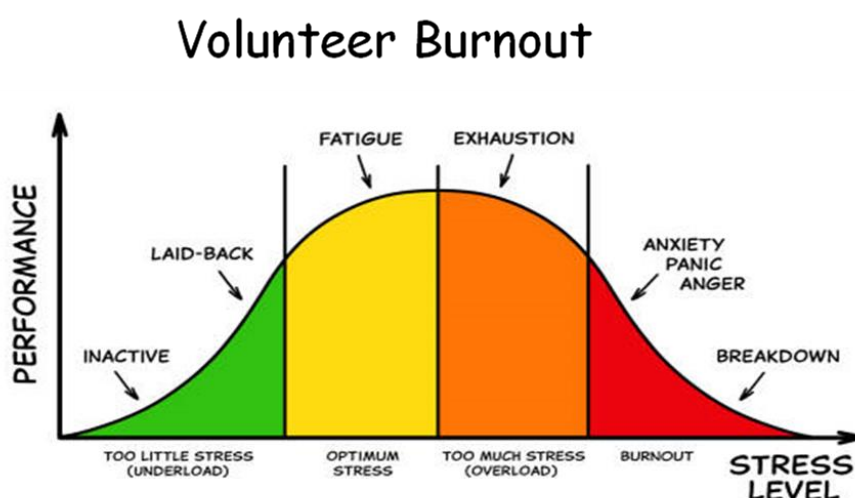


Figure 2: Volunteer Burnout Phases

The Inquiry will find pockets of growth in volunteer numbers – including environmental causes, animal welfare programs and major events – however these pockets do not reflect the sector challenges.

The current barriers to volunteering can be summarised as:

1. People who want to volunteer find it difficult to navigate their way to find opportunities and this is not unique to Queensland¹¹. There has been no value placed on the role of VRCs to support the connection of volunteers with VIOs;
2. Small to medium VIOs face increasing compliance costs such as:
 - i. Recruiting and retaining appropriately skilled directors / committee members to ensure organisations operate in a manner that is compliant with increasing regulatory and legal requirements;
 - ii. An increasing level of training needed to deliver programs and services - compared with paid roles where an employer may go to market seeking a full-time employee and training one person, volunteers often offer small numbers of hours and multiple volunteers are therefore needed to produce the same

¹¹ https://ev.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2.-The-Volunteers-Lens_Emerging-Stronger-24_5_23_FINAL.pdf

output of one paid full-time employee, creating a real and tangible training burden for VIOs;

- iii. VIOs can be the safeguard for people at risk in the community through their interactions, however many VIOs are not resourced to be able to easily escalate and report concerns to the relevant authority. For example, QCAT requires allied health reports for a person suspected of not being able to manage their own affairs, however VIOs may not have the resources to see this assessment carried out, leaving the person at risk;
 - iv. Insurance costs preclude many VIOs from engaging with volunteers under the age of 16, dousing the optimism that the future of volunteering must come through our youth.
- 3. People looking to volunteer across more than one VIO are often subject to a repeated burden of probity checks and mandatory training. Giving more time is challenged by extensive compliance requirements;
 - 4. The State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024 noted that 59% of Volunteer Manager who responded to the survey were themselves volunteers (unpaid). Unpaid Volunteer Managers exceeded paid Volunteer Managers until the volunteer workforce is greater than 101 volunteers¹². Volunteers are supported by well-intentioned and passionate Volunteer Managers; however the number of volunteers being supported is not sustainable;
 - 5. Volunteer Managers and Volunteers are ageing out. COVID has been blamed as the reason for the contraction across the volunteering sector, noting that older volunteers did what was asked of them by Government which was to stay at home. Although this disruption to the rhythm of volunteering has made a significant contribution to the collapse of the volunteering workforce, it demonstrates a clear example of where any disruption to the volunteering rhythm creates a long-term flow in circumstances for volunteers to not commit to their usual volunteering; Online pathways have not solved volunteering's challenges, with the contact from volunteers directly to VIOs is something many VIOs cannot maintain with their existing systems or staffing. This leaves volunteers not feeling valued when responses are delayed or absent. This results in the VIO losing a volunteer, the volunteer losing trust and confidence in the volunteering sector to see them and to support them to volunteer, and the community loses the benefit of a volunteer providing their time.

VGC recommends the Queensland Government act with urgency to protect the base capability across Queensland by making an urgent and strategic investment into regional volunteering infrastructure.

¹² <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland-2024-report/>

3. Current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer involving organisations

VGC's experience is that small to medium sized VIOs mostly seek support for volunteer recruitment, volunteer manager development and best practice advice. Large VIOs tend to be able to invest in their own systems and roles to recruit and manage volunteers.

VIOs in general on the Gold Coast are seeing increasing levels of volunteer shortages. Over the last 2 years VGC has maintained a similar number of VIO members (~110) yet has seen a 200% increase in the roles campaigned on behalf of members. Prior to the dismantling of funding for VRCs, VGC responded to 6,000 inquiries in 2019/20. In 2022/23, inquiries hit their lowest at 2,200 and rose to 2,600 in 2023/24. Across our 25 years of serving the Gold Coast we have responded to 60,000 people wanting to volunteer.

As a prominent VIO on the Gold Coast, VGC has had to adjust to be able to continue to attract and retain volunteers who support our community transport, aged care volunteer visitor program and our beach access program for people who have mobility challenges as a result of ageing and / or a disability. Volunteers are consistently reporting that cost of living pressures are increasingly becoming a barrier to volunteering. VGC has responded with increasing allowances paid to volunteers for travel to volunteer, and associated meal / food costs for volunteer shifts. In FY 2023/24 VGC received \$1,668,491 of in-kind donated labour through 52,800 hours of volunteering, however the volunteer hours declined by 3,000 from the previous year largely due to cost-of-living pressures faced by volunteers. Responding to this, VGC paid around \$107,846.15 in volunteer allowances for the period 2023/24 - and in contrast to the in-kind value of volunteer labour, these volunteer allowances are a cash expense for the organisation. For many VIOs who do not have contracts, recurrent funds or donors, this type of contribution is not possible. This feeds into competition between VIOs for volunteers, whilst contracts such as CHSP Transport services have assumed 100% volunteer labour being available to operate contracts and are priced accordingly.

Whilst youth have been portrayed as a panacea for volunteering, volunteering continues to be powered by retirees. This contrasts with Commonwealth Government policy settings being targeted to only assist marginalised groups (young persons, newly arrived migrants, people with a disability, women escaping domestic violence, First Nations people) to come into volunteering.

Recent Queensland Government policy saw Neighbourhood Centres funded for 5 years¹³ with an expectation that the Centres would activate volunteers¹⁴. Again, data shows that these policy settings have not resulted in an increase in volunteers¹⁵. The definition of place used here has been too narrow, with Neighbourhood Centres charged with supporting neighbourhoods or suburbs, and in many cases VGC has assisted to recruit volunteers for local Neighbourhood Centres. Getting policy to match regional needs and making the right level of investment is therefore key to reaching more parts of Queensland.

¹³ <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/99316>

¹⁴ <https://www.tatsipca.qld.gov.au/media/documents/our-work/community-support/communities-2032/neighbourhood-centres-our-shared-vision/neighbourhood-centres-framework.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report.pdf> ;
<https://seerdata.ai/census-2021-volunteering-australia/> ;
<https://profile.id.com.au/gold-coast/volunteering>

Funding to support VIOs to engage with and maintain volunteers has been infrequent and inadequate. Project based funding often precludes VIOs from attributing organisational overheads. The funding body benefits from the knowledge created or gained through the project, whilst the VIO carries the costs of overheads, creating additional challenges to raise funds for operating costs through other channels. Project based funding favours larger organisations with multiple income streams that can carry the costs of volunteering.

VGC recommends the Government funding should allow for the reasonable inclusion of organisational overheads for VRCs and VIOs.

4. The unique challenges experienced by people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations, and opportunities to improve volunteering participation, accessibility and experience for these groups

Volunteering is a vital part of Queensland's social fabric, with people contributing their time to strengthen communities. However, participation is not always equitable, particularly for diverse populations such as migrants, refugees, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, First Nations Australians, and people with disabilities. While Queensland has one of the highest rates of volunteering in Australia, barriers still prevent many from fully engaging.

A major challenge is language proficiency. Many volunteering roles require strong English skills, which can exclude those who are still developing their language abilities. Additionally, cultural perceptions of volunteering differ—some communities may not see formal volunteering as a typical way of giving back, instead prioritising family or community-based support structures. For First Nations Australians, volunteering may already be embedded in cultural traditions, but it is not always recognised in formal volunteer programs.

Practical challenges also play a role. Regional and rural Queensland communities often have fewer accessible volunteering opportunities due to transport limitations and a lack of structured programs. In urban areas, financial constraints, caregiving responsibilities, and systemic barriers, such as limited disability-inclusive roles, can also hinder participation. Many organisations still rely on traditional recruitment methods, unintentionally excluding underrepresented groups.

To make volunteering more accessible, organisations must take proactive steps. Providing translated materials, multilingual support, and cultural awareness training can help create a more welcoming environment. Community partnerships are crucial: collaborating with multicultural organisations, Indigenous groups, and disability advocacy networks can improve trust and engagement.

Flexible volunteering models are also key. Remote and virtual volunteering can support those in rural areas or with mobility challenges. One-off and short-term roles provide opportunities for people who may not be able to commit to regular volunteering. Financial barriers can be addressed through transport reimbursements and small stipends, ensuring that economic hardship does not exclude willing volunteers.

Government and sector-wide support are also crucial. The Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032 highlighted the need for volunteering to be vibrant and inclusive to ensure volunteering appealed to Queensland's diverse communities¹⁶. By embedding co-design principles and diversity into volunteer programs and policies, Queensland can build a stronger, more representative volunteer sector—one that truly reflects its multicultural and geographically diverse population.

¹⁶ https://www.tatsipca.qld.gov.au/_media/documents/our-work/community-support/communities-2032/queensland-volunteering-strategy/volunteering-strategy-2024-2032.pdf

An essential part of the solution is the use of co-design principles in developing volunteer programs. This means working directly with underrepresented communities to shape policies, recruitment processes, and volunteer roles that reflect their needs and strengths. Co-design fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that volunteering opportunities are truly inclusive rather than imposed by external organisations. For example, involving CALD and First Nations representatives in the design of volunteer roles can help bridge cultural differences and ensure meaningful participation.

While co-design is a powerful tool for making volunteering more inclusive, it is not widely implemented under the current funding and policy settings for volunteering in Queensland. True co-design requires time, resources, and ongoing engagement with diverse communities—something that many volunteer-involving organisations simply cannot afford under existing funding models.

Government grants and funding structures often prioritise service delivery and measurable outputs over community engagement and participatory design. This leaves little room for organisations to meaningfully involve CALD, First Nations, and other underrepresented groups in shaping volunteer programs. Without dedicated funding for co-design processes—such as consultations, pilot programs, and culturally appropriate engagement—many organisations struggle to implement it beyond tokenistic efforts.

Additionally, policy frameworks do not currently embed co-design as a standard practice in volunteer program development. The Queensland Volunteering Strategy acknowledges the importance of inclusion, but without structural changes, co-design remains an aspiration rather than a reality. For real progress, funding models must shift to recognise the value of community-led solutions, and policies must actively support co-design as a requirement rather than an optional extra. Only then can volunteering truly reflect and empower Queensland's diverse communities.

VGC recommends policy, planning and funding are framed within a place-based approach ensures diversity and inclusion are addressed.

5. The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement

Support from all levels of government has failed volunteering and Queensland communities. The pattern is similar across Australia – Queensland can and should take the lead in rectifying this.

Queensland is a diverse state in terms of geography, population, infrastructure, environment and climate. For the majority of Queenslanders that have not volunteered, their perspective of volunteering is informed by the visuals of masses of Queenslanders coming together to assist in times of natural disasters or major events (such as the 2018 Commonwealth Games).

Queensland is not likely to be short of spontaneous volunteers in times of disaster or volunteers seeking to support major events such as the 2018 Commonwealth Games or the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics. These responses present a false positive to the status of volunteering. Queenslanders are lonelier and more socially isolated than ever, looking for connection, purpose and community¹⁷.

Volunteering is valued in government reports, publications, across social media posts, and in political campaigning, but has been undervalued in policy settings and realistic funding. Small grants spread support too thinly to have a sustainable impact.

VGC recommends the use co-design principles to define and implement solutions supported by the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Panel.

Prior to 2020, VGC received dedicated support from the Commonwealth Government to deliver the Volunteer Management Activity program. Under this program, VGC has responded to more than 50,000 volunteer inquiries from 1998-2020, and delivered volunteer placement services across the Gold Coast, West Moreton region and Northern Tasmania during this time. Our multi region / multi state operations reflects our ability to deliver place-based solutions to support volunteering.

Importantly the recruitment of volunteers serviced member organisations (other VIOs). Volunteer recruitment is like any other recruitment activity – needing to be considered, professional, efficient and outcomes focused. The funding provided however supports VRCs to operate with predominantly volunteers. It is not reasonable that the sector operates only on volunteers. VGC believes that a Volunteer Resource Centre needs financial support to cover at least 2.5 FTE of staff to deliver Volunteer Management, Volunteer Recruitment, VIO Support and operational overheads as a minimum.

Resources across the volunteering sector are thin on the ground and the use of funding needs to be coordinated so that duplication of effort is minimised or eliminated. VGC recognises the important role of Volunteering Queensland as the state Peak Body for

¹⁷ <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/newsroom/features/connection-is-key-in-ending-loneliness-and-social-isolation>

volunteering. We acknowledge the leadership provided by its CEO Jane Hedger. Jane's commencement has seen welcomed re-engagement of discussions and efforts between Volunteering Queensland and the 4 remaining Volunteer Resource Centres in Queensland. We have shared knowledge, insights and capability to better support Queensland communities and envisage a model of coordination that can reach all corners of the State. We have extended the support we offer to each other in practical terms and have used the natural disasters in Far North Queensland to exercise together with good effect.

VGC calls on the State Government to examine its support for volunteering organisations and make a deliberate and considered investment in regional models of support for volunteering, aligned with the State plan for volunteering that is auspiced by Volunteering Queensland.

VGC recommends that the Gambling Benefit Community Fund be applied as a source of funds able to stimulate and support core volunteering infrastructure, noting that part of the funding envelope allocated for same can be repurposed for direct funding instead of grant programs.

The limited resources applied to volunteering results in the unintended consequence of leaning on volunteering organisations to do the heavy lifting to assist the sector. VGC welcomes the opportunity to collaborate and implement local strategy with community stakeholders. Local governments can facilitate volunteering being accessible for the widest group of volunteers by addressing some of the cost barriers that can influence participation rate.

Local Government can recognise and incentivise volunteers for their service as follows:

- Examine the provision of public transport options and the extent to which these support or hinder volunteering, especially in regional and remote areas;
- Examine the ability to waive parking costs or supply parking fee exemptions for volunteers;
- Ensure that local grants for VIOs include waiver of Council fees etc. for permits, ensuring monies extend as far as possible for VIOs;
- Provide a variety of options for volunteers to receive in recognition for their volunteer service that supports the local community. This may include:
 - Reduced rates;
 - Additional waste collection / reduced waste collection costs;
 - Car parking credits;
 - Reduced / waived pet registration fees.

A Queensland State Government program offering volunteers discounts on car registration and wellness credits for a healthy and active lifestyle would be a meaningful way to recognise their contributions while encouraging broader participation. Many volunteers give their time selflessly but face financial barriers that can make ongoing involvement challenging.

Volunteering Queensland reported the costs borne by volunteers had increased from \$4.97 (2020) to \$15.57 (2023) for each hour of volunteering¹⁸. Providing discounts on car registration would ease some of the costs associated with volunteering, particularly for those in regional and rural areas where transport is essential to access opportunities. This incentive would not only reward current volunteers but also attract new participants, ensuring that Queensland's volunteer sector remains strong and sustainable.

Wellness credits could further support volunteers by allowing them to invest in activities that enhance their physical and mental health, such as gym memberships, sporting activities, or mindfulness programs. Volunteering is known to improve well-being, but it also requires energy and resilience, particularly in roles involving emergency response, community services, or aged care. By linking volunteerism with proactive health benefits, the government would be reinforcing the idea that giving back to the community should not come at a personal cost. This initiative would align with Queensland's broader health and community engagement goals¹⁹, creating a more supported, motivated, and thriving volunteer workforce.

VGC believes the Queensland Government should invest in a well-planned campaign highlighting the benefits of volunteering, showcasing how it strengthens communities, improves mental health, and creates pathways to employment.

The campaign must be carefully designed to ensure that the volunteer sector can manage the potential surge in interest. If the sector is not prepared to handle inquiries, match volunteers effectively, and provide meaningful opportunities, the campaign would likely backfire—frustrating potential volunteers and damaging both the sector's reputation and the government's credibility. To avoid this, investment must go beyond promotion and include capacity-building measures such as streamlined onboarding processes, increased funding for volunteer coordination, and support for organisations to expand their volunteer programs. A campaign that drives enthusiasm without the infrastructure to support it risks doing more harm than good.

Successive Commonwealth Government policies have dismantled Australia's once-robust volunteering infrastructure, leaving behind a fragmented system that now serves only marginalised groups. Previously, federal programs provided broad-based support for volunteerism, ensuring that all Australians—regardless of background—had opportunities to contribute. However, citing constitutional limitations, the Commonwealth has narrowed its focus, funding only programs that specifically support disadvantaged populations. While targeted support for marginalised groups is essential, this approach has created a two-tiered system where mainstream volunteering lacks adequate investment. The result is a wide-spread decline in volunteer participation, particularly among groups that do not meet narrow eligibility criteria but still play vital roles in their communities.

There is a clear opportunity for cross-governmental agreements to restore a more inclusive volunteer support system. State and Commonwealth collaboration ensures that all parts of the community are empowered to participate in volunteering, regardless of demographic

¹⁸ <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland-2024-report/>

¹⁹ https://hw.qld.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Thriving-Lives-Connected-Communities_Queenslands-Commitment-to-Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing_.pdf

or socioeconomic status. A shared funding model would enable national consistency while allowing flexibility for local needs. By re-establishing a comprehensive framework for volunteer support, governments can strengthen social cohesion, enhance disaster resilience, and maximise the economic and social benefits of volunteering. Without such cooperation, Australia risks further erosion of its volunteering culture, undermining one of its greatest community strengths.

VGC recommends the Queensland Government engage in further collaboration with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that all parts of the community are empowered to participate in volunteering, regardless of demographic or socioeconomic status.

6. Opportunities for the Queensland Government to leverage all portfolios to support growth in volunteering across Queensland, including through hosting the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games

The 2032 Brisbane Olympics and Paralympics present a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Queensland to transform its volunteer ecosystem, not just for the period of the Games but for the long term. Traditionally, major events recruit thousands of volunteers, but their skills and willingness to continue volunteering often go untapped once the event concludes. By addressing long-standing structural issues—such as fragmented volunteer databases and lack of data continuity between VIOs—Queensland can build a more sustainable volunteering system. Capturing volunteer information in a centralised, yet privacy-conscious way, would allow individuals to seamlessly transition between different volunteering opportunities across sectors. Instead of organisations independently managing volunteer records, a system where information follows the volunteer, with their consent, would create a more agile and responsive volunteer workforce.

To achieve this, Queensland must ensure technical interoperability between volunteer management systems so that data can be shared in a meaningful and secure way. Establishing a framework that enables the ethical and ongoing use of the Olympic volunteer database beyond 2032—while respecting privacy and consent requirements—would provide an enduring legacy for Queensland's volunteer sector. By solving these structural issues now, the State can not only support a world-class Games but also create a lasting impact, where volunteering is easier, more rewarding, and better connected to community needs long after the Olympic flame has been extinguished.

Volunteering in the lead-up to the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics provides Queensland with a strategic opportunity to build a highly skilled pool of technical volunteers while strengthening the State's sporting infrastructure. Hosting Olympic and Paralympic qualifying events will require a significant number of trained officials, judges, and event staff—many of whom will be volunteers. By investing early in volunteer development, Queensland can establish a deep and experienced talent pool that will not only support the Games but also leave a long-term legacy for local and national sporting events. Increasing the number of technical volunteers linked to specific sports will elevate the quality of competitions held in Queensland, positioning the State as a premier destination for international events well beyond 2032.

In addition to skill development, Queensland has a unique opportunity to set a new standard for gender equity in technical officiating performed by volunteers. Past Olympics have aimed for gender balance, but progress has been dictated by individual sports rather than broader policy initiatives. Queensland can lead by mandating gender equity in technical officiating roles across all sports, ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in key positions. Furthermore, by strategically locating qualifying events in regional centres, the economic benefits of pre-Games competitions can be widely distributed. These events bring increased tourism, hospitality demand, and local business engagement, providing a direct economic boost to communities while also decentralising Queensland's Olympic legacy. Targets should be adopted for Queenslanders to fill these roles.

Highlighting and investing in volunteers who support sporting activities across Queensland presents a tremendous opportunity to strengthen clubs, enhance player development, and foster community spirit. Volunteers are the backbone of local sports, providing essential support in coaching, organizing events, and maintaining facilities. By recognizing their contributions and offering training and resources, clubs can improve their operations and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for players. This investment not only boosts the morale of volunteers but also encourages greater community involvement, leading to healthier, more connected communities. Ultimately, this support helps nurture talent, promotes physical activity, and builds a sense of pride and unity within the community.

Volunteering is lauded as one of the great legacies from the Olympic movement. The Sydney 2000 Olympics is synonymous with delivering a peak volunteer experience that underpinned the impact of the event. The State of Volunteering in NSW 2024 report showed similar characteristics as the Queensland report – declining participation, reduced hours per volunteer and an unsustainable burden on volunteer managers. This is a timely reminder that volunteering is bigger than the Olympics and Paralympics. The Brisbane Games will be a key event contributing to volunteering.

Recruitment and coordination of volunteers for the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics is a game changing opportunity to advance volunteer sector capability across Queensland. An analysis of past games²⁰ has shown that contracts for volunteer management services have not resulted in an uplift of organisations (referred to as the third sector) that offer in country volunteering services. Awarding the provision of this service to large corporations operating outside of Queensland, voids the provision of legacy outcome for Queensland based organisations.

VGC recommends the Queensland Government require the provision of volunteer services for the 2032 Olympics and Paralympics be performed by Queensland based organisations with expertise in volunteer management. Furthermore, an assessment of capability to deliver these services should precede a strategic investment by the Queensland Government to develop and deliver this capability in lead up mega events.

²⁰ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11266-024-00643-w>

7. Opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering in Queensland, including how to optimize the engagement, support and integration of volunteers assisting with natural disasters and community recovery

When natural disasters strike, the extensive media coverage and the immediate, visible impact on local communities often inspire a surge of volunteers eager to help. Spontaneous volunteers play a crucial role in providing relief and support, driven by the urgent need and the compelling stories broadcasted by the media. The heart-warming images of people coming together to aid those in distress create a powerful narrative of community solidarity and altruism.

However, this surge in volunteerism during crises can create a misleading impression about the overall health of volunteering outside of such events. While the response to natural disasters is commendable, it does not reflect the ongoing, everyday commitment needed to support various community services and non-profit organisations. The reality is that many of these organisations struggle to maintain a steady stream of volunteers, highlighting a gap between the episodic spikes in volunteerism during disasters and the consistent support required throughout the year.

During emergencies, the urgency to provide immediate assistance often leads to a relaxation of the usual standards of probity and deep training required for volunteers. In the face of a crisis, the priority shifts to mobilising as many helping hands as possible, sometimes at the expense of thorough vetting and comprehensive training. This approach, while understandable given the circumstances, highlights a double standard. In non-emergency situations, organisations typically enforce strict protocols to ensure volunteers are well-trained and vetted, maintaining high standards of safety and integrity. However, during disasters, the pressing need for rapid response can result in a more lenient approach, accepting almost anyone willing to help, which can sometimes compromise the quality and safety of the volunteer efforts. Volunteer supervision, briefing and debriefing address many of the underlying risks.

The commitment to supporting local communities in building resilience is often emphasised in policies and public statements. However, the reality of disaster funding arrangements frequently favours larger organisations that have the financial capacity to manage upfront costs. These organisations are typically better equipped to navigate the complex funding processes and can absorb initial expenses until reimbursements are processed. This dynamic can inadvertently sideline smaller, community-based groups that are deeply embedded in local contexts but lack the financial resources to compete for or sustain such funding. As a result, the intended goal of fostering local resilience can be undermined, as the very organisations that could provide tailored, grassroots support are often left without the necessary financial backing.

Over the summer of 2023/24, Queensland experienced a series of severe natural disasters that left significant impacts across the State. Northern Queensland was battered by two powerful cyclones, causing widespread flooding and damage to infrastructure. Meanwhile, the Gold Coast faced a severe weather event that brought heavy rainfall, strong winds, and

flash flooding, disrupting daily life and causing extensive property damage. These events highlighted the vulnerability of Queensland's communities to extreme weather and underscored the importance of effective disaster response and recovery efforts.

In response to these challenges, Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) on the Gold Coast, Cairns, and Townsville collaborated closely to support each other and enhance their volunteer recruitment and management efforts. By engaging with each other and providing remote assistance, these VRCs were able to efficiently handle the influx of calls and coordinate volunteer efforts across the affected regions. This collaboration ensured that volunteers were quickly mobilized to areas in need, demonstrating the strength and resilience of Queensland's volunteer network in times of crisis.

The experience demonstrated the impact a coordinated, aligned and potentially integrated network of VRCs can have on the community (near and afar). The 2025 flood event across FNQ extended this design, integrating Volunteering Queensland into the response model, and further coordinating the volunteer responses across local governments, Local Disaster Management Groups and the State Disaster Management Group.

VGC recognises the significant expertise within and across the Gold Coast Local Disaster Management Group. The LDMG have invested in the development of a robust Spontaneous Volunteer Management Plan and have exercised the plan to assess its maturity.

VGC recommends creating quicker safeguards and vetting processes for stand-up program.

8. First Nations peoples volunteering, including remote and discrete communities, and the role of First Nations volunteering in Closing the Gap

To increase the meaningful participation of First Nations peoples in volunteering activities, several strategic initiatives can be implemented. Firstly, providing funding to Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) to develop and implement Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) is crucial. RAPs help organisations build respectful relationships and create opportunities for First Nations peoples, ensuring their cultural perspectives are integrated into volunteering programs.

Additionally, establishing partnerships through targeted funding for Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations to collaborate with VTCs can enhance engagement and support. These partnerships can facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources, enabling ATSI organisations to play a central role in volunteer recruitment and management. Furthermore, funding cultural competence training for volunteers is essential to ensure they can work effectively and respectfully alongside ATSI peoples. This training helps volunteers understand and appreciate cultural differences, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Finally, providing training for First Nations volunteers to run VIOs empowers them to take leadership roles within the volunteering sector. This not only builds capacity within First Nations communities but also ensures that volunteering programs are led by individuals who have a deep understanding of their cultural context and needs. By implementing these strategies, we can create a more inclusive and effective volunteering landscape that values and supports the contributions of First Nations peoples.

VGC recommends providing localised Cultural Awareness and Education opportunities for volunteers and VIO's.

9. Any other relevant matters

Other topics which could be included in this inquiry include:

- Mapping and measuring the volunteering impact against UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Creating a regional, state and national pathway for the recognition of volunteers
- Recognise prior learning and experience gained through volunteering by tertiary studies and RTO micro-credentialing.
- Align existing programs with public assets.