

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submitted by:	Howard Community Centre
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PROPOSAL FOR ATTRACTING VOLUNTEERS IN QUEENSLAND

A very large number of not for profit groups are having difficulty in attracting new volunteers particularly younger ones. Many long terms volunteers are aging and are unable to physically (and sometimes mentally) do what they have done for years. If Communities are to have essential services like the Rural Fire Brigade and SES then an incentive needs to be found to attract younger people.

Proposal:

For every hour that a person volunteers they are given a nominal credit (e.g. \$1 per hour) to be deducted from the cost of their vehicle/s registration. Ideally it should be a credit off their income tax but that would have to be a Federal Government initiative. Let Queensland lead the way with a trial crediting vehicle registration.

Obviously very strict conditions must be in place regarding the organisations who would qualify to host this programme. The programme could and should not be available to self interest or hobby groups – only those organisations who actually service the entire community.

The following conditions should also be placed on any eligible organisation:

1. They must be registered with ASIC and ACNC and have an ABN.
2. They must not be funded by any level of government (an exception could be made for Fire Fighters and SES).
3. They must have volunteers' insurance
4. They must have public liability insurance for 52 weeks of the year and must produce a certificate of currency for same on demand and then annually if accepted as a certified provider.
5. They must demonstrate that they are a community benefit organisation and not a hobby or self interest group.
6. They must have a safety plan in place for volunteers and an induction scheme for new volunteers.
7. If they have a building, they must demonstrate that all testing and tagging, fire inspections, safety lighting inspections etc are up to date.
8. They must be prepared to be audited by the State Government when required.
9. They must be allocated a Queensland Government number/certificate to use when recording volunteer hours and the President or Secretary must sign off on hours claimed by the volunteer before said hours are submitted to the State Government for vehicle registration credit. This should be done on a monthly basis.
10. They must do an annual return to the relevant State Government office so hours submitted can be reconciled to hours credited.

Volunteering in Queensland - Submission

We must find incentives to encourage younger people to volunteer in their communities.

Volunteering which was once part of Australian culture has gone by the by. Younger people want to be remunerated for their time (which is not volunteering) and most not for profit community groups simply do not have the financial resources to pay people. Many volunteers today are in their 70's and 80's. Just take a look at the average age of Rotarians and other service club members. This is not a problem that is unique to Queensland but affects the whole of Australia and many other countries around the world.

Many events and services that are taken for granted WILL DISAPPEAR if younger people do not step up.

Perhaps (in addition to incentives) a scare campaign could be undertaken such as the danger of the imminent death of things like school fetes and P&C run canteens in smaller areas, social events, Christmas community events, service club parks and community involvement, community centres in smaller towns and maybe even SES and Rural Fire Services. There needs to be an urgent call to action to attract people aged in their 40's and 50's who are more likely not to have younger children that they have to run around for. I have attached a suggestion regarding an incentive programme by giving a credit on car registration. Benefits of volunteering could be highlighted e.g. social interaction, meet new people, make new friends and learn new skills. It may reduce depression and stress whilst giving participants a sense of community.

The "Work for the Dole" programme seems to have disappeared. I understand that this is a Federal matter but it desperately needs to be brought back and policed! Weekend work must be included.

Another important campaign should be an awareness campaign to the general public to stop abusing volunteers. This is a frequent occurrence as many of the public want certain things when they want them and verbally abuse volunteers if they don't get it. The general public should be thanking people who volunteer and acknowledge that they are giving up their free time to help in their community.

Not for profit community groups also need to be made aware of their responsibilities when accepting a position on a committee. An education programme possibly run through the Office of Fair Trading could send out a pamphlet each time a committee changes or new members of the committee are added.

Dealing with government on any level can be extremely frustrating for volunteers so perhaps local and state governments could have trained staff to assist with applications and assist with fund raising events instead of trying to put roadblocks up all the time. Some examples of high costs are things like APRA licences for community events, paperwork that has to be completed to hold an event, liquor licencing, compulsory trained staff for road blocks for Anzac Day in small towns and the list goes on and on. Insurance costs can also be crippling as are council rates and electricity.

Research could also be conducted in other countries or with other countries where younger people are volunteering. How do those countries attract the volunteers, what is the retention rate, how do they engage on an ongoing basis with their volunteers etc? This is especially important in small communities.