

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Submission by AFL Queensland to the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Volunteering in Queensland offers profound benefits across individual, organisational, community and state levels, making it a cornerstone of the state's social and economic fabric.

The benefits include:

- Personal fulfillment, skill development and community connection for the volunteers;
- Enhanced capacity, diverse perspectives and community connection for organisations;
- Social cohesion, increased resilience and cultural enrichment for communities; and
- Economic impact, social wellbeing and civic engagement for the State.

AFL Queensland (AFLQ) has more than 7,000 volunteers who play a significant role in creating a fantastic experience for more than 79,000 registered participants. AFLQ have a Club Development and Experience team who work to support our clubs, and the volunteers that run them, to carry out their roles as easily and as enjoyably as possible. AFLQ is also positioned to play a role in collaborating with all stakeholders to find solutions to volunteering challenges and are open to working further in partnership with the Government and other stakeholders in this process.

Australian Football in Queensland is experiencing a period of significant growth and based on current forecasting AFLQ are anticipating growth in junior and youth AFL of over 50 new teams in South East Queensland alone. AFLQ anticipate that there will be a need for a minimum of 5 volunteers per team for match day roles such as coach, manager, ground marshall and umpires. This growth is putting pressure on our community clubs and existing volunteers, with a need to recruit, educate and retain more volunteers.

The growth in participation has created a significant need for more venues to be activated for community access to cater for the increased team numbers and to provide a quality experience for participants. As these new venues are established, it will often be volunteers who, on behalf of clubs, will take on the responsibility of regular maintenance and preparation for usage.

Volunteers and organisations often face complex legislative and regulatory requirements that can be burdensome, however in sport and AFL more specifically, AFLQ don't experience this to the same degree. Most AFL volunteers are involved through game day roles that support the weekly delivery of sport. These roles rely heavily on people in attendance at clubs on game day volunteering or often defaults to committee members who are juggling many roles and responsibilities.

More broadly challenges that exist in recruiting and retaining volunteers include:

- Time commitment - majority of volunteers are also balancing work, study and family responsibilities. This can impact volunteers' ability to commit to a defined role and/or drive the desired outcomes.
- Lack of recognition – celebration of volunteer contributions to community operations can be lacking. When not celebrated the outcome is usually a drop in retention, which in turn has a detrimental effect on those in existing volunteer roles who must then take on extra responsibilities. Coordination of opportunities to celebrate volunteers is a joint responsibility between both clubs and the league.
- Lack of guidance and/or organisation – lack of a Volunteer Coordinator at clubs or a proactive committee member for volunteering often means people put their hands up, but either no one follows them up, they are provided a poor brief/handover of responsibilities, or they are provided no handover or guidance as to how to undertake their volunteer role.
- Perception on scope of volunteer role and time required – due to a lack of volunteers, existing volunteers at community clubs are often juggling multiple roles and responsibilities which requires them to dedicate a substantial amount of time to volunteering. This can result in prospective volunteers not wanting to put their hand up, due to fear of excessive time needed to fulfil the role.

The processes for applying for grants also can be challenging due to the detailed application process and the time needed to submit successful applications. It should be a priority to streamline this process so that clubs can apply for funding efficiently and focus on completing projects and delivering programs.

Our volunteer efforts required to support Community Clubs through natural disaster response has been significant across Queensland and this adds another layer to the roles volunteers play. The reliance on volunteer response to support club recovery and longer-term sustainability is significant. To assist in the recovery process and the support of club volunteers, the AFL has undertaken corporate volunteer days with Disaster Relief Australia and will continue to do so.

Creating an environment that is conducive to volunteers feeling valued and supported in their roles is critical. To set our community clubs and volunteers up for success the AFL have a suite of assets and materials, including specific profiles on volunteer roles and responsibilities, to educate and develop our clubs and their volunteer network. This is accessible via our Play.AFL website. The investment by the Government in developing Club IQ is welcomed as it provides a platform of generic resources for sports and volunteers to access. Ongoing education and development will provide community clubs with the knowledge and understanding of best practice to recruit and support volunteers.

AFLQ is very focused on recognising volunteers. The Toyota Good for Footy Round of the AFL season celebrates and promotes the roles of volunteers. It launches a nomination process that leads to both state and national recognition where the winners are celebrated through the events and activations in the week leading up to the Toyota AFL Grand Final.

Recently, funding support from the Government through the Active Industry Base Fund has provided significant funding to increase capability across the state through focusing

on key aspects of community sport operations that are predominantly overseen by volunteers.

Our focus is developing a volunteer network that is reflective of society, with people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations. AFLQ continue to invest heavily in education and upskilling of women across coaching, umpiring, playing and as leaders of their clubs to make them feel empowered and capable to assist in volunteer and paid roles in community clubs both on and off the field, as well as career opportunities in the AFL industry.

In relation to First Nations peoples volunteering, including in remote and discrete communities, AFL Cape York House create opportunities through a range of initiatives, including: pathway programs, community-based Auskick and Superkick centres, umpiring programs and other cultural activities. Work with PCYC, Regional Sport and Recreation teams, Men's groups and schools to further engage First Nations people as volunteers is also undertaken.

Other challenges that exist in building a diverse volunteer network include cultural and linguistic barriers, disability access, age related limitations and geographical isolation. AFLQ would welcome initiatives to help support greater diversity across volunteering including cultural competency training and education, accessibility improvement and age-inclusive programs.

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games are an opportunity to set up the sporting sector in Queensland to have a strong, sustainable volunteer workforce. It will attract volunteers into roles with other sports or organisations, while also providing a significant event for sporting volunteers to aspire to be involved with. Strong collaboration between stakeholders will give a collective approach to attract new volunteers and increase the engagement and reach of current volunteers. AFLQ are aware that most volunteers are not just volunteering within AFL community clubs but likely willingly assisting in many other sports across QLD. AFLQ's aim is that the upskilling and education provided to volunteers within the AFL is multi-faceted and provides them with not only the upskilling and education required to be a volunteer but the confidence and drive to volunteer elsewhere in their lives.

AFLQ encourage the Queensland Government to continue to support and promote the volunteering sector in Queensland. There is an opportunity for collaboration between sports to share best practice and the continuation of funding, through programs like the Active Industry Base Fund, which will see ongoing improvement in the capability and capacity of the volunteer network in community sport. Increased recruitment, and more particularly retention, can only occur when the education, support and recognition of contribution is evident.

AFLQ advocate in support of collaboration, tailored initiatives, grant opportunities, education and resources, to allow sports to strengthen and grow their volunteer numbers as part of a statewide volunteer network.