

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Little Athletics Queensland



Submission to the Queensland
Government's Inquiry into
Volunteering in Queensland

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Foreword

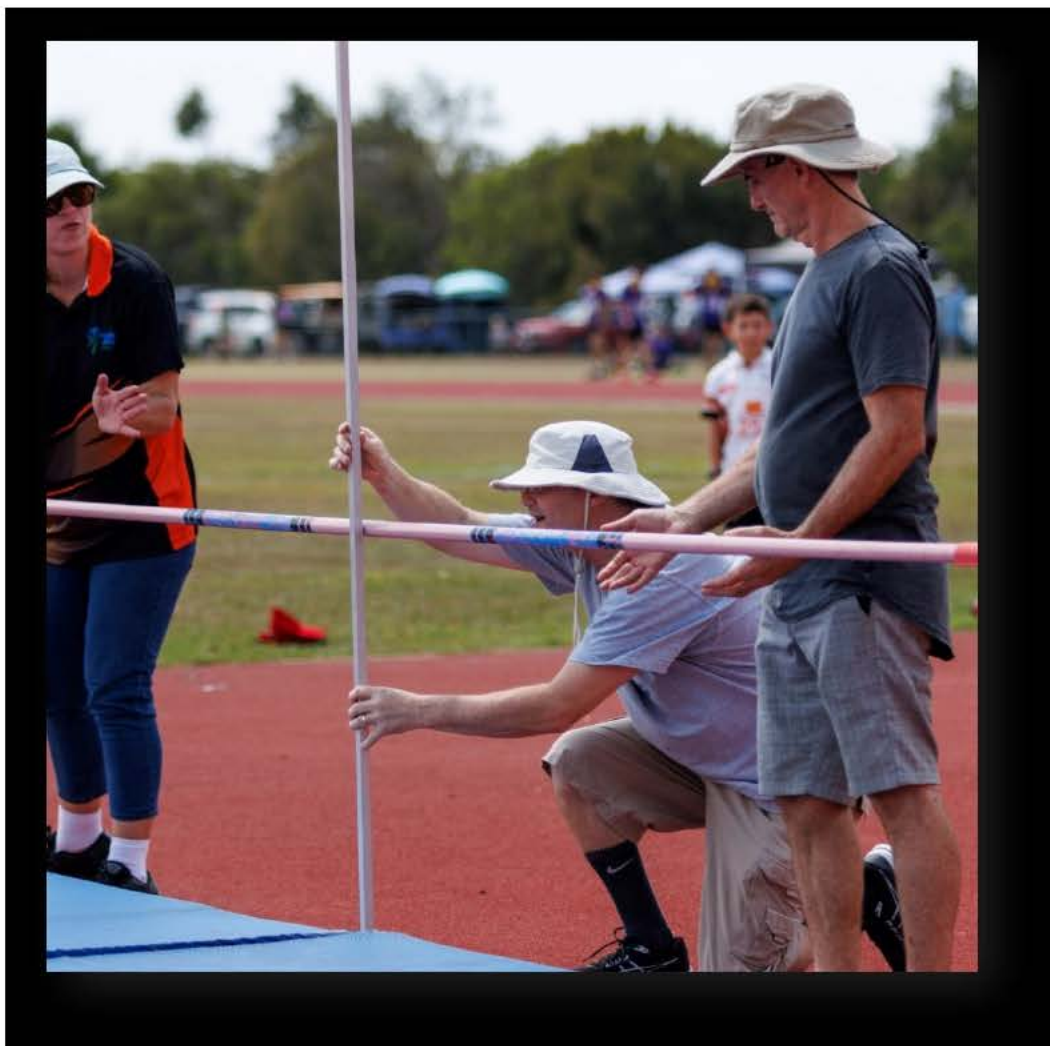
Little Athletics is a uniquely Australian sport that has formed the foundation for lifetime involvement in sport for 60 years.

Little Athletics is widely regarded as one of the most volunteer-intensive childhood sporting activities requiring the support of parents, grandparents and lovers of the sport of athletics to assist children each week.

In Queensland there are an estimated 6,400 volunteers involved weekly, with the total number to be even higher as different volunteers rotate in and out of tasks each week.

To put it simply, without volunteers, our sport, just like many community sports would cease to exist.

We would like to thank the Queensland Government for this opportunity to present on this incredibly important issue.



Who are we?

Little Athletics Queensland is the State Sporting Organisation (SSO) responsible for the growth, development and administration of the sport of Little Athletics in Queensland. First formed in Geelong, Victoria in 1964 to provide an opportunity for young children to participate in the sport of athletics, Little Athletics grew across the country. In 1973 the sport expanded to Queensland with the establishment of the Redcliffe Little Athletics Centre and participation in the sport quickly grew from there.

Today, Little Athletics is one of the most recognisable junior sporting brands in the country and provides the foundation for all sports, teaching young children the skills of running, jumping, throwing, rolling and walking as they strive to be their personal best.

Little Athletics Queensland has 87 affiliated clubs and over 17,000 athletes, spanning almost the entire reach of Queensland, from Cooktown in the North, out West to Charleville and even one club located in Northern NSW. Participation in the sport is almost perfectly 50/50 between boys and girls, and approximately 70% of club committee members are female.

Each club is its own incorporated association under the Associations Incorporations Act (Qld) 1981 and run entirely by volunteers.

Seven volunteers who serve on the Board of Directors are elected by the member clubs, with day-to-day management overseen by the Chief Executive Officer and a team of 8.8 FTE staff. In January 2025, an additional 31 casual staff were employed to increase opportunities for children to participate in the sport through school-based programs.



What is the current state of volunteering at Little Athletics in Queensland?

Volunteers fall into 4 broad categories within Little Athletics:

1. Committee members
2. Parent volunteers
3. Coaches
4. Officials

Committee Members

Each of the 87 affiliated clubs are an individually incorporated entity, each of whom elect their own committees as per their constitution and the requirements of the Associations Incorporations Act (1981). Although the minimum number of volunteers as per the legislation is just three, many clubs have significantly larger committees to help break down administrative tasks into more manageable roles.

The volunteers manage the day-to-day operations of the club including, but not limited to:

- Collection of registrations
- Communication with members
- Organisation of fundraising efforts
- Management of bank accounts, making payments and other financial functions
- Recruiting, training and supporting other volunteers
- Management of complaints and disciplinary issues
- Risk management
- Ensuring child safe environments
- Maintenance of a lease of facilities
- Maintenance and cleaning of facilities
- Adhering to legislative requirements, including those imposed by councils
- Applying for Government grants to improve facilities and the member experience
- Marketing and promotion

This is clearly a long list, and one which carries a lot of responsibility. Importantly, committee members also hold legal duties of care in areas including child safety, risk management and insurance compliance putting themselves in the firing line in the event that something was to go wrong.

Anecdotal evidence suggests 90% of committee members would step away from their role if someone else was willing to take it on. Many committee members have been doing the role far longer than they would like but feel a duty to continue knowing that no-one else will step up to help, and the club will likely face dissolution if they do not continue.

This subsequently leads to volunteers taking on these roles who are either unskilled or do not have the time, or desire to complete the tasks effectively, negatively impacting the member experience at the club. It is also not uncommon to have committee roles remain unfilled, which simply means a task does not get done, as is evidenced in Image 1.

Centre Management Committee

Position	Representative
Centre Manager (President)	Jeff Bayley: president@aspleylittleathletics.com
Secretary	Carolyn Draper: secretary@aspleylittleathletics.com
Treasurer	Brendan Hall: treasurer@aspleylittleathletics.com
Registrar	Michael Draper: registrar@aspleylittleathletics.com
Chief Recorder	Brigid Jones: recorder@aspleylittleathletics.com
Canteen Manager	Kylie Driver: canteen@aspleylittleathletics.com
Fundraising Manager	Vacant
Officials Manager	Carmen Sims
Arena Manager (Grounds)	Vacant
Head Coach	Andrea Taft: coach@aspleylittleathletics.com
Equipment Manager	Vacant
Uniforms Manager	A/Carolyn Draper: uniforms@aspleylittleathletics.com
Technical Manager (IT)	Vacant
Media Manager	Vacant
Chief Starter	Denise Jabbour
Program Manager	Stephen Don
School Liaison Officer	Greg Heskett
Member Protection Officer	A/Chrystal Dillon

Image 1: Aspley Little Athletics Centre Committee where over a quarter of roles remain vacant.

Committee members are often also officials, the people who set-up and pack-up the equipment, they buy stock for the canteen, and fill any remaining task that is incomplete, even if that doesn't form part of the official role they signed up for.



Parent Volunteers

A typical Little Athletics season involves up to 26 weeks of competition with children competing each week at their local club in a program of 4-6 athletics events.

TT	EVENT #									MERGED	MERGED		1st - 300mH 2nd - 200mH 3rd - 200m
		U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12G	U12B	U13B+G	U14	U15+	
60	1	Discus	High Jump (flexi)	200	100	100	Long Jump	Javelin	100	200m H (76cm)	200m H (76cm)	300m H (76cm)	
Vortex	2	300 Pack	300 Pack	Discus	Long Jump	Long Jump	100	100	Javelin	HJ (flop)	Shot Put	Shot Put	
U (jnr pit)	3	Long Jump	Discus	70	400	800	Shot Put	Triple Jump	70	100	100	100	
Tiny Tot Area	4	70	70	High Jump (scissor)	Shot Put	Discus	70	70	Triple Jump	Javelin	HJ (flop)	HJ (flop)	
	5				70	70	800	800	800	800	800	800	

Image 2: Caloundra Little Athletics event program showing each age group across the top, and their individual events in the column below.

Each age group requires approximately 4 volunteers to assist with each event. None of these tasks require any great skill or knowledge and generally include:

1. Recorder
2. Measurer
3. Reader
4. Retriever

In most cases, these tasks are completed by a group of parent volunteers who assist with an age group their child is competing in. This is common to many other sports; however a Little Athletics meet has all age groups competing at the same time. This may mean that up to 16 different age groups, each with 4 volunteers, are all actively volunteering at the same time, at the singular location, just to allow the children to participate in the sport.

Several clubs employ roster systems, and some have also implemented a 'volunteer levy', a refundable fee which is paid at the time of registration and only repaid if a minimum number of shifts have been completed. Even without a formal roster, the premise is that 'many hands make light work', although the volunteering burden inevitably falls upon a similar group of parents each week.

Being a volunteer parent does afford the opportunity to interact closely with the sport, and their children's activities, with most parents willing to help out when asked.

"I much prefer to help than to sit on the sidelines and get bored. I get to see my daughters performance and give her a high-5 when she breaks a PB (personal best)"

There is also the understanding that without parent volunteers the children will simply not be able to participate, performances cannot be recorded and the whole meet is likely to take longer.

Coaches

Coaching is normally conducted by a handful of qualified coaches at each Little Athletics Centre. In the absence of a formal accreditation system within Little Athletics, most of these coaches are past athletes who hold Australian (senior) Athletics accreditation, and some of whom run their own private training groups as a private business.

Due to a shortage of coaches, training is optional within the sport with a historically low take-up due to a poor training experience. In one early season situation there was reportedly around 200 athletes trying to be trained by just 6 coaches. Suffice to say, the experience these athletes received was not a quality one, and within a few weeks the number of children attending training dwindled to around 30. This in turn, results in athletes who do not attend training, do not improve their skills and subsequently leave the sport. If more volunteer coaches were available, this would undoubtedly result in more children remaining within the sport.

To try and address this shortage, some clubs have started to pay their coaches or bring in external coaches who run their own private coaching businesses, again on a fee-for-service model.

Officials

Although the format of a weekly Little Athletics meet at club level varies, officials are often not required; with the role being managed by parent volunteers. Officials are however required at regional, state or national level events. Even at these events, officials are supported by parent volunteers but provide the technical expertise to allow an event to run efficiently, and in accordance with the rules.



Like many sports, officials typically have a long history within the sport, most of whom started as parents of Little Athletes in the past. Our officials are ageing, with the average age being approximately 55 years of age, and only seven of them being under 30.

Like most sports, there is a shortage of officials which results in officials being rostered on for an entire event, sometimes without breaks. Our State Championships will involve 6 hours of competition on Friday evening, 12 hours on Saturday, and a further 7 hours on Sunday, with most officials being involved throughout these 25 hours. They truly love the sport, but even amongst the most committed volunteers there is an increasing level of frustration that new officials are not joining the group, and they fear there will be 'no way out' when they want to take a step back.

Officials are not paid; however a travel reimbursement system was implemented in 2022. This rebate is only available however to those who travel over 50km to attend an event.

The economics of volunteering in Little Athletics (and sport more broadly)

Little Athletics is no different to other sports who rely on volunteers to operate. There is a perception within the sport that Little Athletics requires more volunteers than any other sport, which does have some elements of truth. A typical Little Athletics club meet will require approximately 70 volunteers to operate, all of whom need to be involved at the same time, on the same field, for the same 3-4 hour period. With 87 clubs in operation across Queensland, our sport requires approximately 6,400 volunteers **every week** just to ensure children can run, jump, throw, roll and walk.

Estimation of Value of Volunteers for Little Athletics in Queensland	
Volunteers per Age Group	4.5
Age Groups	16
Volunteers per Club	72
Hours per week	3
Volunteer Hours per Week	216
Club Meets per Season	20
Volunteer Hours per Season	4,320
<i>plus Committee Volunteering</i>	
Number of Committee Members	10
Hours per week	8
Weeks per Year	40
Committee Hours per Club	3,200
Total Volunteer Hours per Club	7,520
Clubs	87
Total Volunteer Hours per Season	654,240
Hourly Rate	\$ 45.00
Estimated Value of Volunteer Labour	\$ 29,440,800

A rough estimation of the total amount of volunteer hours for Little Athletics in Queensland highlights the incomprehensible value that volunteers provide to our sport.

*Volunteers provide an estimated value of over \$29.4 million to Little Athletics in Queensland **each year**.*

If volunteers no longer existed within our sport, every single athlete would be required to pay an additional \$1,913 towards their registration fees, assuming that this was not a barrier to participation and membership numbers remained steady. The current average registration fee is approximately \$250, so this would represent an increase more than 7.5 times current fees.

Volunteering is a vital, and rewarding experience, hence why it remains a significant part of Queensland, and Australian culture. **However, there is no other industry which has such a reliance on volunteers to operate than the sporting industry.**

The benefits of volunteering

The benefits of volunteering have been well researched, and there is unlikely to be anything new provided by Little Athletics Queensland that is not already known. For this reason, we will keep our response brief in this section. Formal responses were provided by some of our affiliated clubs to support our submission where this question was asked. A summary of their identified thoughts include:

- Connection with other volunteers and their community
- Seeing athletes achieve their goals
- Learning
- Supporting children's interests and show they are worth our time and effort (act of love)
- Returning the favour after previously being an athlete
- Useful to put on a resume
- Self-satisfaction
- 'Someone has to do it' to avoid the club folding

"I love the club. I know my kids wouldn't enjoy the sport as much at a much larger club and as such I work hard to keep ours going."

Amanda - Centre Manager, Beaudesert Little Athletics



Why is there is a critical shortage of volunteers within the sport?

Little Athletics Queensland has consulted with our member clubs on several occasions to try and understand and solve this important challenge. While the list of reasons that people don't volunteer could be endless, they can be summarised by 5 key areas:

1. People do not want to, or cannot commit

Sport participation is moving towards informal and low-commitment options as our lives become busier and more varied opportunities arise. The same trend is occurring within volunteering – people cannot, or do not want to commit to being involved every week, or in a formal role.

2. Lack of confidence or lack of skills

Even though most volunteer roles are quite simple, people do not want to give things a go and risk failing. When people fail, they feel silly, and also feel like they have let others down. They can also get criticised by other parents, ironically who are the ones who are not helping themselves, creating further reason to not get involved. These fears exist despite the extensive supply of available resources, workshops and education sessions that are put on by governing bodies, councils, Governments and the private sector to try and help.

3. An assumption that someone else will help

This becomes especially challenging in larger clubs where it does not require *everyone* to help. There is an assumption that someone else will do it, and because the person sitting next to them has not helped recently, then that individual feels as though they do not need to either.

4. Volunteering can cost a lot of time and money, plus offer 'no way out'

With a lack of volunteers, those who do help can often be caught in the same role, helping every single week, for several years. This stops people from even volunteering once to begin with. At a recent club AGM, the committee asked repeatedly for new members to join the committee, while parents stared blankly back at them. Parents knew that the committee were setting up the field each week, packing it away, and being at every function. Most of the committee members had also been in their role for more than 5 years, presenting the perception of a high level of ongoing commitment being required, even if the roles did not require it. Following the formal meeting, three individual parents came up to the President to say that they were willing to help but could not commit to a full role on the committee.



5. The regulatory environment presents significant risk for volunteers.

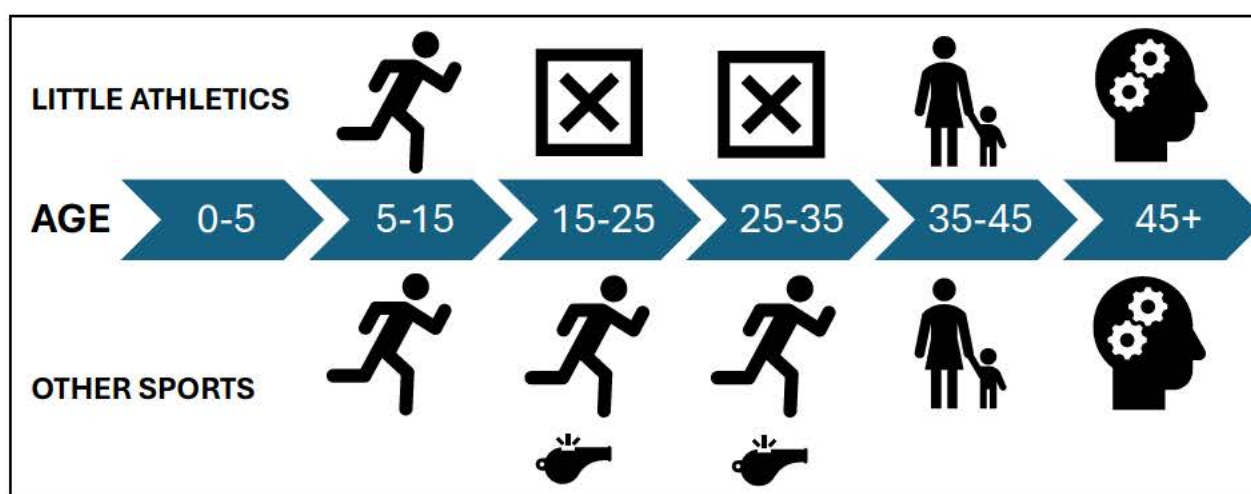
As evidenced by the willingness for parent volunteers to assist at a weekly club meet, people are generally happy to help in a low-commitment role where the risk is low. However, as our society's regulatory framework has increased, committee members are increasingly being treated as employees. Committee members now have:

- a duty to take on governance responsibilities the same as company directors,
- legal requirements to comply with child safety regulations,
- extensive duties related to minimising injury or property damage risks imposed by insurance obligations,
- compliance requirements from councils as facility owners.

While these are of course important, they present personal risk for volunteers, often who are just trying to help but lack the appropriate skills to truly understand this complicated framework. And if they were to get something wrong, a volunteer can be held personally liable, risking their personal time and wealth, potentially even ending up in jail.

Additionally, none of these duties are 'fun', nor the reason they wanted to help in the first place. Going back to the benefits of volunteering noted earlier in this submission, volunteers are there to help their children participate in Little Athletics, not be bedded down in filling out lengthy legal compliance documents.

Little Athletics also has a notable structural challenge we are working to try and address. Typical involvement in the sport starts as an athlete, ending by the age of 17. Athletes then leave their club and if they choose to continue in the sport (of which many do not), they join a separate senior athletics club where the sport shifts to become a personal training and competition structure without the connection to a club. Unfortunately, most athletes drop out of the sport by their mid-20s. Their next engagement with the sport is as a parent, typically in the person's mid-30s by which time they have often moved house and had a 20-year disconnect with the sport. This affects the ability to form strong personal connections to their club, where volunteers can often begin in other sports.



What will happen if nothing changes?

To put it simply, community sport will cease to exist.

Little Athletics Queensland has seen over 21 clubs fold over the past 10 years, with all except one due to being unable to form a committee¹. Most of these clubs have been in rural Western and North Queensland, however it has started to spread to metropolitan areas over the past few years. In June 2024, our largest club of 507 members, Ipswich were forced to adjourn their AGM and hold a secondary meeting after no-one stepped up to take on the role of President. The same thing occurred at Toowoomba Little Athletics (223 members). In both situations, these clubs are the central hub of the sport within their communities of approximately 250,000 people with only small, outlying clubs nearby. Ross River, one of two clubs in Townsville recently faced a similar issue in February 2025. While all three clubs were lucky to have someone put up their hand to be President, they did it reluctantly which is never conducive to an ongoing, positive experience.

Little Athletics clubs that have folded since the 2014/15 season				
Central QLD	North QLD	Western QLD	South East QLD	Darling Downs & Border Districts
Boyne Tannum (Gladstone)	Marlin Coast (Cairns)	Dalby	Colleges (Ipswich)	Border Blues (Tenterfield)
Yeppoon	Charters Towers	Dirranbandi	Forest Lake	Byron Bay
Anakie	Cairns	Tara	Goodna*	Pittsworth
	Ravenshoe		Mt Tarampa	Texas
	Wulguru (Townsville)		Ropehill (Lockyer Valley)	Toowoomba South

Once these clubs disappear it will be close to impossible to see them return, losing the vital community hub that these clubs play. They are leaseholders of school or council facilities which subsequently fall into disrepair and children stop being physically active.



¹ Goodna closed due to repeated facility flooding

Many clubs are now no longer operating full service canteens, which is their primary source of income (outside of membership fees) because no-one is willing to volunteer to help. This also negatively affects the member experience, resulting in further declining membership and participation in the sport.

Little Athletics is a sport that can be easily supported within small, remote communities. Facility requirements are minimal with a grass oval and a sandpit being the bare minimum requirements. Additionally, no opponents are required to play against, which is evidenced by some of our clubs having less than 20 members. This means that in some circumstances, Little Athletics is the only sport in a small, rural town, and if it disappears, can be the only activity keeping the community together.

Alongside gymnastics and swimming, Little Athletics also plays a vital role in being the foundation for movement in children. Children learn the fundamental skills of running, jumping, throwing, rolling and walking, which are central to all other sport. The positive impact the sport provides to society as a whole is evidenced by the [Little Athletics Australia Hall of Fame honour roll](#) where numerous high-profile individuals across athletics, sport more broadly, entertainment and business have commenced their life journey through Little Athletics.

Little Athletics also plays a crucial role towards developing athletes for Olympic and Paralympic Games, especially in the leadup to Brisbane 2032. Six of the seven athletics Paris Olympic medallists started their sporting journey in Little Athletics, and without volunteers helping them along their journey, Australia would not enjoy the global sporting success we pride ourselves on.



Proposed Suggestions

There is no one solution to solving the challenges with decreasing volunteerism in Queensland, and more specifically for community sport. The following suggestions are brief and should be used as thought bubbles as part of a broader range of changes which would need to start making a change.

1. Provide tax incentives for volunteers

Reducing tax bills is an initiative that speaks to everyone, no matter their income level. Higher earners, who generally have white-collar administrative and governance experience will be incredibly beneficial to improving the governance of sport. Equally, lower income earners who need to save every additional dollar would be more willing to help. This system would require additional administration and presents a potentially complex regulatory framework, but we believe is worth exploring.

2. Remove compliance obligations for volunteer-based organisations

If volunteers are able to focus their time and energy on the tasks they want to complete and not spending all of their time on compliance obligations, they will be more likely to take on some of the necessary administrative tasks. Some clear caveats and a robust legal framework would be required, but if sporting clubs can operate under the premise of 'volunteers trying their best' then it would enable volunteers to focus their time and energy on getting kids engaged in sport, as opposed to the tiresome committee tasks. This dynamic may also create a culture shift to basic-level volunteering, where members understand that volunteers are trying their best, and things are not perfect, resulting in less criticism and a willingness to help themselves.

3. Provide additional funding to State Sporting Organisations (SSO's) to invest in shared services

"The rising costs of running local sporting events mean volunteers are now responsible for far more than just helping on the field. They're handling everything from marketing and grant writing to legal matters, insurance, and conflict resolution. They are also seeking fundraising opportunities and scouting for sponsors – which in turn means more time given up volunteering."

Hope - Centre Manager, Tamborine Mountain Little Athletics

Little Athletics Queensland's draft 2025-2027 Strategic Plan outlines a strategy to investigate a shared service model for club delivery. This would allow LAQ to employ a singular skilled individual to handle responsibilities and tasks across multiple clubs; for example, a specialised grant writer, or marketing coordinator, or complaints manager. This however can only occur with appropriate funding from the Government, otherwise the costs just get passed back onto the members which is unsustainable (as noted earlier in this submission).

4. Gain corporate support to provide incentives for volunteers

Utilising the power of private industry, co-funding a state sponsored volunteer recognition and rewards system could have some significant benefits to end user organisations. [parkrun provides a discounted shirt](#) for volunteers who assist on a certain number of times and is worn with pride for those who achieve the milestone. parkrun only survives with the support of corporate sponsors, but a similar volunteer recognition and reward system, funded by large Australian businesses would be sure to generate positive publicity for the business, and reward people who volunteer their time.

We do not need more education programs and workshops

What is clear is that more education programs and workshops are not required. There is already an abundance of resources, but volunteers are choosing not to engage in them. For administrators these programs are seen as an easy win and allow organisations to say that *“the training is there, but you have not engaged in it”*. Online learning has made these workshops more abundant than ever, yet the problem of volunteer participation is continuing to worsen, proving they are not serving their purpose.

Instead, we must identify ideas that will actually result in **more volunteers on the ground**, as opposed to **more volunteers undergoing training**.



Conclusion

Like all community sports, Little Athletics has a heavily reliance on volunteer labour, one which cannot simply be replaced with paid workers. There are simply not enough people, nor enough money in the system to replace them, and volunteering does bring a positive sense of community which is one of the things that makes our Australian sporting system so enjoyable to be involved in. While low-level and immediate volunteering to assist is not too problematic, finding people to step up consistently, and for roles that could be considered the domain of paid work is becoming increasingly challenging.

A lot can be learned from the parkrun model, where a smaller number of paid staff take on the administrative duties, leaving local event volunteers to focus purely on the simple tasks, however this is not the way the Australian sporting system has been historically set up. A change to this structure now would involve reshaping over 100 years of culture which may prove a bridge too far, however, if it were to be used as a base, some positive improvements could be made.

What is clear though, is that without meaningful support from Government, we risk losing our local sporting clubs that are vital components of our community. This is not just some projection either, it has been proven to be the case with 20 Little Athletics clubs in Queensland closing in the past 10 years alone, purely because people do not want to join the committee.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of community sport, and we all need to do more to drive meaningful change.

Contact

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our submission further, assist the Queensland Government in conducting pilot programs, or to engage in additional roundtables and forums.

To reach Little Athletics Queensland, please contact our Chief Executive Officer directly.

Christopher Davis

Chief Executive Officer

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



Appendix 1: Club responses towards the submission

Formal replies made by Little Athletics Queensland affiliated clubs to support this submission.

Beauresort Little Athletics

The crucial role that volunteers play in our sport.

Volunteers keep the cost of our sport affordable for parents. If committee positions became paid then the fees would blow out to cover that and we would then move from one of the cheaper sports to easily the most expensive

Why do people volunteer? What are they getting out of it.

Personally I volunteer because I love the club. I know my kids wouldn't enjoy the sport as much at a much larger club and as such I work hard to keep ours going.

Why aren't people stepping up to help?

I have already started conversation with parents regarding committee positions opening up next season as families move out and move on. I get told a lot "I'm happy to help when I can but I don't want an official title" if everyone had that mentality we wouldn't have a club. This is also the reason we have committee burn out- because when we need it now one steps up!

What happens if nothing changes.

Due to family issues this last few weeks, we were facing no one to run our canteen. My already overworked committee were scrambling to keep it going. I put my foot down and said 'no! If another parent doesn't step up then we won't have a canteen for the rest of the season'. I ended up renting this on Facebook, and I had 4 parents and 2 community members step up. If nothing changes, sport will not be as we know it, it will be run by paid officials and I doubt it would be cheap.

What ideas do we have to solve/help it?

I opened up my canteen position to the wider community. I said the person needed a blue card as well. There are quite a few retired and semi-retired people with the time and resources to help us out. Perhaps if there was a government kick back with pension support we could tap into this section of the community... People with time, knowledge, skills and a need to feel useful and like they belong?

Thanks,

I hope we can find solutions 😊

Amanda O'Shannessy
Center Manager
Beauresort Little Athletics

Tamborine Mountain Little Athletics

The team and I have spoken and provided answers to the questions listed. Hopefully this helps with your submission and please let me know if you require anything else.

1. The crucial role that volunteers play in our sport.

Volunteers are the backbone of Little Athletics, particularly in regional centre's where resources are often limited, and the same people tend to step up time and time again.

Without volunteers, our kids wouldn't have the opportunity to compete, develop skills, and enjoy the sport. From setting up the track to coaching, recording results, officiating, and just helping manage the kids, volunteers ensure events run smoothly and help foster a sense of community that keeps the sport alive.

2. Why do people volunteer? What are they getting out of it.

Many people volunteer because they want to support their children, stay involved in their community, and ensure local sports thrive.

In regional areas, volunteering often goes beyond just one sport—many parents contribute to multiple activities, from netball and rugby league to dance and school fundraising. They do it because they care, and while it can be exhausting, the reward comes from seeing kids grow in confidence, make friendships, and develop a lifelong love of sport.

It also creates strong social connections for the volunteers themselves.

3. Why aren't people stepping up to help?

We believe there are many answers to this question, including the following:

- **Life Is Busier Than Ever:** Many families juggle work, travel, school commitments, and other responsibilities. Volunteering often falls to the bottom of the priority list.
- **The Same People Always Step Up:** In smaller communities, it's often the same group of parents volunteering across multiple sports, school committees, and fundraising events. Over time, this can lead to burnout, and these dedicated volunteers feel they deserve a break.
- **Technology Has Made Us More Passive:** While it connects us, technology has also made it easier to sit back and assume someone else will step up. It's easy to be involved online without physically showing up.
- **Lack of Awareness or Confidence:** Some parents don't volunteer because they don't know what's required, worry they don't have the skills, or assume they won't be needed.

4. What happens if nothing changes.

If volunteer numbers continue to decline, events in regional areas will be harder to run, increasing pressure on those who always step up.

Kids may miss out on opportunities to compete, and without enough hands-on deck, the quality of the experience will suffer. In smaller towns, where sports play a huge role in community connection, the impact could be even greater, leading to disengagement from both children and parents and ultimately a closure of a club.

5. What ideas do we have to solve/help it?

While encouraging more volunteers is important, we also need to address the rising costs and increasing pressure placed on local clubs and volunteers. Government funding needs to be increased for national and state sporting bodies, who can then pass these funds down to local centres through writing grants, sponsorship assistance, and better offers on essential resources such as equipment, merchandise, and coaching.

The rising costs of running local sporting events mean volunteers are now responsible for far more than just helping on the field. They're handling everything from marketing and grant writing to legal matters, insurance, and conflict resolution. They are also seeking fundraising opportunities and scouting for sponsors – which in turn means more time given up volunteering.

In a perfect world, we'd have volunteers with these skills, but the reality is that these are the same people who already have full-time jobs, family commitments, and other responsibilities.

How State Sporting Bodies Can Help:

- Provide More Support & Resources: Offer free training, assistance with securing sponsors including pulling together a sponsor proposal, writing grants, and managing legal and insurance requirements.
- Offer Gifts & Recognition for Volunteers: Small incentives such as free event tickets, merchandise, or even discounts on club fees would help acknowledge their efforts and encourage more participation.
- Deliver Marketing & Promotional Assets: Ready-made digital and print materials for local centres to use, saving volunteers time and effort.
- Improve Systems & Technology: Invest in better competition management systems that reduce manual workload and make events easier to run with fewer people.

By lightening the load on volunteers and ensuring that funding flows down to local centres in meaningful ways, we can keep community sport sustainable, accessible, and enjoyable for everyone.

<ends>

Regards,
Hope Kerslake | Centre Manager

Redcliffe Little Athletics

Crucial role of volunteers:

Committee

- perform the administrative duties of the centre
- organise events
- liaising with families, parent bodies and local councils.

Coaches

- athlete development

Officials

- delivering events for athletes to compete
- sufficient helpers ensures events can be run safely

Fundraising

- sourcing sponsors, raffle prizes, grants.
- organising canteen stock, preparing food and food sales

Why people volunteer:

Overwhelming response from parents saying they volunteer because they love seeing the athletes enjoying themselves and watching the athletes achieve their goals/PBs.

Other responses included:

- Socialising with friends / Meeting new parents and athletes
- Returning the favour (as a previous athlete)
- Self satisfaction of their own achievements

Frustrations with volunteering:

There were three main complaints from those that volunteer regularly:

1. The number of parents that choose never volunteer, and
2. The amount of time required to volunteer at events (Friday nights, carnivals etc)
3. Unruly and uncontrollable athletes, primarily belonging to parents who refuse to volunteer

Other frustrations felt by the committee included:

- Parents dropping athletes and not staying
- Constant follow up regarding the parent's financial responsibilities
- People thinking we're getting paid to run the centre and then get angry if something isn't done on time/to their standard
- Difficult to find time to train new parents on Friday nights as there are usually other tasks requiring attention. Parents won't turn up to training sessions outside of Friday nights.

Why people never volunteer:

There were a variety of reasons why parents said they chose not to volunteer.

- No interest
- Have other young children to supervise
- Disability
- Only there to watch their child/ren
- Too tired after working all day

Why people don't step up:

Again there were a variety of reasons why our regular volunteers don't step up to the next level of officiating and/or committee:

- No interest
- Don't want to be judged by other parents
- Don't want to deal with rude/annoying parents
- No Time
- Kids in other sports that they are involved in
- Bad experiences in the past

What happens if nothing changes:

A few things that we have needed to implement this year and potentially next season include:

- No results for athletes on nights where only one parent has volunteered to help. A single parent is not able to safely and correctly run events. Athletes are still able to participate in events, however no measures will be taken/recorded.
- The canteen will be closing next season.
- Coaching may not be able to be offered next season.
- The handful of key committee members taking on additional roles results in tasks being missed, completed late or of a lesser quality.
- Volunteers become burnt out and leave

Ideas to solve the issues:

- Tax incentives for volunteers, especially allowing volunteers to claim expenses on tax
- Offering payment for work done – e.g. line marking, maintenance
- Financial assistance/incentives to for those that volunteer “above and beyond”.

Maleny Little Athletics

Please find Maleny LAC's responses to your questions below:

Why do people volunteer? What are they getting out of it?

- Connection with others
- Learning
- Supporting children's interest and communicate they are worth our time and effort (act of love)
- Useful to put on a resume
- Feel good about yourself by giving back
- Someone has to do it (not wanting a club/service to cease to exist)

Why aren't people stepping up to help?

- The cost possibly both time and money
- Worry or anxious won't know what to do/be any good – lack of confidence
- Not feeling valued or included (stop volunteering)
- Just don't want to
- Shy
- Not sure how to get involved
- Worry if you do a little the expectation will increase (eg you'll have to take on a bigger role)

What ideas do we have to solve/help it?

- Start young @ Maleny older athletes help with setting and packing up, canteen, fundraising, promo material etc. Encourage this including training older athletes in coaching/officiating.
- Clear and explicit description of what roles can be undertaken (including things that can be done at home). And reassurance that it is ok to just do one small job, there will be no pressure to take on more.
- Incentives - For example, at parkrun there is an automatic thank you for volunteering email with the number of times you have volunteered. After a certain amount you earn a volunteer shirt etc (10, 25, 50, 250 etc). Getting the thank you email & racking up a number of volunteer efforts is rewarding & can make it a bit more of a challenge, especially if you can earn badges or merch. It's also a great motivator for the kids.
- Highlight the benefits for the organisation, its members and also the volunteers themselves.
- Volunteer Levy (refundable once a certain number of hours has been contributed).
- Training to alleviate worry about not knowing what to do.
- Thanks (token gift, celebration (morning tea etc) public acknowledgment (with consent, as some people don't like the attention)

Yours in athletics

Amanda Edwards
Secretary/Team Manager
Maleny LAC

Appendix 2: Strategic Planning Feedback

During development of Little Athletics Queensland's 2025-2027 Strategic Plan, workshops were held across the state. The question of 'how can we achieve Objective #4 – Increase our Volunteer Numbers' was brainstormed. A summary of responses is below.

4. Increasing our Volunteer Numbers

Personal Approach

- **Just ask - it's hard to say "no"**
- **Personally thank and acknowledge the help**
- **Lead by example**
- **Ask them face-to-face**
- Personal approach to recruitment
- Physically show them what needs to be done
- **Be supportive of people and provide a personal approach**

Alternative Sources of Volunteers

- **Encourage older athletes to be involved in younger athlete coaching**
- **Tap into local volunteering organizations (e.g., Volunteering QLD, nursing homes)**
- **Engage older athletes to help in place of competitions**
- Talk to training providers and schools about including Little Athletics in the Certificate in Active Volunteering or Cert III in Fitness
- **Create themed weekends (e.g., Grandparents weekend, "Thank a Volunteer" weekend)**
- **Pay for specialist coaches to attend**
- Centres should employ and pay coaches

Volunteer Programs

- Parent levy
- Introduce volunteer membership
- Host a regional volunteer recognition function
- Mentoring
- Financial incentive
 - Increase fees to get money back
 - Parent levy
- Develop a volunteer rewards system (e.g., free dinners)

- Promote positive volunteering, as opposed to negative penalties
- Paying for training courses
- **Volunteer roster**

Marketing

- **Launch an LAQ marketing campaign:**
 - "Many hands make light work"
 - "We're all volunteers"
- **Communicate the values of volunteering**
- Educating the life skills of built through LA's. Promote this to the parent to 'get involved'
- **"Family, fun, fitness → you're needed too"**
- Use Centre-generated content for volunteering promotion
- Show potential volunteers how easy it is to get involved

Structuring Roles

- **Be specific on what is needed**
- **Build roles to fit their skills**
- Break tasks down as small as possible (time e skills)
- Break it down into smaller tasks
- **Put people in the right positions**
- Use assistants to share the load
- Start with small volunteer tasks
- **Early identification of, and empowerment of age managers**
- **Put a knowledgeable person on each event**
- Need to increase the number of qualified people in admin positions

Volunteer Coordinators

- **Encourage a Volunteer Coordinator role in Centres, and ensure they're the right person**
- **Introduce a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator role**
- Introduce a dedicated role to coordinate/greet new volunteers
- Organize catch-up training/networking sessions specific for Volunteer Coordinators