

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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The Pacific Islands Council of Qld (PICQ) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland. Volunteering is the heart of Pacific Islands Council of Qld, a community organisation that is tasked to be a voice for all people who have a heritage from the Pacific Islands and reside or are in Qld. PICQ is managed by volunteers who are full time or part time volunteers to manage the organisation and run community focused events, projects and initiatives. PICQ was formed in 2008 by Pacific Islands community leaders. This inquiry provides the opportunity for PICQ to tell its story of how it has operated throughout the years with its volunteers.

Pacific Islands Council of Qld is a community organisation of people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities and locations. All our organizational and individual members volunteer their time and resources to PICQ and their communities, clubs and churches. At the outset, this submission states that volunteering is part of our members' cultural norm and is not considered as volunteering. The cultural backgrounds that we represent consider volunteering as more than a transactional way of life. For most cultures from the Pacific Islands whose ways are imbedded in communal way of living, that cultural norm is what people bring into the western ways of volunteering. Volunteering is more than giving a few hours of your week as a volunteer because one is required to for professional and personal development, social security benefits, and experience (for our young people). For Pacific people, unpaid work is a service and obligation to the people they are serving. There is a lot of investment not only in monetary terms but in relationship and kinship building, in enhancing and maintaining culture and language and for the collective good of the community/ society.

Since migrating to Qld, most of our Pacific Islands community members have volunteered in one way or another in their church, school, clubs, cultural groups and other services or non-government organisations. The challenges faced by our volunteers are like those that are faced by mainstream volunteers. These include the transactional nature of most of the organisations that have the capacity to take on volunteers and train them. In the need for exercising good governance on volunteering management, the organisations end up losing the volunteers due to the very constricting governance measures that volunteers, and their managers do have to work around. There is too much paperwork for little reward to the volunteers. The other challenge is the lack of cultural sensitivity of staff and managers that manage their volunteers from other diverse backgrounds. Most volunteer managers are people of dominant or mainstream cultures who most of the time have no cultural competency and make volunteers feel out of place in workplaces. It is critical that those organisations that have volunteers in their services or organisations need to be trained on cultural competency and that organisations should not be allowed to recruit volunteers until they have been certified to take on volunteers from diverse communities.



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The State of Volunteering in Qld report¹ indicate that volunteering is a key part of the Qld society. The research not only reported the monetary value of volunteering but also the societal benefits of volunteering. The research although is broad in the findings, it would be beneficial to Qld if there was in depth findings on the numbers of volunteer run organisations as compared to the non-volunteers run groups and how retention of volunteers was done by the varying organisations.

The lack of data on the actual costs for the volunteer who is below the poverty line or those who are in vulnerable positions makes it difficult for community organisations that are managed by volunteers to attain the much-needed resources to carry out the coordination and management roles for their organisations. The Qld government needs to support the research on the costs for volunteering of those who are from diverse backgrounds and that it should also include the reasons people from diverse backgrounds volunteer, the transactional and non-transactional attributes of CALD volunteers, the personal resources that the CALD volunteers use when volunteering, the monetary values of the attributes and the restrictive governance measures that are contributing to the decline of volunteers. There needs to be more support provided to volunteer managed organisations than those that are not. Research on how Qld volunteers can benefit from volunteering in the long term. These could be in the form of people's volunteer time being remunerated through long-term benefits is needed.

As an organisation that is managed by volunteers, PICQ is often taken for granted that the organisation's volunteers will carry out the service or support with little or no resources from services and governments. There is also often the notion from people who work for governments that the community organisations/groups that are managed by volunteers will step in to do the community support always. In addition, there is a narrative, that grants should just be made available so that community organisations/groups can step up to support. The grants unfortunately, don't consider the mammoth costs to the individuals who are volunteering their time and resources to plan, develop, Implement and acquit programs and projects. Some Government grants also don't allow for administrative costs so volunteer managed organisations/groups end up having to financially pay for the costs of administrative resources. For the public servant who has public funds at their disposal it is easy to impose strict guidelines on grants that are meant to assist community organisations with their projects and events. Unfortunately, what happens is the volunteer managed organisations and community groups' volunteers end up forking out more of their personal resources. This is also a contributing factor on why people don't want to volunteer because they are aware of the financial burdens volunteering costs individuals and families.



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There is little support provided to community organisations of diverse backgrounds that are managed by volunteers. It is critical that Volunteers Qld consider running focused programs for CALD community organisations that are run by volunteers.

The mindset of government services and departments of volunteer managed community organisations/ groups needs to change. With the ever growing need to have whole of governments and whole of society collaborations, it is important that Qld considers changing the narratives of the past to ensuring that the status and recognition together with the much-needed resources for volunteer managed community organisations/groups is elevated so that our volunteer managed organisations/groups are taken care of better.

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1. State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report - <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/State-of-Volunteering-in-Queensland-2024-Report>.