


Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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1. The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State;

As a proud member of the Queensland State Emergency Service we save the State and local governments hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. The initial outlay by the local and State governments should be seen as an investment not as a burden. SES volunteers contribute their own time, across the state this equates to a staggering amount of hours. When the SES is needed to perform it's allocated functions, such as search (assisting QPS), rescue, preparedness activities and storm damage this is done for the most part by volunteers, who should be well equipped and well trained to perform the role. Sadly this is not always the case. Training products and the training regime is lack-luster. The regional and State staff whose job it is to support the volunteers, groups and units, can at times can be very inconsistent and appear to have virtually no accountability for their work outputs.

For me personally the reward is knowing that after a job I have made a difference to somebody and to me that feels good, hence I have been an SES volunteer for just over 34 years. The SES organisation does not provide (for the most part) recognition or acknowledgement of jobs well done.

2. The views of volunteers, prospective volunteers and the volunteering sector on the current barriers to volunteering, including excessive legislative and regulatory burdens and other restrictions adversely limiting active volunteers;

The current burdens to volunteering are naturally financial. Over 20 years ago it cost a SES volunteer about \$2000 a year to be a volunteer, I am not sure currently how much the cost of fuel, extra non-supplied equipment (torches, pocket knives and knee pads amongst other things), time off work and other expenses would add up to, but for those who are already struggling this cost is a deterrent.

The culture within some areas of the SES is toxic, for a brand new volunteer this is off-putting. As there is no standards for the buildings that we call our "sheds" can be very off putting to those who this matters to. I heard a story that several female members at the Runaway Bay group were in such disarray at the state of the female toilets they were considering not coming back after their first night. Another Group does not even have a toilet in the building and must use the council public toilet in the park adjacent to their building. This can be detrimental to the new volunteer as nothing screams we will look after you because you matter when something as simple as a toilet can not be included in a building.

In the SES there is a lot of red tape. The SES Doctrine tells us how we are supposed to conduct ourselves, how we must be activated, who can activate us, what our team composition must be and how we are going to complete the task and then report on it. In the training world the Standards for RTO's (2015) and training procedures define who will train what they will train, how they will train, who can receive the training and how it is recorded. There is a lot of red tape that in truth was put in place to keep volunteers safe. In some cases this has gone too far and in other cases there still is not enough governance around the documentation.

In my SES group one of the largest limiting factors is the vehicles that we use/ My local government supplies tradies ute as response vehicles. These can fit 4 people reasonably comfortably 5 at a squeeze. My group currently has 2 vehicles, which means that following the

doctrine regarding activations we can have only 10 members active at any one time (unless the volunteers break doctrine and use their own vehicle). At my group currently we have over 40 active members. It is soul destroying when you have made arrangements to attend a call out usually with 10 or 20 minutes notice only to be told that the cars are full.

3. The current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations and their recommendations for addressing challenges and improving the volunteering experience;

Tax incentives for volunteers would help to offset some of the expenses that volunteers incur.

For the SES, maybe look at a different structure to the training where new members are able to participate operationally with some limited course work for example an introduction course or designated as level 1. Further on in their SES career they can complete an operator course or level 2 to become fully proficient in the associated skills and knowledge. Level 3 for expert or trainer or high risk operator etc... This would allow new members the opportunity to participate earlier in a restricted capacity as well as maintaining a low profile for organisational risk. This would also (if done correctly) address the volume of training issue that the SES faces as frankly our training and the training system is non-compliant when measured against the Standards for RTO's 2015.

The SES are not compliant with the legislation regarding return to work. The volunteer (who is engaged with a volunteer organisation) is required to provide a medical clearance to return to work in their volunteer capacity. The volunteer also must also have their treating medical practitioner complete a 11 page work suitability/capacity form before being allowed to attend to their duties as a volunteer. The Workplace Health and Safety legislation and the rehabilitation clauses state that volunteers do not need to provide medical certificates or work capacity statements to act as a volunteer. This has driven several good volunteers away from the SES and I believe makes a mockery of the volunteer as the service is unable to follow legislation. What a fantastic message to send to volunteers about how valued their contributions are.

Initially I was motivated to join the SES as a 16 yr old as it promised adventure and you got to do some pretty cool stuff. As I have matured I have come to realise that mateship and camaraderie plays an important part of showing up every week to training and attending activations. I also enjoy the feeling that I have done something to help out another person, who is in a less fortunate position than I am currently, this makes me feel good about myself and the SES organisation.

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;

I find that on the whole SES members are very accommodating and incredibly inclusive. Existing volunteers may be a little stand offish at first as statistically 90% of new members will leave within 5 years and after 1 year we can hope to retain less than 30% of applicants. This must change. Hence in the above statements I have spoken about a different approach to training to allow new members to get out on jobs faster, but with some minimal training. I am of the opinion that nothing builds teams doing something worthwhile while feeling uncomfortable (soaking

wet, a bit cold, too hot etc...), the stories that this generates and the bonding that goes with the experience is quite remarkable, this is how you can improve the retention rate for new volunteers.

In the State of Queensland there are a plethora of volunteering opportunities. We have started to use a strategy of having a recruiting night prior to joining up as a volunteer. This is to explain the induction and onboarding process as well as to provide information about the SES at the local level. This has seen retention rates rise. I would like to see the State government provide funding for an annual campaign to target potential volunteers and get them excited about what they could achieve in the SES and how to get involved. Other states have government funded marketing campaigns, why don't we?

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

State provides staff to allegedly support the volunteer, radios and uniform items/ Local councils supply over 80% of the funding to keep groups active. These stats will fluctuate as different LGA's view the SES differently and provide funding inconsistently across the State.

I understand that the funding model was looked at fairly recently in the past. As a volunteer executive it is a source of frustration that you effectively have 2 masters, The SES hierarchy and the local council. If we are indeed the QLD SES wouldn't it be better to have the State government levy the existing moneys spent on SES and provide that funding from the State of QLD giving only 1 master for the local volunteer executive to report too.

SES, just prior to leaving QFES had an uplift for staff positions. It would appear to me that many of these positions are filled with people who have no idea about volunteerism and what it means to support the volunteers. I would go as far to say that I have seen no discernible difference to my volunteering experience as a result of these positions. I said at the time that every position must have an outcome (s) that are measurable and relevant to the volunteer. I do suggest that this was an exercise in kingdom building not to support the volunteers on the ground.

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;
7. Opportunities to increase emergency response volunteering in Queensland, including how to optimise the engagement, support and integration of volunteers assisting with natural disasters and community recovery;
8. First Nations peoples volunteering, including in remote and discrete communities, and the role of First Nations volunteering in Closing the Gap; and

9. Any other relevant matters, including academic and other diverse sources, and any relevant reports and reviews at the national level and across other states and territories.