

## **Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland**

<b>Submission No:</b>	526
<b>Submitted by:</b>	Lance Mergard
<b>Publication:</b>	Making the submission and your name public
<b>Attachments:</b>	See attachment
<b>Submitter Comments:</b>	

## **Cover Page**

**Title:** Submission to the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

**Date:** 5 March 2025

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### **Disclaimer Statement:**

*This submission, prepared independently, offers personal insights and professional perspectives in response to the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland. It is informed by direct experience in the field and engagement with volunteering.*

*While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, this submission references publicly available reports, academic research, and government documents. Any inadvertent errors or omissions are unintentional, and the author accepts no liability for inaccuracies.*

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*Through this submission, the author reaffirms a commitment to contributing constructively to ongoing discussions on volunteering in Queensland.*

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## **Inquiry's Terms Of Reference**

This submission responds to the 'Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland', addressing each of the nine inquiry points with structured headings and subheadings for clarity.

"The terms of reference call upon the committee to inquire into and report to the Legislative Assembly by 18 September 2025 on:

1. The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State;
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;
3. The current experiences, motivations and challenges for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations and their recommendations for addressing challenges and improving the volunteering experience;
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;
5. The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement;
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."

## **Preamble**

With decades of firsthand experience in Queensland’s volunteering sector—both as a volunteer and as a coordinator—I have witnessed the immense value that volunteerism brings to individuals, communities, and the broader society. Volunteering is more than an act of goodwill; it is a powerful economic driver, a foundation of social cohesion, and a key enabler of personal and professional development. Across Queensland, volunteers play a pivotal role in disaster response, community welfare, environmental conservation, aged care, mental health support, and countless other areas, demonstrating resilience and adaptability in the face of evolving challenges.

Despite these strengths, the volunteering sector faces pressing challenges that, if left unaddressed, could weaken its effectiveness and sustainability. Issues such as declining participation rates, increased compliance burdens, funding insecurity, and the need for better coordination require proactive interventions, strategic investment, and innovative solutions. A failure to address these challenges risks diminishing Queensland’s capacity to mobilize volunteers effectively, particularly in times of crisis and community need.

This writer has chosen to address this submission to provide an evaluation of the state of volunteering in Queensland through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis, integrating:

Personal experience and insights gained from long-term involvement in volunteer participation and coordination.

Academic research and sector reports, offering evidence-based perspectives on best practices and systemic challenges.

Government documentation and policy frameworks, identifying certain current supports and areas for reform.

This submission seeks to highlight key areas that may need further consideration and pinpoint opportunities for sustainable growth and innovation in Queensland’s volunteering sector.

1. “The current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State”
  - 1.1. Volunteering in Queensland is a cornerstone of community resilience, social cohesion, and economic contribution. It enhances the wellbeing of volunteers, strengthens organisations, and supports communities by providing essential services, particularly in crisis response, social care, and disaster recovery. The sector contributes significantly to the state's economy through unpaid labour and fosters civic engagement, personal development, and social inclusion. However, sustaining and expanding Queensland’s volunteer workforce requires strategic investment, policy support, and innovative engagement to address emerging challenges and ensure long-term viability.
    - 1.1.1. Strengths—Volunteering is deeply ingrained in Queensland’s social fabric, contributing over \$4 billion annually (Queensland Government, 2023). Volunteers provide critical support across multiple sectors, including emergency response, healthcare, environmental conservation, and community development.
      - 1.1.1.1. From a personal perspective, the spirit of volunteering is one of Queensland’s greatest assets, fostering resilience, social cohesion, and individual empowerment.
    - 1.1.2. Weaknesses—Despite its strengths, volunteering rates have declined over the past decade, exacerbated by external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainty, and changing lifestyle patterns (ABS, 2022). Many volunteers report feeling undervalued, unsupported, and overburdened with administrative requirements, reducing long-term engagement (McBride, 2019).
    - 1.1.3. Opportunities—Digital volunteering, skills-based volunteering, and corporate partnerships present opportunities for modernising volunteer engagement. Strategic initiatives, such as a state-wide volunteer recruitment campaign, could revitalise participation rates and attract new demographics.
    - 1.1.4. Threats—A shrinking volunteer pool places increased pressure on existing volunteers and organisations, threatening the sustainability of essential services. If unaddressed, this decline could lead to greater reliance on paid services, increasing costs for communities and the state government.

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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”

2.1. Strengths—Queensland has a relatively strong infrastructure for volunteering, supported by well-established networks and organisations that facilitate volunteer engagement. The state government and various non-profit entities actively promote volunteerism through structured programs, funding initiatives, and public awareness campaigns. Additionally, Queensland benefits from a culture of community service, particularly in rural and regional areas where informal volunteering is deeply embedded in social norms. Local communities often rally around common causes, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and support (Queensland Government, 2023).

2.1.1. Furthermore, technological advancements and digital platforms have enhanced volunteer engagement by making opportunities more accessible and streamlining recruitment processes. The rise of online volunteering and hybrid models also allows individuals to contribute without geographical constraints, expanding the pool of available volunteers.

2.2. Weaknesses—Despite its strengths, volunteering in Queensland faces significant barriers, particularly related to excessive bureaucracy. Complex compliance requirements, including extensive background checks, stringent insurance policies, and detailed reporting obligations, act as deterrents for many willing participants. These regulatory demands disproportionately impact smaller organisations that lack dedicated resources to manage the administrative burden (Harten et al., 2020).

2.2.1. In my experience, I have witnessed passionate individuals withdraw from volunteering due to frustrations with red tape. The onboarding process, often lengthy and convoluted, discourages spontaneous or short-term volunteering, which is particularly problematic in times of crisis when immediate support is needed. Additionally, the high level of formalisation can alienate volunteers who prefer more flexible, informal ways of contributing to their communities.

- 2.2.2. Another challenge is the growing disconnect between volunteer expectations and organisational requirements. Many prospective volunteers seek meaningful, hands-on experiences, but rigid policies and excessive training mandates can diminish their enthusiasm. This is especially relevant for younger generations, who may be less inclined to engage if the process appears overly complicated or bureaucratic.
- 2.3. Opportunities—Addressing these barriers presents significant opportunities for improving volunteer engagement and retention. By reducing unnecessary administrative burdens and streamlining regulatory requirements, organisations can make volunteering more accessible and appealing. Potential strategies include:
- 2.3.1. Implementing a tiered compliance system where lower-risk volunteer roles require minimal screening, while high-risk roles maintain necessary safeguards.
- 2.3.2. Providing government financial support and grants to smaller organisations to assist with administrative costs and volunteer management infrastructure.
- 2.3.3. Encouraging non-government philanthropic organisations and grant bodies to recognise volunteer-involving organisations as worthy recipients in their own right is essential. Many volunteer-driven organisations struggle to meet rigid grant criteria that are often designed for larger or more traditional service providers. Greater flexibility in grant eligibility and assessment criteria would ensure that these organisations can access the funding they need to sustain their missions and continue serving their communities effectively.
- 2.3.1. Enhancing recognition programs to acknowledge and reward long-term and high-impact volunteers is essential for fostering a stronger culture of appreciation. Initiatives could include ‘years of service’ certificates, challenge coins, medallions, and official recognition ceremonies that celebrate sustained commitment and contribution. While awards like ‘Volunteer of the Year’ are commendable, they can inadvertently overlook the thousands of volunteers who make equally valuable contributions. A more inclusive and structured approach to recognition would ensure that all dedicated volunteers feel valued and motivated to continue their service.
- 2.3.2. Leveraging digital solutions to simplify paperwork, automate compliance processes, and enhance communication between volunteers and organisations.

- 2.3.3. Additionally, targeted outreach and recruitment programs can encourage participation from underrepresented groups, including younger volunteers, culturally diverse communities, and individuals with disabilities. By fostering inclusive and flexible volunteering opportunities, Queensland can strengthen its volunteer workforce and better address societal needs.
- 2.3.4. All high schools, colleges, and training institutions should integrate volunteering into both academic curricula and practical, hands-on experiences. This could be achieved through in-school programs or partnerships with volunteer-involving organisations, allowing students to engage directly in community service. By embedding volunteering into the education curriculum, students can develop a deeper understanding of its social impact and personal benefits, fostering a lifelong commitment to civic engagement and personal wellbeing.
- 2.4. Threats—Without proactive intervention, existing barriers may continue to exacerbate volunteer shortages, particularly in critical sectors such as aged care, emergency response, and community support services. The increasing perception that volunteering is ‘too complicated’ or time-consuming risks alienating future generations, leading to declining participation rates over time.
- 2.4.1. Moreover, growing economic pressures and shifting work-life dynamics mean that many individuals have less disposable time to commit to unpaid work. If volunteer roles remain overly bureaucratic and rigid, potential volunteers may opt for alternative ways to contribute, such as direct financial donations or informal mutual aid efforts outside of structured programs.
- 2.4.2. A failure to address these issues could have long-term consequences, including increased strain on essential services, reduced community cohesion, and diminished social capital. To mitigate these risks, stakeholders—including government agencies, non-profits, and community leaders—must work collaboratively to create a more flexible, inclusive, and volunteer-friendly environment.
- 2.4.3. By tackling the systemic barriers to volunteering, Queensland can harness the full potential of its civic-minded population and ensure that volunteer efforts continue to play a vital role in supporting communities across the state.

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3. “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”
- 3.1. Volunteering should be inclusive and accessible to all, yet people from diverse backgrounds, genders, age groups, abilities, and locations often face barriers to participation. Challenges such as cultural exclusion, physical accessibility, limited opportunities in regional areas, and rigid volunteer structures can deter engagement. Addressing these issues through inclusive policies, flexible roles, and targeted support can enhance participation, improve accessibility, and create a more diverse and representative volunteer sector that benefits individuals, organisations, and communities alike.
- 3.2. Strengths—Queensland’s multicultural and multigenerational population provides a rich source of potential volunteers. The state has demonstrated success in engaging diverse groups through tailored programs that encourage participation among young people, retirees, and culturally diverse communities (Campbell, 2018).
- 3.2.1. Government initiatives and community-based organisations have developed mentorship and peer-support systems that foster inclusion, particularly for newly arrived migrants, refugees, and indigenous communities. Multilingual resources and community liaison officers have also played a role in reducing barriers for non-English speaking volunteers.
- 3.2.2. Additionally, intergenerational volunteering programs have proven beneficial in strengthening social cohesion and knowledge-sharing across age groups. Schools, universities, and senior citizens' organisations have successfully facilitated programs that allow younger and older volunteers to work together, benefiting both demographics through skill development and social engagement.
- 3.3. Weaknesses—Despite these strengths, many minority groups continue to experience barriers to volunteering. Language difficulties, cultural misunderstandings, and a lack of targeted recruitment efforts hinder participation among migrants and refugees.

- 3.3.1. People with disabilities also face significant accessibility challenges, including physical infrastructure limitations, lack of adaptive equipment, and limited flexible roles that accommodate diverse needs. Even when organisations express a willingness to include volunteers with disabilities, a lack of training and understanding often results in unintentional exclusion (Queensland Government, 2023).
- 3.3.2. Rural and regional communities experience additional logistical challenges, such as limited transport options, fewer available volunteer opportunities, and reduced access to support networks. The reliance on word-of-mouth recruitment in these areas can also unintentionally exclude individuals who are new to the community or who lack established social connections.
- 3.4. Opportunities—There is significant potential to expand and enhance volunteer participation among diverse groups by:
  - 3.4.1. Implementing culturally appropriate volunteer programs that respect and integrate diverse traditions and customs, making volunteering more accessible and comfortable for minority communities.
  - 3.4.2. Strengthening multilingual communication and providing resources in multiple languages to assist non-English speaking volunteers.
  - 3.4.3. Improving accessibility measures by ensuring volunteer locations are physically accessible and that roles can be adapted to accommodate different abilities.
  - 3.4.4. Expanding digital volunteering platforms to allow people from remote areas, individuals with mobility challenges, or those with time constraints to contribute in flexible ways.
  - 3.4.5. Encouraging collaboration between organisations and culturally diverse community leaders to build trust and improve engagement strategies.
  - 3.4.6. By embracing these opportunities, Queensland can create a more inclusive and representative volunteer workforce, ensuring that all groups have equal access to meaningful volunteer experiences.

3.5. Threats—Without proactive efforts to address these challenges, there is a risk of continued underrepresentation of diverse groups in volunteering. A lack of inclusive policies and targeted outreach can lead to the marginalisation of already disadvantaged communities, exacerbating social inequalities.

3.5.1. If volunteering remains inaccessible or unappealing to minority groups, organisations may struggle to recruit and retain a diverse volunteer base, leading to a homogenous volunteer workforce that does not fully reflect the broader Queensland population. This could weaken community engagement efforts and limit the effectiveness of volunteer programs in addressing diverse community needs.

3.5.2. Additionally, failure to adapt to changing demographic trends may result in declining volunteer rates over time. Younger generations, in particular, may disengage if they perceive volunteering as outdated or unwelcoming to diversity. Ensuring a proactive and inclusive approach to volunteer recruitment is essential for long-term sustainability and the continued strength of Queensland’s volunteer sector.

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4. “The extent, effectiveness, and efficiency of Queensland Government support for the volunteering sector and sustainable opportunities for improvement”

4.1. Queensland Government's Role in Volunteering: The Queensland Government plays a pivotal role in fostering community engagement, driving economic growth, and promoting social cohesion through volunteering. By assessing the current landscape, the government can implement sustainable strategies to enhance volunteer participation, streamline support systems, and ensure long-term sector resilience.

4.2. Strengths—The Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032 (TATSIPCA. 2024).) reaffirms the State Government's commitment to acknowledging, strengthening, and sustaining volunteerism. It provides a structured approach to ongoing volunteer engagement, support, and recognition.

4.2.1. Strategic Frameworks: The QVS 24-32 serves as a guiding framework to enhance the effectiveness, accessibility, and sustainability of volunteering. It aims to:

- 4.2.1.1. Celebrate volunteers' contributions.
- 4.2.1.2. Align policies, programs, and services to better support volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs).
- 4.2.1.3. Foster collaboration between government, community organisations, and the private sector.
- 4.2.2. Economic Contributions: Volunteering is a key economic driver for Queensland. According to Volunteering Australia (2022), every \$1 invested in volunteering yields a \$4.70 return by:
  - 4.2.2.1. Reducing strain on public services, such as healthcare and emergency response.
  - 4.2.2.2. Boosting local economies through volunteer-driven initiatives.
  - 4.2.2.3. Enhancing workforce skills, contributing to economic productivity.
- 4.2.3. Diverse Volunteer Engagement: Government initiatives ensure broad volunteer participation across sectors, including:
  - 4.2.3.1. Disaster response and recovery (e.g., Red Cross, Lifeline, QDCN, SES).
  - 4.2.3.2. Environmental conservation.
  - 4.2.3.3. Community services (e.g., aged care, disability support, homelessness assistance, youth mentoring).
- 4.3. Weaknesses—Despite its strengths, Queensland's volunteering sector faces challenges, including:
  - 4.3.1. Declining Participation Rates: Volunteer engagement fell by 10% from 2020 to 2023 (DLGWV, 2025).
  - 4.3.2. Regulatory and Administrative Burdens: Excessive and uncoordinated requirements deter potential volunteers and strain VIOs.
  - 4.3.3. Funding Limitations: Financial constraints hinder recruitment, training, and retention efforts.

4.4. Opportunities—Queensland can strengthen its volunteering sector through innovative policies, technology integration, and inclusive engagement strategies.

4.4.1. Leveraging Community and Major Events: The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games presents an opportunity to boost volunteerism, with similar efforts applicable to other community and major events (e.g., arts and culture events, music festivals, sports events and endurance sports, food & drink festivals, markets & community fairs, heritage & historical events, literary & book festivals, environmental & sustainability events, tech & innovation events).

4.4.2. Enhancing Emergency Response Volunteering: A structured approach to integrating volunteers in disaster response includes:

4.4.2.1. Expanding the Definition of ‘Disaster’: Disaster response should include not only natural disasters but also mass casualty events, terrorism, biological hazards, and large-scale emergencies.

4.4.2.2. Deployment through formal agreements with state and local governments.

4.4.2.3. Engagement of the Community Recovery Ready Reserve workforce.

4.4.2.4. Collaboration with VIOs such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and QDCN to support evacuation and recovery efforts.

4.4.2.5. Centralising Disaster Response Management: Currently, disaster management and volunteer services fall under multiple government departments, leading to inefficiencies. A single department overseeing the entire disaster management cycle would:

4.4.2.5.1. Streamline volunteer engagement and training.

4.4.2.5.2. Improve coordination and eliminate bureaucratic overlaps.

4.4.2.5.3. Enhance partnerships with local governments and emergency services.

4.4.3. Recognising and Supporting Volunteer Contributions: Efforts should include:

4.4.3.1. Establishing incentive programs for long-term emergency volunteers.

4.4.3.2. Providing mental health and well-being support post-deployment.

- 4.4.3.3. Encouraging diverse participation, including First Nations peoples.
  - 4.5. Threats—Modern challenges require volunteerism to remain adaptable and proactive. Key threats include:
    - 4.5.1. Aging Volunteer Demographics: Over-reliance on older volunteers’ risks sustainability.
    - 4.5.2. Economic Pressures: Financial stress limits volunteer availability.
    - 4.5.3. Time Constraints: Modern work commitments and digital distractions reduce volunteering rates.
  - 4.6. Additionally - Sustainable Strategies for Improvement: To address these challenges, the Queensland Government should:
    - 4.6.1. Simplify regulatory frameworks to reduce barriers to entry.
    - 4.6.2. Provide dedicated funding to VIOs for better volunteer management.
    - 4.6.3. Develop youth engagement programs integrating volunteering into education.
    - 4.6.4. Launch public awareness campaigns on the benefits of volunteering.
    - 4.6.5. Strengthen partnerships between government, non-profits, and private sectors to amplify volunteer program impact.
  - 4.7. By addressing these aspects, Queensland can enhance its volunteering sector’s vitality, ensuring it remains robust and capable of meeting future challenges.
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- 5. “The extent, effectiveness and efficiency of current government support at all levels for the volunteering sector in Queensland and sustainable opportunities for improvement”
  - 5.1. Government support for the volunteering sector in Queensland plays a crucial role in sustaining community engagement, resilience, and social welfare. Support mechanisms exist at local, state, and federal levels, including funding programs, strategic policies, and

regulatory frameworks. While these initiatives provide essential resources and recognition, challenges such as financial instability, administrative complexities, and declining volunteer participation persist. This analysis examines the extent, effectiveness, and efficiency of current government support, identifying sustainable opportunities for improvement to ensure long-term growth and resilience in the sector.

## 5.2. Strengths:

- 5.2.1. Government Funding and Grants: The Queensland Government, through initiatives like the Volunteer Grants Program and the Gambling Community Benefit Fund, provides financial support to volunteer organisations (Queensland Government, 2023).
- 5.2.2. Legislative Framework: Policies such as the Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2017–2020 have provided a strategic vision for volunteer support (Department of Communities, 2020).
- 5.2.3. Emergency and Disaster Response Support: Volunteering Queensland is supported by the government in mobilising volunteers during crises, such as bushfires and floods (Volunteering Queensland, 2022).
- 5.2.4. Recognition Programs: Government-backed initiatives like the Queensland Volunteering Awards promote the value of volunteering and encourage participation (Queensland Government, 2023).

## 5.3. Weaknesses:

- 5.3.1. Funding Gaps and Short-Term Grants: Many government-funded programs operate on short-term funding cycles, creating financial instability for volunteer organisations (Productivity Commission, 2022).
- 5.3.2. Administrative Burden: Compliance requirements and grant applications are often complex and resource-intensive, making it difficult for smaller volunteer organisations to access support (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, 2023).
- 5.3.3. Declining Volunteer Rates: Despite government support, there has been a decline in volunteer participation due to economic pressures and changing social dynamics (Volunteering Australia, 2022).

5.3.4. Limited Rural and Regional Support: Government resources are often concentrated in metropolitan areas, leaving rural and remote volunteer groups with insufficient support (Queensland Council of Social Service, 2022).

#### 5.4. Opportunities:

5.4.1. Sustainable Funding Models: Developing long-term funding strategies and expanding corporate partnerships could enhance financial security for volunteer organisations (Australian Productivity Commission, 2023).

5.4.2. Technology Integration: Government investment in digital platforms could streamline volunteer recruitment, training, and management (Volunteering Queensland, 2023).

5.4.3. Policy Enhancements: Revisiting and updating the Queensland Volunteering Strategy with a focus on post-pandemic recovery could provide a renewed framework for growth (Queensland Government, 2023).

5.4.4. Workplace Volunteering Programs: Expanding incentives for businesses to engage employees in volunteer programs could increase participation rates (Volunteering Australia, 2022).

#### 5.5. Threats:

5.5.1. Economic Constraints: Government budget limitations and competing priorities could reduce funding allocations for volunteer programs (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

5.5.2. Volunteer Fatigue and Burnout: Increased demands on volunteers, especially in disaster response roles, could lead to declining retention rates (Queensland Mental Health Commission, 2022).

5.5.3. Policy Inconsistencies: Changes in government leadership and policies could impact the continuity of volunteer support programs (Australian Policy Institute, 2023).

5.5.4. Aging Volunteer Workforce: A significant portion of volunteers are older Australians, and without sufficient recruitment of younger volunteers, the sector may struggle to sustain itself (Volunteering Australia, 2022).

- 5.6. While the Queensland Government provides general support for the volunteering sector, challenges remain in funding sustainability, accessibility, and volunteer retention. Addressing these through strategic policy updates, increased funding security, and greater technological integration will be essential for ensuring a resilient and effective volunteer sector in Queensland.
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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”

- 6.1. The Brisbane 2032 Games present a unique opportunity to enhance volunteer engagement across Queensland. Historical precedents, such as the Sydney 2000 Olympics, the London 2012 Olympics, and the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, demonstrate that large-scale volunteer programs can leave a lasting legacy. However, without a structured framework, this engagement may be short-lived, failing to translate into long-term community involvement (Australian Sports Commission, 2022; Gold Coast Chaplaincy Report, 2018). A strategic, well-supported legacy volunteer program can ensure that the enthusiasm and skills developed during the Games are harnessed for ongoing civic participation.

6.2. Suggestions

- 6.2.1. Appointment of a Volunteer ‘Tsar’: A critical aspect of ensuring the success of the Legacy Volunteer Program is the appointment of a Volunteer Tsar, an independent leader responsible for championing volunteerism and ensuring program cohesion. This individual should:

6.2.1.1. Not be a politician or public servant to maintain neutrality and credibility.

6.2.1.2. Be a trusted leader within the volunteer sector with experience in large-scale, community-oriented programs.

6.2.1.3. Have autonomy to make strategic decisions, free from bureaucratic red tape.

- 6.2.1.4. Inspire innovation and oversee a dynamic coordinating group tasked with mobilising and supporting volunteers effectively.
- 6.2.2. Establishing a Forward-Thinking Coordinating Group: To ensure agility and efficiency, a Coordinating Group must be established with the following characteristics:
  - 6.2.2.1. A diverse membership, including representatives from community organisations, non-profits, business partners, and the Games oversight body.
  - 6.2.2.2. The ability to act quickly and decisively without excessive bureaucratic constraints.
  - 6.2.2.3. A focus on integrating technology and data to streamline volunteer registration, training, and deployment (Volunteering Australia, 2022).
- 6.2.3. Partnerships with local non-profits to absorb trained volunteers into long-term roles (Volunteering Queensland, 2023).
  - 6.2.3.1. Integrating Chaplaincy into Volunteering: Integrating chaplaincy services into the volunteer framework can further provide support, guidance, care and wellbeing to the public, athletes, staff, and spectators. Chaplains also contribute a well-trained pool of volunteers for ongoing service. Despite its proven value, chaplaincy remains an often-overlooked volunteer resource. Event chaplains have played a key role in past international sporting events, offering pastoral care, emotional support, and crisis response (Hawkins & Sims, 2016). The successful integration of chaplaincy in the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games demonstrated its impact, with chaplains supporting thousands across multiple venues ((SC UK, 2018, Gold Coast Chaplaincy Report, 2018; Whitworth, 2018).
  - 6.2.3.2. Looking Ahead to Brisbane 2032: Incorporating chaplaincy into the Brisbane 2032 volunteer strategy would enhance the volunteer pool during the Games while establishing a long-term network of trained volunteers equipped to serve elsewhere, such as hospitals, disaster response, and community organisations beyond the event.

6.2.4. Implementing a Streamlined Volunteer Management System: Drawing on the success of the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games and the Mud Army during the 2022 floods, a volunteer coordination process should be streamlined and easily accessible, ensuring that volunteers are well-prepared for their roles. Key elements include:

6.2.4.1. Registration: A user-friendly platform for volunteer sign-up and categorisation.

6.2.4.2. Authorisation: Appropriate background checks and clearances for safety and trust.

6.2.4.3. Training: A flexible training framework covering general volunteer skills, emergency response, and sector-specific education.

6.2.4.4. Resourcing: Equipping volunteers with leadership and teamwork skills for long-term civic engagement.

6.2.4.5. Preparation: Orientation sessions, clear expectations, and defined support mechanisms.

6.2.4.6. Deployment: A system for the rapid and flexible deployment of volunteers to meet urgent and ongoing needs (Productivity Commission, 2023).

6.2.5. To maximize the impact of volunteers engaged during the Brisbane 2032 Games, the Queensland Government must implement a comprehensive legacy volunteer program that ensures a seamless transition into long-term civic participation. This initiative should be backed by structured incentives, strategic leadership, and streamlined coordination to foster a thriving volunteer culture beyond the Games. By integrating these elements, Queensland can create a lasting legacy, strengthening community resilience and civic engagement for years to come.

6.2.5.1. Establishing a Legacy Volunteer Program: The Queensland Government should establish a Legacy Volunteer Program that ensures a clear pathway from Olympic volunteering to long-term civic engagement. Key components should include:

6.2.5.2. Structured transition programs to facilitate ongoing volunteer involvement in community initiatives.

- 6.2.5.3. Post-Games incentives to encourage sustained participation, such as recognition awards, accreditation, and skill-building opportunities.
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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”

- 7.1. Queensland faces frequent natural disasters, including floods, bushfires, and cyclones, necessitating a well-prepared and resilient volunteer network. Emergency response volunteers play a critical role in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

However, while natural disasters are often the primary focus of emergency volunteer efforts, the scope of emergency response must be expanded to include other large-scale crises. These include mass casualty events, terrorism, biological hazards (such as biosecurity threats and pandemics), and large-scale community emergencies. In these scenarios, emergency volunteers can also play a vital role, providing logistical support, crisis intervention, medical assistance, and community resilience efforts. Expanding the concept of emergency volunteering beyond natural disasters will ensure Queensland remains prepared for a broader range of threats and enhances the effectiveness of volunteer mobilisation in critical situations.

7.2. Strengths

- 7.2.1. Established Volunteer Networks: Queensland benefits from well-organised volunteer programs such as the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES), State Emergency Service (SES), Rural Fire Service (RFS), and NGOs such as the Red Cross Emergency Services, Lifeline, Salvation Army, QDCN.
- 7.2.2. Community Spirit and Willingness to Assist: The success of the Mud Army during the 2011 and 2022 floods demonstrated Queenslanders’ readiness to volunteer in times of crisis (Volunteering Queensland, 2022).

- 7.2.3. Existing Training Frameworks: Organisations like Volunteering Queensland and the Australian Red Cross offer structured training programs that equip volunteers with disaster response skills (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2021).
- 7.2.4. Government and NGO Collaboration: Partnerships between state agencies, local governments, and non-profits enhance coordination and resource allocation (Productivity Commission, 2023).

### 7.3. Weaknesses

- 7.3.1. Volunteer Fatigue and Retention Challenges: High-intensity emergency response work can lead to burnout, causing difficulties in retaining volunteers long-term (Queensland Mental Health Commission, 2022).
- 7.3.2. Bureaucratic Barriers and Red Tape: Lengthy onboarding processes, background checks, and administrative hurdles can delay volunteer deployment (Productivity Commission, 2023).
- 7.3.3. Limited Integration Across Organisations: Coordination between different volunteer groups is sometimes fragmented, leading to inefficiencies during large-scale disaster responses (Volunteering Australia, 2022).
- 7.3.4. Insufficient Post-Event Support: Volunteers often lack mental health support and recognition programs, reducing motivation for continued participation.

### 7.4. Opportunities

- 7.4.1. Expanding Digital Volunteer Platforms: Implementing a centralised, user-friendly online system for volunteer registration, coordination, and deployment can streamline engagement (Volunteering Queensland, 2023).
- 7.4.2. Flexible and On-Demand Volunteering Models: Offering micro-volunteering opportunities, including episodic and remote roles, can attract a wider range of participants (Australian Red Cross, 2022).
- 7.4.3. Strengthening Corporate Volunteering Partnerships: Encouraging businesses to support employees' participation in emergency response efforts can bolster volunteer numbers (Business Council of Australia, Reed T., Westacott J., 2023)

- 7.4.4. Improved Training and Upskilling Programs: Providing incentives for skill-building, such as formal accreditation in emergency management, could enhance volunteer capability and retention (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, 2021).
- 7.4.5. Greater Mental Health and Well-being Support: Integrating psychological first aid and peer-support networks within volunteer programs can improve long-term engagement (Queensland Mental Health Commission, 2022).

## 7.5. Threats

- 7.5.1. Increasing Frequency and Severity of Disasters: The growing impact of climate change places higher demands on volunteers, potentially overwhelming existing systems (CSIRO, 2022).
- 7.5.2. Volunteer Demographic Shifts: An aging volunteer workforce and declining engagement from younger demographics pose sustainability challenges (Volunteering Australia, 2023).
- 7.5.3. Funding Uncertainty: Inconsistent, erratic and unpredictable funding and grants for volunteer programs and emergency services may limit expansion and innovation. The reality is that every time funding or grants are made available, multiple agencies are forced to compete against each other for limited resources—scrambling for the scarce opportunities that trickle down from well-intentioned funding bodies. This creates an environment where organisations, rather than collaborating for the greater good, are pitted against one another in a relentless struggle for survival.
- 7.5.4. Public Safety and Liability Risks: Volunteers face potential safety hazards, and inadequate legal protections may deter participation (Safe Work Australia, 2023).
  - 7.5.4.1. Additionally, the rising costs of insurance—such as public liability and injury insurance—place a significant financial burden on volunteer-involving organisations, further straining their ability to operate effectively and safely.

## 7.6. Suggestions for Optimising Engagement, Support, and Integration

- 7.6.1. Insurance Assistance Scheme: Create a government resourced Insurance Assistance Scheme where a percentage of the annual insurance premiums for community-oriented volunteer-involving organisations can be accessed.

#### 7.6.2. Streamline Volunteer Onboarding and Mobilisation:

- 7.6.2.1. Develop a fast-tracked, tiered registration process to allow for immediate deployment in crisis situations while maintaining necessary security checks.
- 7.6.2.2. Enhance interoperability between emergency services and volunteer organisations to ensure seamless integration during response efforts.

#### 7.6.3. Increase Training and Incentives

- 7.6.3.1. Offer free or subsidised courses in emergency management, first aid, and disaster response, leadership etc, to equip volunteers with essential skills.
- 7.6.3.2. Provide formal recognition, such as certificates and career development pathways, to encourage long-term participation.

#### 7.6.4. Enhance Support Systems for Volunteers

- 7.6.4.1. Establish post-deployment well-being services, including access to counselling and peer support groups.
- 7.6.4.2. Implement a structured recognition program that includes awards, public acknowledgments, and tangible benefits for volunteers.

#### 7.6.5. Leverage Technology for Coordination and Communication

- 7.6.5.1. Develop a digital platform integrating real-time volunteer deployment, training modules, and disaster alerts to enhance responsiveness.
- 7.6.5.2. Utilise data analytics to track volunteer engagement trends and identify areas for improvement.

#### 7.6.6. Strengthen Community and Corporate Engagement

- 7.6.6.1. Launch targeted recruitment campaigns focusing on younger demographics through schools, universities, and social media platforms.
- 7.6.6.2. Foster corporate partnerships by creating incentives for businesses to support employees in emergency volunteering initiatives.

#### 7.6.7. Ensure Sustainable Funding and Policy Support

- 7.6.7.1. Advocate for long-term government funding dedicated to volunteer emergency services.
- 7.6.7.2. Establish a bipartisan advisory group to oversee policy development and strategic planning for volunteer engagement.
- 7.7. Enhancing emergency response volunteering in Queensland requires a strategic approach that addresses current weaknesses while capitalising on existing strengths and opportunities. By implementing streamlined recruitment, flexible engagement models, improved training programs, and increased mental health support, Queensland can build a sustainable and resilient volunteer network. A well-supported volunteer force will not only strengthen disaster response and recovery efforts but also contribute to long-term community resilience and cohesion.

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## 8. “First Nations peoples volunteering, including in remote and discrete communities, and the role of First Nations volunteering in Closing the Gap”

8.1. First Nations peoples have a long and rich history of volunteering, often embedded in cultural traditions of kinship, community service, and custodianship of Country (AIHW, 2024). In remote and discrete communities, volunteerism plays a vital role in community well-being, disaster response, cultural preservation, and essential service delivery. Additionally, volunteering among First Nations peoples contributes to the broader *Closing the Gap* agenda by fostering employment pathways, improving health and well-being, and strengthening community cohesion (National Indigenous Australians Agency [NIAA], 2022). Despite these benefits, challenges such as logistical barriers, under-resourcing, and systemic exclusion continue to impact the effectiveness of First Nations volunteering efforts.

### 8.2. Strengths

- 8.2.1. Strong Community Bonds and Cultural Traditions: Volunteering aligns with traditional First Nations values of collective responsibility, reciprocity, and mutual support (AIHW, 2021).
- 8.2.2. Existing First Nations-Led Volunteer Programs: Programs such as the Indigenous Rangers Program and community-controlled health organisations demonstrate successful volunteer models (DAWE, 2023).
- 8.2.3. Critical Role in Community Resilience: First Nations volunteers play a key role in emergency response, health services, education support, and cultural preservation (NIAA, 2023).
- 8.2.4. Enhancing Self-Determination and Leadership: Volunteering provides leadership opportunities for First Nations peoples, fostering community-led solutions (NIAA, 2022).

### 8.3. Weaknesses

- 8.3.1. Limited Access to Resources and Support: Remote communities often lack the infrastructure, funding, and training opportunities needed to support structured volunteer programs (Productivity Commission, 2023).
- 8.3.2. Barriers to Formal Recognition: Many First Nations volunteering efforts are informal and go unrecognised in mainstream volunteer reporting and funding models (Volunteering Australia, 2022).
- 8.3.3. Logistical and Administrative Challenges: Distance, transport costs, and unreliable internet access make it difficult for volunteers to engage in training, coordination, and reporting (AIHW, 2021).
- 8.3.4. Risk of Cultural Tokenism: In some instances, First Nations volunteers are engaged in symbolic roles without genuine decision-making power or meaningful impact (Reconciliation Australia, 2023).

#### 8.4. Opportunities

- 8.4.1. Culturally Safe Volunteering Frameworks: Implementing First Nations-led policies that acknowledge cultural practices and community decision-making can improve participation (NIAA, 2022).
- 8.4.2. Training and Pathways to Employment: Volunteering can serve as a pathway to employment in sectors such as land management, health, and education (AIHW, 2021).
- 8.4.3. Strengthening Partnerships with Mainstream Organisations: Increased collaboration between First Nations communities and government agencies, NGOs, and corporate partners can enhance support for volunteering initiatives (Volunteering Australia, 2023).
- 8.4.4. Leveraging Digital Technology for Remote Engagement: Expanding access to online volunteer management platforms and virtual training programs can help overcome geographic barriers (Australian Digital Inclusion Index, 2023).
- 8.4.5. Greater Recognition and Funding: Expanding government and philanthropic funding for First Nations volunteering can ensure sustainability and scalability of existing programs (Productivity Commission, 2023).

## 8.5. Threats

- 8.5.1. Ongoing Socioeconomic Disparities: High unemployment, housing instability, and health inequalities can limit the capacity for community members to engage in voluntary work (Closing the Gap Report, 2023).
- 8.5.2. Volunteer Burnout and Over-Reliance on Community Leaders: Without adequate support, key individuals within communities may experience burnout, reducing long-term volunteer engagement (AIHW, 2021).
- 8.5.3. Government Policy Uncertainty: Changes in government funding and policies can disrupt volunteer programs and limit continuity (Productivity Commission, 2023).
- 8.5.4. Limited Cultural Awareness in Mainstream Volunteering Programs: A lack of cultural competency training for non-Indigenous organisations can result in misunderstandings and disengagement from First Nations volunteers (Reconciliation Australia, 2023).

## 8.6. Suggestions for Optimising Engagement, Support, and Recognition

### 8.6.1. Develop and Fund Culturally Safe Volunteer Programs

- 8.6.1.1. Establish frameworks co-designed with First Nations communities to ensure culturally appropriate volunteer engagement.
- 8.6.1.2. Provide long-term funding to community-controlled organisations leading volunteer efforts.

### 8.6.2. Recognise and Integrate First Nations Volunteering into Closing the Gap Strategies

- 8.6.2.1. Ensure First Nations volunteering is formally acknowledged in Closing the Gap reporting and funding allocations.
- 8.6.2.2. Create pathways from volunteering to employment, particularly in Indigenous-led health, education, and environmental programs.

### 8.6.3. Improve Training, Capacity Building, and Digital Access

- 8.6.3.1. Increase investment in remote and digital learning resources to enhance volunteer training and skill development.

8.6.3.2. Provide transport and logistical support to overcome geographic barriers in remote communities.

8.6.4. Foster Meaningful Partnerships and Recognition

8.6.4.1. Strengthen collaboration between First Nations organisations and mainstream volunteer groups to promote shared learning and resource-sharing.

8.6.4.2. Implement recognition programs to formally acknowledge and celebrate First Nations volunteers' contributions.

8.6.5. Ensure Long-Term Sustainability of Volunteer Efforts

8.6.5.1. Embed First Nations volunteer programs into government disaster response, environmental management, and health initiatives.

8.6.5.2. Reduce bureaucratic barriers to funding and program access to enable community-led, flexible volunteering approaches.

8.6.6. First Nations volunteering is integral to strengthening community resilience, advancing self-determination, and supporting the *Closing the Gap* agenda. Addressing systemic barriers while leveraging existing strengths and opportunities can create a more inclusive, sustainable, and impactful volunteering ecosystem in Queensland's remote and discrete communities. By investing in culturally safe, community-led solutions, Queensland can empower First Nations volunteers and ensure their contributions are properly recognised and supported for generations to come.

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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"

9.1. Bibliography: This submission is supported by a broad range of source materials, including books, journals, and official documentation from Queensland and across Australia. These references have been part of this submission's research selected to provide a well-informed, evidence-based perspective on the issues discussed. Throughout the submission, appropriate citations have been included to substantiate key points and recommendations.

9.2. Existing Research and Policy Discussions: In the process of sourcing reference materials, it has become evident that many of the issues under review by this committee have already been extensively examined in previous reports, academic studies, and policy discussions. The challenges and opportunities within the volunteering sector have been explored across multiple domains, revealing both widespread concerns and sector-specific nuances. This underscores the importance of moving beyond research and discussion to implementing practical, sustainable solutions that address known gaps and inefficiencies.

9.3. Recognition of Chaplaincy in Volunteerism: Within this submission, particular attention has been given to chaplaincy, reflecting the author's extensive experience and expertise in this field. Chaplaincy is a vital yet often under-recognized component of the volunteer sector, playing a crucial role in crisis response, pastoral care, and emergency support. Chaplains provide essential emotional and spiritual care in high-stress situations, supporting individuals and communities during natural disasters, public emergencies, and personal crises. Their contributions extend beyond immediate response efforts, fostering long-term community resilience and well-being. The inclusion of chaplaincy within this submission aims to ensure its role is properly acknowledged within the broader framework of volunteerism and considered in future policy development.

9.3.1. The work of Dr. Neil Percival OAM (Percival, N., 2024) serves as an exemplary case study. Dr. Percival, an Anglican Priest and Archdeacon based in rural New South Wales, has dedicated nearly 25 years to serving as a chaplain with the NSW Rural Fire Service. His academic background includes studies at the University of Sydney, Moore Theological College, and the University of Newcastle. As a spiritual care practitioner, researcher, educator, and conference speaker, his work has focused on the impact of trauma exposure on emergency service personnel and the high rates of suicide in rural communities. In recognition of his service, he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2019.

The contributions of chaplains like Dr. Percival illustrate the vital intersection of emotional, psychological, and spiritual support within emergency response and community volunteering. Their work not only aids individuals in crisis but also strengthens the overall resilience of volunteer-based organisations. Given the unique role chaplaincy plays, it is essential that this aspect of volunteerism is considered within the broader discussion on volunteer engagement, support, and sustainability.

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## 10. Final Suggestions and Call to Action

10.1. The "Boiling Frog" of Volunteerism: The state of volunteerism in Queensland is akin to the well-known "frog in boiling water" analogy. No single law, regulation, or compliance requirement was designed to strangle volunteer organisations. Each was introduced with good intentions—to improve safety, accountability, or service quality. However, the slow and steady accumulation of red tape has created an environment where organisations and volunteers are being gradually overwhelmed, often without realising just how much the burden has grown.

10.2. The Growing Administrative Burden: Volunteer organisations are now drowning in administrative tasks, stretched thin by ever-increasing obligations and the relentless tightening of regulatory exactitudes, each adding complexity without consideration for their cumulative burden. It diverts time and resources from their core mission. The risk is clear: without urgent reform, we will reach a tipping point where volunteer-driven organisations—especially smaller community groups—simply cannot survive. The goodwill that sustains volunteerism will not be enough to counteract a system that makes participation frustrating, exhausting, and unsustainable.

This is not just an issue of inconvenience—it is a systemic failure that threatens Queensland's ability to respond to crises, support vulnerable populations, and build resilient communities. Volunteers are not just an asset; they are essential to the social fabric of the state. Yet, instead of fostering their contributions, excessive compliance requirements are suffocating their efforts.

10.3. Striking the Right Balance: Regulation itself is not the enemy. Oversight plays a crucial role in ensuring ethical, effective, and community-aligned volunteer work. When properly designed, compliance frameworks build trust, improve coordination, and uphold standards that protect both volunteers and the people they serve. However, the balance has been lost. Instead of facilitating participation, the current system has become an obstacle course—prioritising process over purpose and control over contribution.

The lack of coordination across local, state, and federal levels has resulted in overlapping, inconsistent, and often contradictory requirements. These inefficiencies force volunteer-driven organisations to divert already scarce resources into compliance rather than community service. Smaller, community-based organisations—those with the deepest local impact—are hit the hardest, expected to meet administrative standards that even well-resourced professional entities would struggle to satisfy.

#### 10.4. A Call for Meaningful Reform

10.4.1. If this committee is genuinely committed to strengthening Queensland’s volunteer sector, it must take decisive action. The solution is not to eliminate regulation but to reform it—harmonising compliance frameworks across jurisdictions, reducing unnecessary bureaucratic barriers, and ensuring that oversight supports rather than hinders participation. A well-structured regulatory system should provide clear, practical pathways for volunteers to contribute meaningfully without becoming entangled in red tape.

Without urgent reform, the mounting pressures will weaken Queensland’s emergency response capacity and diminishing the broader social resilience that volunteerism provides. Now is the time to act—not to dismantle oversight, but to recalibrate it—ensuring that regulatory frameworks encourage participation, safeguard best practices, and respect the invaluable contributions of volunteers across the state.

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Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion. Volunteers are the heart of Queensland's communities, sustaining vital programs, supporting those in crisis, and strengthening our social fabric. However, without meaningful investment and well considered reform, the challenges facing the volunteer sector will continue to grow.

I urge the committee to carefully consider the suggestions presented and, where appropriate, take action to ensure a strong and sustainable future for volunteering in Queensland. I remain committed to supporting this effort and welcome any opportunity for further collaboration.

While volunteers do not seek recognition, they deserve respect, support, and a system that empowers them to serve effectively.

*The time to act is always now.*

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