

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Every Queensland
community deserves
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28 February 2025

Committee Secretary
Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

By email: lgsbcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: LGAQ Submission - Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

On behalf of Queensland's 77 local governments and the communities they represent, the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee on the Parliament Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland (the Inquiry), announced on 11 December 2024.

Overall, the LGAQ supports the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry and is pleased to see the State Government already taking important action to investigate the barriers and opportunities to address the national downward trend in volunteer participation.

Volunteering is at the heart of Queensland communities and supports a host of social and economic outcomes and community services, including mitigating the impacts of social isolation and loneliness; welcoming newcomers and visitors; mobilising locals to respond to natural disasters; supporting local sports, arts, events, environmental activities and causes and so many other aspects of community wellbeing.

In preparing this submission, the LGAQ has considered the LGAQ Policy Statement, previous LGAQ Annual Conference resolutions and direct feedback from Queensland councils regarding Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

On this basis, the LGAQ has identified the following matters as critical factors to be considered and addressed as part of the Inquiry to ensure a strong volunteering network throughout Queensland:

- Providing ongoing support and funding through critical programs to deliver and strengthen volunteering outcomes for local disaster management and community recovery.
- Removing legislative barriers to volunteering such as Queensland's Blue Card system and framework.
- Addressing impacts of insurance requirements for volunteering and the costs associated with recruitment and training of volunteers, including for local government.
- Leveraging opportunities to boost volunteering and ensure legacy benefits across Queensland regions in the lead up to, during and post the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Ensuring greater coordination volunteering programs, training etc. through regional volunteer hubs and funding support for volunteer coordinators, for example.
- Enhancing the recognition of volunteers in Queensland and promoting the benefits and work of the volunteering sector more broadly.



In total, the LGAQ has made 10 key recommendations in this submission for the consideration of the Committee.

We look forward the State Government's continued engagement with local government in removing barriers and creating pathways to volunteering and working collaboratively with the State Government on solutions to strengthen and support the volunteering network throughout Queensland.

Please do not hesitate to contact Crystal Baker, Manager – Strategic Policy via [REDACTED] or Jo Dawson, Lead – Community Development Policy and Projects via [REDACTED] or phone 1300 542 700 should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Smith
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



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Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Submission to Local Government, Small Business
and Customer Service Committee

February 2025

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About the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ)

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) is the peak body for local government in Queensland. It is a not-for-profit association established solely to serve councils and their needs. The LGAQ has been advising, supporting, and representing local councils since 1896, enabling them to improve their operations and strengthen relationships with their communities. The LGAQ does this by connecting councils to people and places; supporting their drive to innovate and improve service delivery through smart services and sustainable solutions; and providing them with the means to achieve community, professional and political excellence.

Rural and Remote Councils Compact

The Rural and Remote Councils Compact¹ provides a platform to ensure issues of priority for these communities are properly considered by the Government when developing policies, programs, and legislation.

The Rural and Remote Councils Compact pledges to amplify the voice of and improve outcomes for the state's 45 rural and remote councils and their local communities by enhancing engagement between both levels of government.

¹ Rural and Remote Councils Compact – available online [here](#).

Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

1.0 Executive Summary

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee (the Committee) on the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland (the Inquiry).

The LGAQ understands the primary objective of the Inquiry is to understand the current state of volunteering in Queensland and the value it contributes, including benefits to volunteers, organisations, communities and the State.

Overall, the LGAQ supports the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry and is pleased to see the State Government already taking important action to investigate the barriers and opportunities to address the national downward trend in volunteer participation.

As the closest level of government to the community, Queensland councils are acutely aware of the important and positive impact volunteering makes across the state, and utilise volunteers in a wide range of areas such as supporting:

- local disaster management and community recovery,
- sporting or community festivals and celebrations,
- arts and culture programs, library programs and other community support programs such as domestic and family violence programs, seniors' programs, men's sheds and historical societies, and;
- tourism initiatives and environmental conservation programs.

As noted by Volunteering Queensland through its *State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024*², the value of volunteering to Queensland in the 2022-23 financial year was estimated to be \$117.8 billion. This includes commercial benefits (\$22.8 billion), individual benefits (\$54.5 billion), and civic benefits (\$40.5 billion), with civic benefits also including the cost to replace the labour that volunteers contribute to Queensland, estimated at \$31.3 billion.

Notwithstanding, there are also significant costs incurred for both volunteers and organisations, including councils, that engage and enable volunteering, with Volunteering Queensland finding that all volunteering costs in Queensland for the 2022-23 financial year totalled \$25 billion.

Local government wants to be a strong and reliable delivery partner with the State Government including in supporting a strong volunteering network throughout Queensland.

However, Queensland councils continue to navigate a challenging financial environment as evidenced by the latest Queensland Audit Office report into local government financial sustainability, finding that 48 out of Queensland's 77 councils are at moderate to high risk of not being financially sustainable³.

² Volunteering Queensland's *State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2024* – available online [here](#).

³ [QAO Financial Audit report - Local government 2023 \(Report 8: 2023-24\)](#)

As the level of government that is funded the least – earning around three cents in every dollar of taxation revenue compared to 80 cents for the Federal Government and almost 17 cents for the State – councils cannot continue to absorb additional costs and be expected to deliver more for less.

The LGAQ's submission to the Inquiry focuses on key matters raised by Queensland councils in feedback provided to the LGAQ during the consultation period, including the current state and importance of volunteering to councils (including for disaster management and community recovery) as well as barriers and opportunities for supporting a strong volunteering network in Queensland.

To ensure a strong volunteering network throughout Queensland, it is critical that the following matters are considered and addressed as part of the Inquiry:

- Providing ongoing support and funding through critical programs to deliver and strengthen volunteering outcomes for local disaster management and community recovery.
- Removing legislative barriers to volunteering such as Queensland's Blue Card system and framework.
- Addressing impacts of insurance requirements for volunteering and the costs associated with recruitment and training of volunteers, including for local government.
- Leveraging opportunities to boost volunteering and ensure legacy benefits across Queensland regions in the lead up to, during and post the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Ensuring greater coordination volunteering programs, training etc. through regional volunteer hubs and funding support for volunteer coordinators, for example.
- Enhancing the recognition of volunteers in Queensland and promoting the benefits and work of the volunteering sector more broadly.

The LGAQ appreciates the State Government's commitment to establishing the Inquiry and looks forward to working with the State Government on solutions strengthen and support the volunteering network throughout Queensland.

1.1 Recommendations

In total, the LGAQ has made 10 key recommendations for the consideration of the Committee, which are summarised below:

Recommendation 1: The LGAQ recommends the State Government engages with the LGAQ and Queensland councils on any updates to the *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032* and the associated Action Plan as a result of the Inquiry outcomes.

Recommendation 2: The LGAQ recommends the State Government considers initiatives to address the decline in volunteer numbers and promote recruitment of volunteers across Queensland communities, to support a strong statewide volunteering network by:

- establishing a sustainable recruitment base for volunteers, while maintaining the Queensland Volunteering Resource Centre Network's capacity to support volunteer-involving organisations across Queensland communities,
- strengthening Queensland Volunteering Resource Centre Network skills in building organisational capacity and local, place-based volunteer activity,

- enabling a focussed approach to boosting the ability of local volunteer organisations to engage a diverse range of volunteers and ensure sustainability, and
- investing in and supporting the infrastructure necessary for volunteers to access volunteering opportunities, such as transport, digital connectivity etc. as outlined in this submission.

Recommendation 3: The LGAQ recommends the State Government continues to invest in initiatives such as the Get Ready Queensland program and the Emergency Volunteering Crew, and supports new initiatives such as the LGAQ's Council to Council (C2C) program, that help Queensland councils to improve community and council resilience and response to disaster recovery.

Recommendation 4: The LGAQ recommends the State Government assumes ownership and responsibility for all operational and capital expenses of State Emergency Services' assets to reduce the cost impact on Queensland councils and ratepayers.

Recommendation 5: The LGAQ recommends the State Government reviews and amends Queensland's Blue Card system and framework, so that historical minor offences that do not involve children, are not a barrier to volunteering in Queensland.

Recommendation 6: The LGAQ recommends the State Government reviews and increases the current minimum insurance requirements prescribed under section 214 of the *Local Government Regulation 2012*, in consultation with Queensland councils, to ensure these are contemporary and fit-for-purpose.

Recommendation 7: The LGAQ recommends the State Government increases investment in training for volunteers and capacity building programs in volunteering management, recruitment and training for councils and other key organisations.

Recommendation 8: The LGAQ recommends the State Government ensures the social and economic benefits from the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games (including the potential to raise the profile of volunteering and increase volunteer numbers throughout Queensland), flow to all regions statewide by:

- establishing a regional, rural and remote Queensland funding program;
- developing Regional Olympic Plans to support tourism, investment attraction and local business opportunities;
- appointing a dedicated senior officer with local government experience, to be based within the State Government to work directly with and support councils; and
- including local government representatives from across Queensland regions, including First Nations councils, in governance arrangements for the 2032 Games.

Recommendation 9: The LGAQ recommends the State Government:

- invests in regional volunteer hubs and a coordinated approach to connecting and training volunteers to work across Queensland's regions, and
- provides funding to support organisations, including Queensland councils, to employ volunteer coordinators as needed, on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 10: The LGAQ recommends the State Government implements actions (such as a state-based recognition program and/or marketing campaign) to promote the value and benefits of volunteering and highlight the important role and contribution of volunteers in Queensland.

Please do not hesitate to contact Crystal Baker, Manager – Strategic Policy (via email crystal_baker@lgaq.asn.au) or Jo Dawson, Community Development Policy and Projects Lead (via email jo_dawson@lgaq.asn.au), should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission.

2.0 Introduction

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee (the Committee) on the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland (the Inquiry).

The LGAQ understands the Committee will examine the valuable contributions of the state's volunteering sector as per the following Terms of Reference:

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.

Overall, local government supports the Inquiry, recognising that volunteering is at the heart of community life and supports a host of social outcomes and community services, including mitigating the impacts of social isolation and loneliness; welcoming newcomers and visitors; mobilising locals to respond to natural disasters; supporting local sports, arts, events, environmental causes and so many other aspects of community wellbeing.

2.1 LGAQ Policy Statement and Annual Conference resolutions

The LGAQ is committed to member-driven advocacy and working with member councils to build stronger local governments and more resilient local communities.

The LGAQ Policy Statement⁴ is a definitive statement of the collective voice of local government in Queensland and contains the agreed policy positions of Queensland councils.

⁴ <https://www.lgaq.asn.au/downloads/file/183/2019-lgaq-policy-statement>

The LGAQ Policy Statement does not contain any specific agreed policy positions in relation to volunteering, however, the following policy statements are relevant in the context of community services and social policy are as follows:

7.1.1 Planning and Resourcing

7.1.1.1 Local government will work with its community and other spheres of government and the private sector to facilitate and coordinate appropriate planning and resourcing for the delivery of human services.

In addition, three resolutions have been passed by Queensland councils at recent LGAQ Annual Conferences on matters relating to volunteering as outlined below:

Resolution 13 (2023): Review of Blue Card Framework

The LGAQ calls on the State and Federal governments to review the blue card framework so historical offences of a non-serious nature and not involving children are not taken into account.

Resolution 114 (2023): A Strong Volunteering Network for Queensland

The LGAQ calls on the State Government to:

- *Address the decline in volunteer numbers throughout Queensland.*
- *Promote recruitment of volunteers across our communities*
- *Support the establishment of RVHs (Regional Volunteer Hubs)*
- *Integrate the activities of the Queensland Volunteer Resource Centre Network into the State's volunteer framework, building and maintaining a stronger and more resilient volunteering sector.*

Resolution 138 (2022): State Government Responsibility for the State Emergency Service

In relation to the State Emergency Service (SES), the LGAQ calls on the State Government to:

- *Release to the LGAQ, its members and the SES, the independent review of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services capability and funding model carried out in 2021 and*
- *Respond to the recommendations in the independent review;*
- *Assume ownership and responsibility for all operational and capital expenses of State Emergency Service assets on and from 1 July 2022; and*
- *Provide certainty in relation to the governance arrangements for the SES.*

3.0 Response to the Inquiry

In preparing this submission, the LGAQ has considered the LGAQ Policy Statement, previous LGAQ Annual Conference resolutions and direct feedback from Queensland councils regarding Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

Detailed feedback is provided in this section of the submission on the following matters:

- Current state and importance of volunteering to councils, including for disaster management and community recovery (section 3.1).
- Barriers to volunteering – including Queensland's Blue Card system and framework, insurance requirements and the costs associated with recruitment and training (section 3.2).
- Opportunities for volunteering – including the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, a coordinated approach and recognition (section 3.3).

3.1 Importance of strong volunteering networks

The LGAQ acknowledges volunteers are the cornerstone of Queensland communities and are considered essential in the delivery of a broad cross section of services, events and activities that would not be otherwise possible.

Volunteering also plays an important role in assisting people who are unemployed and/or seeking employment by placing them in appropriate volunteer roles that support them to upskill, and in many cases, become job ready and to gain paid employment.

Given the national downward trend in volunteer recruitment and retainment, and the fall in participation by more than 10 per cent over the previous three years, it is important the State Government is investigating and responding to this important issue.

During consultation for this submission, feedback from Queensland councils indicates a need for greater support to enable councils, volunteer groups and organisations to deliver services that help strengthen community outcomes.

Suggestions made by Queensland councils to strengthen Queensland's volunteering network include increased State Government support through:

- providing grants specifically for volunteer programs, covering recruitment, training, travel reimbursements, and infrastructure improvements like digital tools and community hubs.
- enhancing training and capacity building by offering state-funded training, delivered by locals for locals, for council staff and local organisations in volunteer management, leadership, and compliance with regulations. Establish mentorship programs to share expertise between councils.
- supporting initiatives to engage diverse groups, including First Nations people, CALD community, young people, and retirees, ensuring roles are flexible and culturally inclusive.
- fostering collaboration and partnerships and building significant and coordinated relationships at the local and state level
- increasing recognition for the volunteering sector and simplifying compliance processes for councils and organisations, and;

- addressing geographical challenges and barriers to volunteering by subsidising transport for volunteers and creating mobile outreach programs to reach remote communities, for example.

These measures can empower councils and community organisations to build stronger volunteer networks and address community needs more effectively.

The LGAQ is aware the *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032*⁵ contains three focus areas to guide State Government policies, programs and services to better meet the needs of volunteers and the volunteering sector. These focus areas include: 'Supported and Sustainable', 'Vibrant and Inclusive' and 'Recognised and Celebrated' and the Strategy is supported by the Queensland Volunteering Strategy Action Plan 2024-2026.

The Strategy also highlights a number of key challenges and issues relating to volunteering that align with the feedback of Queensland councils including volunteer retention, volunteer recruitment as well as the cumulative impacts of growing demand and increased costs, alongside a reduction in availability of volunteers.

The LGAQ looks forward to engaging further with the Department of Local Government, Water and Volunteering as and when the Action Plan and Strategy are revised to take into account the outcomes of the current Inquiry.

Recommendation 1: The LGAQ recommends the State Government engages with the LGAQ and Queensland councils on any updates to the *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032* and the associated Action Plan as a result of the Inquiry outcomes.

Recognising the vast expanse of Queensland, geographical isolation is a significant challenge in many regional areas. The distance between communities and limited public transport makes access to volunteering roles more difficult across many areas of the state and local governments and other organisations do not generally have the extra funding to support transport costs.

Likewise, the loss of local newspapers has made it increasingly difficult to keep possible volunteers informed about opportunities. Other forms of advertising are generally not cost effective and social media algorithms sometimes hides valuable community updates and is not always an effective way to keep people informed.

Add to this the fact that the digital divide is a critical issue for Queensland, with telecommunications and digital connectivity remaining a critical concern across many parts of Queensland as noted by LGAQ in its submission to the 2024 Federal Regional Telecommunications Review⁶.

The State Government's Digital Economy Strategy *Our Thriving Digital Future*, published in 2023, lists closing the divide as it's number one priority⁷, however, digital connectivity remains a critical concern.

In feedback provided by councils to the LGAQ, it has been noted that: "*Technology gaps, including limited internet access and digital literacy, hinder online recruitment [of volunteers] and*

⁵ *Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024-2032* – available online [here](#).

⁶ LGAQ Submission: 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review (July 2024) – available online [here](#).

⁷ Queensland's Digital Economy Strategy – *Our Thriving Digital Future* (2023) – available online [here](#).

communication.” It’s clear more needs to be done to ensure people who would like to volunteer can find the opportunity available, including opportunities like being a Digital Mentor⁸.

Issues of an ageing volunteering workforce have also been raised, with some fields such as natural resource management identified as needing a varied and more diverse demographic, including attracting younger volunteers to the field, due to the outdoor and intensive nature of activities undertaken when delivering NRM activities such as environmental rehabilitation and invasive species management.

Similarly, attraction of more volunteers and greater diversity in the volunteering workforce will also assist with volunteer fatigue. Queensland councils have reported volunteer fatigue in regional, rural and remote areas as a significant issue noting the smaller cohort of volunteers in these areas, with some councils noting they need volunteers for multiple different events in a short time period, but it is generally the same group of people volunteering time and time again.

Recommendation 2: The LGAQ recommends the State Government considers initiatives to address the decline in volunteer numbers and promote recruitment of volunteers across Queensland communities, to support a strong statewide volunteering network by:

- establishing a sustainable recruitment base for volunteers, while maintaining the Queensland Volunteering Resource Centre Network’s capacity to support volunteer-involving organisations across Queensland communities,
- strengthening Queensland Volunteering Resource Centre Network skills in building organisational capacity and local, place-based volunteer activity,
- enabling a focussed approach to boosting the ability of local volunteer organisations to engage a diverse range of volunteers and ensure sustainability, and
- investing in and supporting the infrastructure necessary for volunteers to access volunteering opportunities, such as transport, digital connectivity etc. as outlined in this submission.

3.1.1 Emergency management and community recovery volunteers

As Australia’s most disaster-prone state, the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters is placing greater strain on capacity and capability of councils and community organisations in Queensland to continually respond and recover from events.

Many councils have invested significantly in programs where volunteers are helping to strengthen a local community’s disaster response and recovery efforts. This includes programs, such as Redland City Council’s ‘Redlands Coast Community Champions program’ (see **Attachment 1**), with the support of important State Government funding such as the Get Ready Queensland program, that provides a total of \$2 million to help local governments improve their communities’ resilience.

The LGAQ also acknowledges the important role of Emergency Volunteering Crew (EV Crew) which focuses on supporting disaster related volunteering activities undertaken by response agencies, local governments and community organisations.

However, volunteering efforts during times of natural disasters needs to be integrated into local response efforts, and at the most suitable and relevant time.

⁸ <https://skvau.edu.au/volunteering/117590/>

The 2022 South East Queensland rainfall and flooding event that impacted 23 local government areas attracted more than 20,000 individual volunteers and 300 corporate groups who registered 4,000 volunteers in the first five days of the event. In some cases, the early activation of EV Crew and enthusiasm of local, spontaneous volunteers resulted in volunteering efforts being mobilised prematurely or to areas where other agencies were actively involved in immediate response efforts.

With recovery efforts usually taking weeks and months volunteering support needs to be allocated across both response and long-term recovery phases. Where regions are critically impacted by natural disasters, the LGAQ's Council to Council (C2C) program provides vital support to councils in disaster recovery.

The C2C program was launched by the LGAQ in late 2023, in the aftermath of Cyclone Jasper, and leverages the diverse and specialised disaster management capabilities within the local government sector. It facilitates the pairing of critically impacted councils with those in non-affected areas, enabling the deployment of personnel with the necessary skills and resources to support response and recovery efforts.

Since 29 January 2025, a total of 23 local government areas have been at Stand-Up, Lean Forward, or Alert status due to natural disasters occurring within their regions, while numerous surrounding councils have also been affected due to disruptions in the supply of produce, goods, and essential services caused by flood-related road closures and severed transport links.

In response to the prolonged weather event and flooding that has significantly impacted North and Far North Queensland, extending into North-West Queensland and the Central West, the C2C program has been activated to support councils in need by providing additional on-the-ground resources. Disaster-affected councils have had to coordinate local response efforts, often with very limited resources.

Five councils formally requested assistance through the C2C program, namely Townsville City Council, Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council, Hinchinbrook Shire Council, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, and Burdekin Shire Council.

To support these councils, personnel have been deployed through the C2C program both on the ground and remotely from 11 assisting councils, primarily from South East Queensland, as well as North Queensland, Central Queensland, and the Central West. A total of 20 officers have been engaged through the program to support response efforts.

With support, the C2C program could be expanded beyond its initial natural disaster response focus to increase the capability of recovery personnel within the local government sector. This is especially the case with recovery needs intensifying as weather events become more severe and more frequent.

Programs like the C2C, Get Ready Queensland and EV Crew that support volunteers in disaster recovery and resilience efforts are vital to local communities and should continue to be supported.

Recommendation 3: The LGAQ recommends the State Government continues to invest in initiatives such as the Get Ready Queensland program and EV Crew and supports new initiatives such as the LGAQ's C2C program, that help Queensland councils to improve community and council resilience and response to disaster recovery.

Queensland councils also recognise the value and need for a strong, sustainable and robust State Emergency Service (SES) and ongoing support for local volunteers to engage through the SES disaster response and recovery activities. Importantly, the LGAQ and Queensland councils also recognise the need for strong partnerships between State and local government to maintain local SES operations.

The LGAQ acknowledges the additional investment made in SES in recent years since the release of the State Emergency Services Report and disaster management reforms in 2023, including the State Government's commitment to uplift the SES by committing \$60 million to support an additional 159 SES staff.

In March 2024, the former State Government also announced an additional \$5.36 million to enhance its annual local government subsidy by distributing a one-off payment of between \$25,000 and \$107,000 to local governments across the state, to provide enhanced support to their local SES groups, with SES groups also eligible for a share in a further \$1.92 million in support grants for vehicles and facilities.

These are important and welcome investments. However, in line with Resolution 138 passed at the 2022 LGAQ Annual Conference, the LGAQ continues to seek that the State Government assume responsibility for the capital and operational costs of the SES.

These capital and operating costs for councils associated with SES can be significant and include costs associated with:

- All SES facilities, in addition to power, water, rates, repairs and grounds maintenance of such facilities;
- Telecommunications, Wi-Fi, and executive mobile phones;
- The majority of plant and equipment, including vehicles, flood boats, trailers, fixed plant, and small equipment;
- Insurance for all facilities and contents; and
- Insurance for specialist rescue trucks, flood boats, and trailers.

In one example provided to the LGAQ, a council's operational expenditure in relation to the SES for the 2022-23 financial year was budgeted at \$163,241.27 with a State Government contribution of \$16,629.73 (approximately 10%). In addition, the council's capital expenditure in relation to the SES for the 2022-23 financial year was budgeted at \$443,423.00 with a State Government contribution of \$20,300.00 (approximately 5%).

The decision to incur capital expenditure has been necessitated by years of indecision by the former State Government, following the Darby Review and needs to be addressed.

Recommendation 4: The LGAQ recommends the State Government assumes ownership and responsibility for all operational and capital expenses of State Emergency Services' assets to reduce the cost impact on Queensland councils and ratepayers.

3.2 Barriers to volunteering

In feedback provided to the LGAQ, the following barriers to attracting and retaining volunteers has been identified by Queensland councils:

- Legislative barriers such as Queensland's Blue Card system and framework.

- Insurance requirements, including for local government.
- Costs associated with recruitment and training of volunteers.

3.2.1 Queensland's Blue Card system and framework

One of the key legislative barriers identified by local governments relates to the impacts of the current Blue Card system and framework in Queensland on the ability to recruit volunteers for important and critical needs in some communities.

Queensland councils have experienced various levels of red tape when engaging certain types of volunteers where they have specific supervision requirements – including prisoner work camps, work for the dole and work with minors. Through these programs – councils are required to either provide additional supervisory resources, and or, are required to invest in staff to attain appropriate qualifications (i.e. blue cards).

At the 2023 LGAQ Annual Conference, Queensland councils passed Resolution 13 seeking a review of the Blue Card framework and changes to the system to not preclude people who have historic non-violent offences that would not endanger children or put anyone at risk.

A Blue Card is a crime prevention, risk management and monitoring system for people working with children, similar to the Working with Children Check in other states.

From 31 August 2020, the State Government changed the Blue Card system, known as 'No Card, No Start', which prevents a person running a child-regulated business or working or volunteering with kids until their Blue Card application has been approved. These laws also apply to all paid and volunteer firefighters and rural fire brigade members, including brigade support members, which means they must hold a Blue Card or leave the organisation. Because of this change, the services have lost thousands of vital volunteers.

In the Cook Shire, for example, rural fire brigades have been disadvantaged, in communities such as Laura, Marton and Poison Creek. Members of the Laura community are missing out on the opportunity to provide crucial support to the local rural fire brigade due to Blue Card barriers.

Volunteer rural fire brigade members are operational staff and, unlike police and paramedics, are not exempt from needing a Blue Card. Some rural firefighters are offended by this requirement and have chosen not to apply for a Blue Card even after 25-plus years of service.

Other remote and discrete First Nations communities such as Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council has also been affected and been entirely without a local SES because of these barriers, leaving the community vulnerable and limited in its response capacity in the event of a natural disaster.

In addition, issues with the Blue Card system are also preventing people in communities taking up kinship care roles for children in local communities, including First Nations communities, and as such, contributes to the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system.

On behalf of Queensland councils, the LGAQ is seeking measured reforms to the Blue Card system so historical offences of a non-serious nature and not involving children are not taken into account. This would allow people to take up jobs at council, volunteer for emergency services, or take on mentoring roles in their community.

Recommendation 5: The LGAQ recommends the State Government reviews and amends Queensland's Blue Card system and framework, so that historical offences of a non-serious nature and not involving children, are not a barrier to volunteering in Queensland.

3.2.2 Insurance

All local governments are required to provide volunteers with a safe workplace and safe system of work including ensuring that council volunteers are appropriately appointed, managed and supervised and receive the relevant inductions and training. This means councils also necessarily deal with several public liability insurance challenges, that at times, present as significant barriers to councils mobilising volunteers.

Within the natural resource management field, insurance challenges are particularly evident through the management of workplace health and safety concerns, especially when dealing with the management of high-risk activities (i.e. herbicide control, working in difficult terrain, etc.). At times, this has caused councils to abandon the delivery of certain activities with volunteers due to insurance coverage concerns.

Insurance for volunteers is often complex, and many community organisations struggle to understand the nuance of their insurance cover and how it applies. In addition, the cost and availability of insurance cover for volunteers has also impacted many volunteer organisations and is an area of concern for local governments who may seek to partner with community organisations.

In Queensland, minimum insurance coverage for local government also presents a challenge given the *Local Government Regulation 2012* specifies a minimum insurance coverage of \$30 million for public liability and \$10 million for professional indemnity insurance. These figures have not been reviewed since the commencement of the *Local Government Act 2009* in 1994.

In contrast, the South Australian Government recently amended the *Local Government (Financial Management) Regulation 2011* (SA) to require a minimum level of cover for civil liabilities of \$300 million. It is also understood the NSW Office of Local Government is currently considering representations to increase the minimum level of public liability coverage to \$400 million.

In this context, the current minimum insurance covers for local government in Queensland are considered to be largely inadequate given the risk profile of councils in performing their existing roles, responsibilities and functions. This may lead to underinsurance by local government and have significant financial sustainability implications.

At the 2022 LGAQ Annual Conference, Queensland councils passed Resolution 13 which included a call for the State Government to review the current minimum insurance requirements prescribed under section 214 of the *Local Government Regulation 2012*, in consultation with Queensland councils, to ensure these are contemporary and fit-for-purpose.

Recommendation 6: The LGAQ recommends the State Government reviews and increases the current minimum insurance requirements prescribed under section 214 of the *Local Government Regulation 2012*, in consultation with Queensland councils, to ensure these are contemporary and fit-for-purpose.

3.2.3 Recruitment and Training

Recruitment and retention of volunteers has been cited as a significant issue for Queensland councils and particularly, rural and regional areas with smaller population centres where volunteers face competing priorities or risk burnout due to taking on multiple roles.

In addition, councils have identified issues and challenges faced in providing training and resources for volunteers, building capacity and ensuring compliance with legislative and safety requirements.

To manage volunteers, Queensland councils are required to provide staffing resources to not only supervise volunteers but to ensure that volunteers have the appropriate training, skills and knowledge to undertake the tasks associated with their engagement.

Volunteer management sits outside of local government responsibilities as set by the *Local Government Act 2009*, however, volunteers are considered workers under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*. Councils therefore have a responsibility to ensure volunteers comply with any work health and safety training required and need to navigate complex legal and safety regulations and insurance requirements with often limited capacity.

Limited funding and staffing also often restrict councils' ability to develop and deliver effective training programs and geographical dispersion, for example in rural areas, adds difficulty in providing consistent, accessible training and resources.

High volunteer turnover, particularly in rural areas, can complicate long-term training efforts, while varying levels of digital infrastructure and literacy hinder access to online resources. Furthermore, tailoring training to diverse volunteer needs, from youth to retirees, is challenging, especially for specialised roles like disaster recovery and volunteers may lack motivation to engage in training perceived as time-consuming or irrelevant.

Additionally, councils have raised issues with limited training opportunities available on certain social aspects such as human rights, anti-discrimination, disability and the domestic and family violence (DFV) common risk and safety framework known as the CRASF⁹. Volunteers in these settings also often do not have mental health first aid training¹⁰ and are not necessarily aware of Queensland human rights laws and how they apply to the work they are doing.

In recognising the trauma that a DFV victim/survivor may have already gone through or the impact of natural disasters on a local community for example, it is important that volunteering training is robust, comprehensive and adequately supported at a statewide level.

Addressing these issues requires increased funding, simplified compliance processes, and accessible, tailored training solutions through, for example, the State Government offering state-funded training (delivered by locals for locals), for council staff and local organisations in volunteer management, leadership, and compliance with regulations and establishing mentorship programs to share expertise between councils.

As the level of government that is funded the least – earning around three cents in every dollar of taxation revenue compared to 80 cents for the Federal Government and almost 17 cents for the State – councils cannot continue to absorb additional costs and be expected to deliver more for less.

⁹ <https://www.justice.qld.gov.au/about-us/services/women-violence-prevention/violence-prevention/service-providers/integrated-service-responses/dfv-common-risk-safety-framework>

¹⁰ <https://www.mhfa.com.au/>

Local governments continue to navigate a challenging financial environment as evidenced by the latest Queensland Audit Office report into local government financial sustainability, finding that 48 out of Queensland's 77 councils are at moderate to high risk of not being financially sustainable¹¹.

Recommendation 7: The LGAQ recommends the State Government increases investment in training for volunteers and capacity building programs in volunteering management, recruitment and training for councils and other key organisations.

3.3 Opportunities for volunteering

Consistent with the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, the LGAQ agrees that hosting of the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games (2032 Games) provides a significant opportunity to support growth in volunteering across Queensland.

In addition, opportunities for a more coordinated approach to volunteering across Queensland's regions and greater recognition of volunteers more broadly, have been identified by Queensland councils as an important part of ensuring continued attraction and retention of volunteers statewide.

3.3.1 Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games

The 2032 Games are a once in a generation opportunity for Queensland to promote its unique environment and offerings on the international stage. While much of South East Queensland (SEQ) will become the focus during the 2032 Games, it is vital that economic benefits are shared across Queensland's regional, rural and remote communities.

In the LGAQ's submission on the State Government's *Discussion Paper - Destination 2045: Queensland's Tourism Future*, the LGAQ has highlighted the importance of legacy benefits from the 2032 Games for all Queensland communities and the opportunity to promote Queensland's diverse regions, including tourism opportunities, before, during and in the lead up to the 2032 Games.

If managed effectively, the legacy from the 2032 Olympics has the potential to leave a long-lasting impact on all of Queensland. This includes the opportunity to raise the profile of volunteering statewide and increase volunteer numbers in Queensland as a legacy benefit, including for the tourism industry.

This opportunity to boost volunteering in the lead up to, during and post the 2032 Games, is a key consideration for the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland.

Recommendation 8: The LGAQ recommends the State Government ensures the social and economic benefits from the 2032 Games (including the potential to raise the profile of volunteering and increase volunteer numbers throughout Queensland), flow to all regions statewide by:

- establishing a regional, rural and remote Queensland funding program;
- developing Regional Olympic Plans to support tourism, investment attraction and local business opportunities;
- appointing a dedicated senior officer with local government experience, to be based within the State Government to work directly with and support councils; and

¹¹ [QAO Financial Audit report - Local government 2023 \(Report 8: 2023-24\)](#)

- including local government representatives from across Queensland regions, including First Nations councils, in governance arrangements for the 2032 Games.

3.3.2 Coordinated Approach

In feedback to the LGAQ, several councils identified challenges in coordinating volunteer programs to address community needs, noting this as an opportunity for improvement and the need for statewide support.

Limited financial resources and staffing were cited as often restricting the ability to fund, manage, and support volunteer initiatives effectively.

In addition, geographical dispersion in some regions (particularly rural and remote areas) makes it difficult to ensure equitable access to programs across communities, while inadequate infrastructure funding for community organisations and councils, restricts maintenance and development of facilities and hampers efficient program management.

Funding to support councils to employ volunteer coordinators on an ongoing basis has been raised as an opportunity and need across multiple councils. In particular, the following benefits of having a volunteer coordinator were identified:

- supporting promotion of volunteering opportunities,
- coordinating and managing council volunteers (including training programs),
- assisting with administration and governance matters, and
- supporting greater engagement and coordination with local volunteering groups and bodies.

It is acknowledged that Volunteering Queensland, as the state's peak body for advancing and promoting volunteering, plays a key role in the coordination of volunteers. However, additional promotion and resourcing is required with particular support needed in regional, rural and remote areas where organisations are often competing for volunteers, leading to volunteer fatigue in some cases (as highlighted above).

At the 2023 LGAQ Annual Conference, Queensland councils passed a resolution that calls for the State Government's support in establishing regional volunteering hubs as a network distributed geographically around the state.

These hubs, supported by paid volunteer managers from the local community, would be a place for all volunteers to come together across the region to connect and access consistent training, volunteer opportunities and information about blue cards and work health and safety legislation.

In doing so, such an initiative could help to support and facilitate partnerships between councils, local organisations, and private sector entities to pool resources, share best practices, and avoid duplication of efforts.

Recommendation 9: The LGAQ recommends the State Government:

- invests in regional volunteer hubs and a coordinated approach to connecting and training volunteers to work across Queensland's regions, and
- provides funding to support organisations, including Queensland councils, to employ volunteer coordinators as needed, on an ongoing basis.

3.3.3 Recognition and Promotion

The recognition and promotion of the work done by volunteers, is acknowledged by Queensland councils as an important part of ensuring a strong volunteering network.

Local governments across Queensland acknowledge volunteers regularly through their Australia Day awards and celebrations. National Volunteer Week is also Australia's largest annual celebration of volunteering and is an important initiative. However, more should be done at a statewide level to truly promote the value and benefits of volunteering and recognise the important role and contribution of volunteers in Queensland.

In feedback provided to the LGAQ, the following suggestions were made by Queensland councils to enhance the recognition and promotion of the work of volunteers and the volunteering sector:

- Develop a state-based acknowledgement and recognition program for volunteers.
- Consider developing and running a marketing campaign to deliver messaging of the benefits volunteers bring to society and to the volunteers themselves.
- Promote successful programs that could not have been achieved without the help and support of volunteers, not just an annual celebration.
- Develop tools to make volunteering attractive to young people including linking volunteering to skills that are vital to being job ready.
- Investigate creating a category of Annual Leave that caters to taking time off work to volunteer in the community, noting that currently, employees, including casual employees, can only take community service leave for activities such as voluntary emergency management activities or jury duty and there are also rights and entitlements for people who are Defence Reservists under the *Fair Work Act 2009* and the *Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act 2001*.

Recommendation 10: The LGAQ recommends the State Government implements actions (such as a state-based recognition program and/or marketing campaign) to promote the value and benefits of volunteering and highlight the important role and contribution of volunteers in Queensland.

4.0 Conclusion

The LGAQ appreciates the opportunity to make this submission to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee on the Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland.

Overall, the LGAQ supports the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry and is pleased to see the State Government already taking important action to investigate the barriers and opportunities to address the national downward trend in volunteer participation.

As noted throughout this submission, it is critical that the following matters are considered and addressed as part of the Inquiry to ensure a strong volunteering network throughout Queensland:

- Providing ongoing support and funding through critical programs to deliver and strengthen volunteering outcomes for local disaster management and community recovery.
- Removing legislative barriers to volunteering such as Queensland's Blue Card system and framework.

- Addressing impacts of insurance requirements for volunteering and the costs associated with recruitment and training of volunteers, including for local government.
- Leveraging opportunities to boost volunteering and ensure legacy benefits across Queensland regions in the lead up to, during and post the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Ensuring greater coordination volunteering programs, training etc. through regional volunteer hubs and funding support for volunteer coordinators, for example.
- Enhancing the recognition of volunteers in Queensland and promoting the benefits and work of the volunteering sector more broadly.

The LGAQ and Queensland councils look forward to working collaboratively with the State Government on solutions to strengthen and support the volunteering network throughout Queensland.

Attachment 1: Case Study – Redlands Coast Community Champions program

Overview

The Redlands Coast Community Champions program¹² is a vital component of Redland City's disaster management strategy, leveraging local knowledge and volunteerism to enhance community resilience and preparedness.

Established in response to the 2016 Russell and Macleay Island fires, the program has since expanded to include over 60 members and plays a central role in disaster response and recovery efforts across the region.

Community Champions are local volunteers who take on the following responsibilities:

- **Preparedness and Education:** Champions educate residents on disaster preparedness, providing guidance on safeguarding homes and businesses and sharing critical information about emergency response measures. This proactive role helps build community resilience and reduce disaster impact.
- **Emergency Response:** During emergencies, Community Champions assist in setting up and managing evacuation centres, coordinating the provision of shelter, food, water, and care for affected residents. Their support is particularly crucial in isolated areas like the Southern Moreton Bay Islands, Coochiemudlo Island and North Stradbroke Island (Minjerribah).
- **Recovery Support:** After a disaster, Champions provide both emotional and practical support, aiding in recovery efforts and helping to rebuild community resilience. Their local knowledge ensures that recovery initiatives are effectively targeted to meet the community's specific needs.

Training and Support

Community Champions receive extensive training to prepare them for their roles, including:

- **Psychological First Aid (PFA)** - Champions are trained to offer initial emotional support to individuals affected by disasters, ensuring psychological well-being is prioritised alongside physical recovery efforts.
- **Evacuation Centre Management (ECM)** - Volunteers acquire the skills necessary to manage evacuation centres efficiently during crises.
- **Community Engagement and Recovery** – Champions are trained to deliver community education to better prepare their community prior to an event as well as being there to support their community recovery post event.
- **Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements (QDMA)** – Volunteers gain knowledge on how Disaster Management functions in Queensland
- **Redland City Council Code of Conduct** – As they are representing RCC while volunteers, they require to undertake Code of Conduct training

¹² Redlands Coast Community Champions program – further information available online [here](#).

The program is supported by the Queensland Government's Get Ready Queensland initiative, which provides resources and training to keep Community Champions' skills current and effective.

Program Success

The program has achieved success by striking an ideal balance in volunteer engagement. Volunteers convene six times a year for meetings that feature guest speakers, hands-on practical exercises, and a diverse array of training sessions.

Additionally, mandatory training such as QDMA, ECM, and PFA is scheduled during the months when meetings are not held. For those interested in additional participating, we also provide an opportunity for Community Champions to attend markets where they educate the importance of disaster preparedness to their local community.

Programs Issues

In the past, a number of volunteers left the program because they were required to complete online training and online applications and did not have strong computer literacy skills resulting in them feeling overwhelmed by these requests. To address these issues, some of these online training sessions are conducted in-person and council also brings laptops to meetings to assist volunteers in completing online applications.

Program Impacts

The Community Champions program has proven especially successful in island communities where isolation can delay external assistance. For instance, on Russell Island, trained Champions established an evacuation centre during a major grass fire in 2017, providing immediate care to residents before external emergency services arrived. This underscores the value of localised response efforts in reducing risks to life and property.

On Russell Island in 2023, a house fire tragically claimed the lives of six people. In response, dedicated community champions, who are also well-known members of the community, provided psychological first aid alongside chaplains and counsellors. In this time of crisis, the community gravitated towards the community champions, as we found the island residents prefer to talk to someone from their own community.

Future Directions

Redland City aims to expand the program to involve more volunteers from diverse backgrounds, ensuring it remains representative of the entire community. This initiative exemplifies Redland City's commitment to a community-led approach to disaster management, where local residents play an active role in safeguarding their communities and enhancing resilience.