# Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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# Archdiocese of Brisbane: Response to Queensland Parliament's Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee's inquiry

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## Executive summary

The Archdiocese of Brisbane's submission provides a detailed overview of volunteering in Queensland, highlighting both its spiritual foundation and the social and economic benefits it brings. Across the Archdiocese more than 15,000 volunteers serve in parishes, hospitals and prison ministries, refugee support, homelessness and schools strengthening vulnerable communities and fostering social cohesion.

The submission notes the recent decline in volunteer numbers, mirrored across the state and nation, is attributed to factors such as economic pressures, regulatory complexities, and evolving social patterns. As volunteer numbers decline, the need for reforms that simplify engagement and support participation becomes increasingly urgent. Despite these challenges, the Archdiocese's volunteers deliver considerable value through both the spiritual enrichment they gain and the cost savings to community services generated by their donated time.

Drawing on feedback from volunteers, parishes, and the community, this submission outlines measures to address barriers and strengthen volunteer participation. It advocates streamlined compliance and training processes so volunteers can engage more readily. Alongside these measures is the suggestion of introducing a state-issued Volunteer Card, a unified credential that would enable volunteers to demonstrate that they have met safeguarding and compliance requirements across multiple roles and organisations. Volunteers would apply for the card through a streamlined government portal, where they would submit necessary compliance documents, including Blue Card and police checks. Once approved, the card would be issued digitally and physically, allowing organisations to verify compliance through an online database or QR code scanning system. This process would reduce duplication of paperwork and facilitate easier transitions between volunteer roles and organisations. The Archdiocese also underscores the need for recognition, practical support with training and expenses, and continued commitment to safeguarding, professional development, and regular audits.

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In anticipation of the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the submission calls for collaboration between government and community organisations, including the Archdiocese, to design meaningful roles and properly resource volunteers.

Concluding that well-structured, faith-inspired volunteering is vital for creating a more compassionate and resilient Queensland, the Archdiocese points to practical reforms, including a *Volunteer Card*, enhanced training, and strong partnerships, as the key to fostering social well-being and strengthening the spiritual dimension of community life.

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## Introduction

1. The Archdiocese of Brisbane (the Archdiocese) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee's inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. This inquiry provides a timely platform to explore the strengths, challenges, and future opportunities for volunteerism, particularly as Queensland prepares for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

2. As a cornerstone of community life, the Archdiocese plays a vital role in the volunteering landscape, with over 15,000 dedicated volunteers actively engaged in pastoral care, hospital and prison ministries, and parish and school support. These individuals serve in diverse roles, from offering comfort to those in hospital to assisting vulnerable individuals and fostering strong parish communities. Their service not only enhances the well-being of others but also enriches their own spiritual and personal growth.

3. Our commitment to volunteering is deeply rooted in the Gospel call to 'love one another'.[1] As Pope Francis has affirmed, 'Volunteers are the strength of the Church,'[2] and our mission is guided by a belief that service to others is not merely an act of charity but a fundamental expression of faith. By helping those in need, volunteers embody the teachings of Jesus and uphold the dignity of every person.

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[1] John 13:34

[2] Pope Francis, 'Message to Volunteers on International Volunteer Day' (Video Message, 5 December 2022) https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-12/pope-francis-volunteers-volunteering-world-day-video-message.html.

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4. The impact of this faith-driven volunteering extends beyond the Church, strengthening social cohesion and fostering a more compassionate and resilient Queensland. From young people seeking meaningful ways to engage with their communities to retirees dedicating their time to lifelong service, volunteers of all ages contribute to a network of care and support that benefits the entire state.

5. This submission outlines the Archdiocese's insights into the current state of volunteering, identifies key barriers, and proposes practical recommendations to enhance volunteer participation. Through this, we reaffirm our belief that robust volunteer engagement is essential to a thriving, inclusive, and community-focused Queensland.

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### About the Archdiocese of Brisbane

6.  The Archdiocese of Brisbane is the face of the Catholic Church in Southeast Queensland, stretching 77,000 square kilometres of Southeast Queensland from Hervey Bay in the north, to Kingaroy and Gatton in the west and down to the New South Wales border. The Archdiocese is composed of 94 Parishes, 146 schools, 190 Catholic Early EdCare and Centacare aged care, disability, and family and relationship service centres. Our services collectively contribute $3.5 billion annually to local economies.[3]

7.  Through our social services arm, Centacare, we provide care and offer vital services across aged care, disability care, early childhood education and care, family and domestic violence, mental health, hospital and prison ministry, post prison release, homeless accommodation and housing support and many other community services.

8.  The Archdiocese's pastoral care, hospital, and prison ministries rely heavily on the dedication and generosity of volunteers. These individuals provide essential spiritual and practical support, ensuring that those in need receive comfort, guidance, and companionship. Without their selfless contributions, many of these services would face significant challenges in meeting the needs of the community. Their presence not only strengthens the Archdiocese's outreach but also enriches the broader social fabric of Queensland by fostering compassion, inclusion, and solidarity.

9.  Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) is the agency of the Archdiocese delivering Catholic education to 76,000 Prep to year 12 students. While Catholic Early EdCare is the early education provider of the Archdiocese of Brisbane, providing early childhood education and care to over 31,000 children across 133 services.

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[3] A summary of the Archdiocese's Socio-Economic Contribution is attached in Appendix 1.

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**Defining Volunteering**

10. Volunteering is defined as 'time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain' (Volunteering Australia, 2023). This definition underpins the Archdiocese's approach to engaging volunteers, focusing on roles where there is a genuine need and a genuine role. This distinction is particularly important in differentiating between formal volunteering and participation in the life of the Church. Formal volunteers take on structured roles with specific responsibilities, such as youth group coordinators, pastoral care volunteers, and Eucharistic ministers who visit the sick and elderly. In contrast, volunteers, in roles like mass readers, or Eucharistic ministers at Mass, and choir singers are considered part of parish participation rather than formal volunteering. This nuanced understanding is critical in ensuring that parishioners are not unduly burdened by compliance and safeguarding requirements intended for formal volunteer roles.

11. This importance of this nuanced approach was aptly illustrated by one of our Parish Priests who questioned whether those responding to our baptismal call and participating in the life of the church should be deemed volunteers:

    11.1.      *"Most parishes rely on the involvement of many individuals who, as you know, keep parish activities going. Without such involvement some parishes would not be viable.*

            *The point that requires clarification is the difference between seeing these people as volunteers or are they responding to the call and grace of baptism and minister and not merely volunteering. Some people differentiate between the two and can be affronted when referred to as volunteers. I'm not sure if we describe those who lead music and distribute Holy Communion as volunteers.*

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*More often is the case that we use the description of minister as opposed to volunteer. To take the reality of baptism seriously and if I look at all of life through the lens of Christian faith then ministry and service is a more apt description than volunteering. To be called a volunteer is a misnomer for the life of service by many parishioners."*

12. Over the past two years, the Archdiocese has undertaken a significant process to redefine and streamline what we characterise as volunteers. Historically, the Archdiocese had identified 54 different volunteer roles, a broad categorisation that included both genuine volunteer positions and general church participants. Through careful review and consultation, this list has now been refined to 28 distinct roles, focusing only on those that meet the criteria of genuine volunteer roles. This restructuring process is ongoing, with continued efforts to ensure clarity and compliance across all Parishes and Agencies.[4]

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[4] Copies of the previous volunteer matrix (Appendix 2) and the current matrix (Appendix 3) are attached.

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## Current State of Volunteering in Queensland.

13. Queensland's volunteer sector remains a vital contributor to the State's social fabric and economic well-being, yet recent evidence indicates that both the volume of volunteer activity and the number of active volunteers have been on a downward trajectory. Volunteering is a critical component of community support and development, with individuals and organisations relying on the selfless efforts of volunteers to deliver services across a wide range of sectors. Statewide surveys suggest that between July 2022 and July 2023 Queenslanders contributed estimated 719 million hours of service, a contribution valued at over $117 billion.[5]

14. Within the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane alone, there are approximately 15,000 volunteers whose dedication spans vital ministries such as pastoral care, hospital and prison ministries, parishes, and schools. These volunteers not only support the practical needs of the community but also foster a sense of belonging and spiritual nourishment among those they serve and within themselves. Their roles extend from providing direct care and spiritual support to organising community events and administrative functions. As a result, it is undoubtable that our volunteers form the backbone of community engagement and service delivery within the Church.

15. Volunteering plays a critical role in Queensland, underpinning social cohesion, economic prosperity, and the well-being of both volunteers and the communities they serve. In 2023, the Archdiocese of Brisbane, alongside our associated agencies, engaged 15,674 volunteers who contributed an estimated economic value of $268 million. We are currently finalising our 2024 socio-economic contribution, and look forward to providing updated figures to the committee once available

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[5] *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report.*

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16. For every dollar invested in volunteering, Queensland realises a return of about $4.70, demonstrating the immense value volunteers bring to the community.[6]

17. Despite these substantial contributions, the sector is facing a critical juncture. The decline in volunteer numbers, mirrored both nationally and internationally since 2020 with an approximate 10% drop, poses significant challenges for organisations that depend on this essential resource.

18. The current volunteering landscape in Queensland is a complex mix of opportunities and challenges. On one hand, volunteers contribute significant social and economic value to their communities; on the other, barriers such as economic challenges, time constraints, bureaucratic red tape, and limited clear pathways to engagement are inhibiting broader participation. This disconnect between volunteer supply and organisational demand is a pressing concern that requires targeted policy responses and strategic outreach initiatives.

19. In responding to these challenges, the Parliaments decision to conduct this comprehensive review of current volunteering strategies is timely.

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[6] Ibid; Nicholas Biddle and Matthew Gray, *Ongoing trends in volunteering in Australia* (ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, Australian National University, 2023).

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20. The Archdiocese of Brisbane, like many other volunteer-dependent organisations, has seen its own challenges mirrored in statewide trends. the steady decline in volunteer numbers, compounded by an ageing volunteer base within the Archdiocese not only impacts the provision of pastoral care and community support services but also risks weakening the overall social and spiritual fabric of the community. In response, this inquiry has also provided us with the opportunity to review how the Archdiocese engages with our volunteers and to intensify our efforts in volunteer recruitment, retention, and support. This involves reimagining volunteer roles to ensure they are flexible, clearly defined, and well-supported, as well as recognising the multifaceted contributions that volunteers make to both the Church and the wider community.

21. The economic benefits of volunteering are substantial. The aggregation of volunteer hours – 719 million in 2023 alone – translates into an enormous economic impact. This impact underscores, that volunteer activity is not merely a charitable pursuit but a critical economic input. When volunteers forgo paid work to serve their communities, their contributions generate multiplier effects that support local economies and reduce the burden on public services. These benefits are quantifiable, yet they extend far beyond the numbers. The act of volunteering also enhances social capital, fosters community resilience, and builds networks of trust and reciprocity that are essential for both crisis response and everyday community life.

22. The decline in volunteer numbers is symptomatic of broader societal shifts that include demographic changes, economic pressures, and evolving social dynamics. While the overall contributions of volunteers remain high, the challenge lies in sustaining and increasing these numbers in a context where many potential volunteers face competing demands on their time and resources. The declining trend, noted both nationally and internationally, is a wake-up call for policymakers and community leaders. It underscores the importance of implementing measures that support volunteer engagement, recognising the dual role volunteers play in enriching community life and driving economic value.

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## Perspectives from Volunteers

23. This section of our submission presents the views of volunteers and prospective volunteers from the Archdiocese of Brisbane, based on insights gathered through a community questionnaire. These perspectives provide valuable firsthand accounts of the motivations, challenges, and opportunities within the volunteering sector in Queensland. The findings offer a deeper understanding of the barriers preventing participation, as well as recommendations to enhance engagement, retention, and support for volunteers.

24. A community survey was sent out to all parishes, and archdiocesan agencies requesting feedback from volunteers and prospective volunteers. The survey received responses from 176 participants, of which a significant proportion identified as volunteers within Parishes.[7]

25. The volunteer pool was diverse in age and gender, with a majority of respondents aged 65 and older. While women comprised the largest demographic group who responded to the survey.

26. A key finding is the strong connection between older adults and volunteering. Many respondents in the 65+ age group reported active participation in volunteer work, reinforcing the role of older Australians in sustaining community services. However, younger respondents (aged 25–34) also demonstrated interest in volunteering, particularly for large-scale events and emergency response efforts, suggesting an opportunity to further engage this demographic through targeted recruitment and flexible volunteering options.

27. Volunteers cited a range of motivations for their involvement, including:

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[7] Should the Committee find it helpful, the Archdiocese would be pleased to provide a de-identified copy of the survey results

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27.1.    *"A desire to contribute to the community and support those in need"*

27.2.    *"A personal or faith-based commitment to service"*

27.3.    *"The social benefits of connecting with others"*

27.4.    *"The opportunity to develop new skills and gain personal fulfilment"*

28. When asked about the most valuable contribution volunteers make to Queensland, respondents highlighted the importance of social support, strengthening community ties, and assisting vulnerable populations. Some direct responses included:

28.1.    *"Helping those most in need."*

28.2.    *"Supporting those less fortunate."*

28.3.    *"Time, skill, and the sharing of expertise."*

29. These responses suggest that volunteers see their contributions as fundamental to community resilience and wellbeing.

30. Despite strong motivation, respondents identified several barriers that limit their ability to participate in volunteering. The most reported challenges included:

30.1.    **Time constraints** – Many individuals, particularly those in full-time employment or with caregiving responsibilities, cited time limitations as a key obstacle to regular volunteering.

30.2.    **Lack of awareness** – Some respondents expressed uncertainty about where and how to get involved, suggesting a need for better communication and outreach efforts.

30.3.    **Bureaucratic and regulatory burdens** – Several volunteers mentioned excessive administrative requirements, such as obtaining Blue Cards and complying with complex regulatory procedures, as deterrents to participation.

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30.4. **Accessibility issues** – Volunteers with disabilities or mobility challenges indicated that some volunteer opportunities were not inclusive or adaptable to their needs.

30.5. **Financial constraints** – While volunteering is an unpaid activity, some respondents noted that transport costs and other associated expenses could be prohibitive.

31. One respondent poignantly expressed the challenge about volunteer retention, stating:

31.1. *"A new volunteer has so much enthusiasm and energy to share, unfortunately due to the lack of support and recognition of skills that could be shared, enthusiasm dwindles and eventually disappears."*

32. These findings indicate that simplifying administrative processes, improving accessibility, and increasing awareness of volunteer opportunities could help remove barriers to participation.

33. The survey also explored interest in volunteering for large-scale events such as the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. While some respondents expressed enthusiasm,[8] a significant number were hesitant or uninterested, particularly among older age groups. To mitigate concerns, it is crucial to provide clear role descriptions, comprehensive training, and accessible resources that ensure volunteers feel prepared and valued. Additionally, offering incentives such as transport assistance, recognition programs, or pathways to future volunteering opportunities could enhance participation and long-term engagement.

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[8] 48 people indicated interest, 40 people indicated they may be interested, and 87 indicated they were not interested.

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34. Additionally, while 66 respondents had volunteered during a natural disaster or emergency, another 33 indicated that they had not been involved but would be interested in doing so if they felt better prepared. Key factors that would help increase emergency volunteer participation included:

    34.1.      Training in emergency response procedures

    34.2.      Clearer communication and expectations

    34.3.      Better integration with existing emergency response organisations

35. These insights reinforce the importance of structured training and coordination in optimising emergency response volunteering in Queensland.

36. We asked respondents to provide some recommendations that the committee should consider enhancing volunteering in Queensland, the recommendations received can be broken down into five clear recommendations:

    36.1.      **Reduce Administrative Burdens** – Streamlining background checks and regulatory processes would encourage greater participation and reduce frustrations among volunteers.

    36.2.      **Improve Outreach and Awareness** – Establishing a centralised, easily accessible platform for volunteer opportunities would help connect prospective volunteers with organisations in need.

    36.3.      **Enhance Accessibility and Flexibility** – Providing more inclusive and flexible volunteering options, including virtual roles and short-term commitments, would encourage broader participation.

    36.4.      **Support for Emergency Volunteers** – Offering specialised training and clearer engagement pathways would help mobilise volunteers for natural disasters and crisis situations.

    36.5.      **Leverage Large-Scale Events** – The Brisbane 2032 Olympics present an opportunity to recruit and retain volunteers by creating meaningful, well-supported engagement opportunities that leave a lasting volunteering legacy.

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37. The voices of volunteers across the Archdiocese of Brisbane reflect a deep commitment to service and a strong recognition of the critical role volunteering plays in supporting communities. However, the insights from our survey also reveal significant barriers that must be addressed to ensure the continued growth and sustainability of the sector.

38. By streamlining administrative processes, improving outreach, and fostering a more inclusive and flexible volunteering environment, Queensland can strengthen volunteer participation and enhance community resilience in the years to come.

39. Their views underscore the importance of aligning government support and policies with the real experiences and needs of volunteers, ensuring that volunteering remains an accessible and rewarding opportunity for all Queenslanders.

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## The Archdiocese of Brisbane's approach to volunteering: Embracing Service with Safety, Training, and Diverse Ministries

40. Volunteering is core to the Archdiocese of Brisbane's mission and is embraced across myriad faith-based ministries, reflecting our parishioners' enduring commitment to serving the community with compassion, integrity, and a spirit of self-sacrifice. The Archdiocese recognises that volunteer service is not only a means of delivering vital ministry but also a way of nurturing the personal and spiritual growth of those who give their time and talents. Central to our approach is a comprehensive framework that emphasises a thoughtful onboarding process,[9] continuous training, rigorous safeguarding,[10] and ensuring that every volunteer is equipped to serve safely and effectively.

41. At the core of our volunteer programme is an uncompromising commitment to safeguarding the welfare of all participants, particularly children, young people, and adults-at-risk. The Archdiocese maintains a zero-tolerance stance toward any form of abuse, and this is reflected in our stringent screening processes.

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[9] A sample of the Archdiocese's onboarding training is attached in Appendix 4, including Workplace Health and Safety Induction, Emergency Management, Sexual Harassment, and Safeguarding Training. While PDF versions have been provided to the Committee, volunteers complete these as online modules incorporating videos and interactive content. Should the Committee wish to experience the modules firsthand, the Archdiocese would be pleased to provide login details to access the online induction platform, offering an authentic insight into the volunteer onboarding process.

[10] A copy of the Volunteer Safeguarding Accreditation Requirements is attached in Appendix 5

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42. Every volunteer is required to provide a Prior Conduct Declaration[11], affirming that they have never engaged in any conduct that would compromise the safety of vulnerable individuals. This declaration, together with our detailed safeguarding accreditation requirements, ensures that all volunteers are appropriately vetted before they are allowed to assume any role.

43. Our safeguarding framework is aligned with the *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations*, developed by the *Australian Human Rights Commission* and endorsed by all Australian States and Territories.[12] These principles were a direct outcome of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* and set out nationally consistent expectations for creating safe environments for children.

44. Additionally, the Archdiocese adheres to the *National Catholic Safeguarding Standards* (NCSS), developed and endorsed by the *Australian Catholic Bishops Conference* and *Catholic Religious Australia*.[13] The NCSS not only closely reflects the National Child Safe Principles but also strengthens them by incorporating additional measures to safeguard adults-at-risk, ensuring that our safeguarding practices are comprehensive and inclusive. This dual focus reinforces our commitment to providing a safe and welcoming environment for all.

45. In December 2024, the Queensland Parliament passed the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024*, formalising in legislation a set of Child Safe Standards that are mandatory for organisations working with children, including religious bodies. The Child Safe Standards, which align closely with the National Child Safe Principles, further solidify our legal and ethical obligations to uphold the highest standards of child safety.

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[11] A Copy of the Prior Conduct Declaration form is attached in Appendix 6.

[12] *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations* (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2019)

[13] *National Catholic Safeguarding Standards: Edition 2* (Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd, 2022)

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46. The Archdiocese's safeguarding team regularly audits parishes and agencies to maintain compliance across our community. In 2024 alone, they completed 60 parish audits, and we also engage external advisors to conduct random audits. These internal audits focus on 15 priority indicators, such as verifying that all staff, religious members, and volunteers have Queensland Blue Cards; confirming the signing of the Prior Conduct Declaration and Safe Behaviour Code; ensuring that safeguarding information is prominently displayed; checking everyone has completed the necessary safeguarding training; and making sure safeguarding is a regular item at leadership meetings.

47. Beyond the regular safeguarding audits, our safeguarding team are regularly reviewing policies and procedures to ensure compliance with the latest statutory standards and best practise. As a result, our safeguarding framework is not static; it is continually refined to respond to emerging risks and evolving best practices. The Archdiocese's requirements for volunteers outline clear criteria for all volunteer roles, ensuring that every individual who engages with our ministry is supported by robust safety protocols. This includes up-to-date police checks and blue cards along with specialised training tailored to the nature of each volunteer role.

48. Our safeguarding framework includes a range of measures such as mandatory safeguarding training, strict Blue Card compliance, updated police checks, and adherence to the Prior Conduct Declaration. These elements are designed to create a secure environment where the potential for abuse or exploitation is minimised, and where the dignity and rights of every participant are upheld.

49. Such measures not only protect the community but also provide reassurance to volunteers, who can be confident that they are operating within a secure and well-regulated environment.

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50. The Archdiocese's safeguarding policies are not self-created but are rigorously guided by established national standards and legal requirements. By embedding these frameworks into our operations, we strive to maintain a culture of safety, accountability, and continuous improvement, ensuring the well-being of all community members engaged in our ministries.

51. Equally significant to safeguarding is the robust training and development program that enhances the volunteer experience. The Archdiocese has established a thorough onboarding process, welcoming new volunteers to our core values, organizational culture, and specific operational protocols. The online induction program provides critical insights into safe practices, emergency management procedures, and the ethical responsibilities associated with Archdiocesan work.[14] This foundational training is bolstered by ongoing professional development initiatives, ensuring that volunteers remain informed about the latest practices in pastoral care and safeguarding.

52. Our training framework is designed to evolve continually. Volunteers are required to refresh their training in line with the timelines outlined in the volunteer matrix. They receive targeted education tailored to their roles, covering topics such as pastoral counselling, crisis intervention, and specialized ministry skills. This approach not only maintains volunteer competence but also fosters a sense of value and support. By offering specialised and role-specific training, the Archdiocese cultivates a culture of excellence, empowering volunteers to deliver exceptional care while exploring new opportunities for growth.

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[14] If volunteers unable to complete the induction online, Archdiocesan services work with parishes to facilitate group training sessions on-site. Training records are then signed and forwarded to Human Resources (HR) for record-keeping.

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53. A cornerstone of our volunteer engagement strategy is the diversity of ministry programmes addressing the varied needs of the Brisbane community. Centacare Pastoral Ministries, including our hospital and prison ministries, plays a pivotal role in offering pastoral care, spiritual guidance, and practical support to individuals and families navigating difficult circumstances. Whether in hospitals, prisons, or mental health support groups, our volunteers provide a compassionate presence, offering comfort and easing the burdens of those in need.

54. Our hospital ministry extends comfort and spiritual support to patients and their families during times of illness and uncertainty. Volunteers are trained to work within clinical settings, navigating the complexities of healthcare environments while upholding the highest standards of compassionate care. Meanwhile, our prison ministry is dedicated to offering hope and pastoral care people affected by the criminal justice system. Volunteers engage with those often marginalised by society, delivering spiritual guidance and a listening ear as part of a broader effort to promote rehabilitation and reintegration.

55. Eucharistic ministries represent another vital area of volunteer engagement. Volunteers in these ministries bring the Eucharist to individuals in their homes, offering spiritual comfort and connection to those unable to attend Mass. These roles require a deep commitment to service, pastoral sensitivity, and a thorough understanding of the Eucharistic rites. Volunteers receive specialised training that covers both the theological and practical aspects of administering the Eucharist in a home setting, reinforcing the Archdiocese's commitment to excellence in every facet of ministry.

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56. Overall, the Archdiocese of Brisbane's approach to volunteering is defined by its dedication to maintaining the highest standards of safety, support, and professional development. Our volunteer programme is underpinned by a comprehensive safeguarding framework that ensures all volunteers are thoroughly screened and continuously trained. The robust onboarding processes are designed to integrate new volunteers seamlessly into our diverse ministry teams, providing them with the skills and confidence they need to serve effectively.

57. By offering a wide range of ministry programmes, the Archdiocese provides multiple avenues for volunteer engagement. Each of these programmes is carefully managed to ensure that safeguarding remains paramount and that volunteers receive ongoing support and development opportunities. This integrated approach not only enhances the quality of volunteer service but also contributes to the overall well-being of the community.

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## Challenges Facing Volunteers and Volunteer Organisations

58. Volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations in Queensland are essential contributors to the social, economic, and cultural fabric of our communities. However, they face numerous challenges, particularly concerning compliance burdens, safeguarding requirements, insurance obligations, financial disincentives, and difficulties with recruitment and retention. These challenges not only affect the capacity of organisations like the Archdiocese of Brisbane to effectively deliver services but also deter potential volunteers from offering their time and skills. Addressing these obstacles is critical to fostering a sustainable and thriving volunteering sector that continues to enrich our society.

### Compliance Burdens

59. Volunteer-involving organisations face significant administrative and compliance challenges, particularly concerning mandatory screening checks and insurance requirements. Volunteers often need to complete multiple background checks, such as Blue Card working-with-children checks, and National Police Checks, along with mandatory training modules before commencing their roles. While these measures are essential for safety, their duplication and complexity can be discouraging.

60. Across Australia volunteering peak bodies have noted that the cost and administrative burden of mandatory screening is "excessive" and constitutes a "significant barrier to volunteering." Queensland has taken positive steps by providing Blue Cards for volunteers at no charge, as do most states; however, the application process and wait times still impose a burden.

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61. These requirements, while intended to protect safety, can overwhelm prospective volunteers – especially when multiple separate checks are required for different roles or when volunteers must repeatedly fill out forms for each organisation. As the Archdiocese Volunteer coordinator noted *"lots of paperwork can be off-putting"* and many people *"just want to get in and help and not be bogged down in forms and training."*

62. These challenges were highlighted in the National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033, acknowledging that complex onboarding processes, including background checks, are *"not easy or inclusive"* for some individuals, such as those lacking formal identification or private transport. This complexity can disproportionately exclude certain groups from volunteering opportunities. Additionally, the Productivity Commission's "Future of Giving" inquiry recommended minimising unnecessary regulatory barriers to volunteering, highlighting that worker screening checks can be a barrier, especially for organisations operating across different jurisdictions.[15]

63. To address these challenges, some jurisdictions have implemented reforms. In 2018, South Australia made all volunteer checks free, including National Volunteer Police Checks, to reduce financial barriers. Despite these efforts, the lack of national consistency and portability of checks continues to pose challenges for volunteers and organisations alike.

64. It is important to emphasise that even indirect costs – like requiring a volunteer to obtain a First Aid certificate or specific training at their own expense – can deter those who cannot afford it. For example, mandatory training or certification costs (and even needing a personal vehicle) are common barriers for otherwise willing volunteers.

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[15] Productivity Commission, *Future Foundations for Giving*, Report No. 104, Canberra, 2024.

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65. One of the challenges we face in the Archdiocese from a compliance perspective is encouraging long-standing volunteers to undertake continuous training. Many of our dedicated volunteers have been serving faithfully for years, if not decades, and often express a sentiment of, "I've been volunteering for so long; why do I need to complete this now?" This mentality can create resistance to new safeguarding or compliance requirements, even when these updates are essential to align with current legislative standards and best practices.

66. The reluctance is not necessarily due to a lack of willingness to learn but can stem from a sense of redundancy or frustration with perceived bureaucracy. For some volunteers, particularly those in older demographics, online training modules or repeated police checks feel unnecessary and, at times, disrespectful of their long service and integrity. This challenge is further compounded when training requirements evolve frequently, leading to "compliance fatigue" among volunteers who may already feel stretched by their service commitments. Balancing respect for volunteers' longstanding contributions with the need to uphold rigorous compliance standards is a delicate task.

67. In addition to these broader challenges, the Archdiocese of Brisbane faces specific compliance hurdles that reflect both the scale of our operations and the diverse nature of our volunteer programmes. The Archdiocese's comprehensive safeguarding framework necessitates a robust and multi-layered compliance approach, incorporating requirements such as the Prior Conduct Declaration, Blue Card clearances, National Police Checks, and tailored safeguarding training modules for different volunteer roles. While these measures are crucial for maintaining a safe environment, they contribute to a significant administrative load.

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68. Volunteers involved in Centacare Pastoral Services' hospital and prison outreach, Archdiocese Ministries, and school programmes often need to navigate distinct compliance pathways, each with unique screening and accreditation needs. This complexity can be particularly burdensome for volunteers engaged in multiple ministries, as they must often complete repeated checks and training sessions. The Archdiocese is committed to streamlining these processes wherever possible, exploring strategies such as consolidated training modules. We would seek the committees support to advocate for a streamlined approach to compliance red tape.

### Insurance Requirements

69. Insurance requirements present a particular challenge for the Archdiocese of Brisbane's volunteer programmes, adding another layer of complexity to compliance obligations. As a large and diverse organisation, the Archdiocese must ensure that appropriate liability and accident insurance covers a wide array of volunteer activities – from Eucharistic ministries who visit the elderly, and pastoral care providers to school support roles and broader community outreach.

70. This necessity extends to volunteers who use their own vehicles or equipment, such as those involved in transport ministries or hospital visits, who may require supplementary insurance coverage or need to sign risk waivers for added protection. Although these measures are vital for safeguarding both volunteers and service recipients, they can introduce administrative burdens that deter new volunteers and place additional strains on existing ones.

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71. Challenges become particularly evident at the parish level, where interpretations of compliance obligations can vary. Some parishes, aiming to minimise risk, feel compelled to register every individual involved in Masses – from Eucharistic ministers and altar servers to musicians and hospitality volunteers – while others avoid registration entirely due to the perceived administrative load. This inconsistency poses difficulties for the Archdiocese's HR and Insurance teams, who must maintain accurate records of volunteer participation to ensure adequate coverage. Without a uniform approach to volunteer registration, it is increasingly difficult to determine the number of active volunteers, which is vital for appropriate insurance policies and risk management strategies

72. As noted in national studies, "governance obligations and regulations introduce red tape," discouraging many from stepping into volunteer leadership roles. In response, the Archdiocese is working to simplify and align processes by providing clearer guidance to parishes, reducing the number of official "volunteer roles" from 54 to 28. This refinement has helped to distinguish genuine volunteers from those who roles are more aligned with active participation in the Mass. Through these efforts, we seek to strike a balance between necessary compliance measures and the practical realities of volunteer engagement.

## Safeguarding Requirements

73. The Archdiocese of Brisbane adopts safeguarding as a proactive measure to ensure the safety and well-being of every individual engaged in volunteer activities. Safeguarding is not merely seen as a regulatory requirement but is fundamentally embedded in the Archdiocese's commitment to protecting all members of our community, particularly the vulnerable. Our safeguarding framework includes a range of measures such as mandatory safeguarding training, strict Blue Card compliance, updated police checks, and adherence to the Prior Conduct Declaration. These elements are designed to create a secure environment where the potential for abuse or exploitation is minimised, and where the dignity and rights of every participant are upheld.

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74. In practical terms, safeguarding training equips volunteers with the knowledge and skills necessary to recognise, prevent, and report any form of abuse or neglect. The training is regularly updated to reflect evolving best practices and legislative changes, ensuring that all volunteers remain informed about the latest protocols. Blue Card compliance and updated police checks, critical aspects of our safeguarding regime, confirm that all volunteers working with children and vulnerable groups have undergone rigorous and current background checks. Similarly, the Prior Conduct Declaration serves as a formal attestation from volunteers that they have not engaged in any conduct that could compromise the safety of those they serve. These measures collectively ensure that our volunteers are not only prepared to act safely and responsibly but are also held accountable to the highest standards of conduct.

75. However, the implementation of these safeguarding measures can sometimes be perceived as burdensome – and even offensive – particularly by long-serving volunteers who began their service under less stringent compliance frameworks. Many of our dedicated volunteers have contributed to the community for years, sometimes decades, and have built their reputation on trust and longstanding service. When asked to undergo updated police checks or additional compliance measures, some volunteers feel that their prior record of safe, dedicated service is being questioned. This can lead to a sentiment of, "I have been volunteering for years—why do I have to comply with these new requirements now?" Such reactions are understandable; change can be difficult, and for many, these new checks are seen not only as an administrative imposition but as an implicit criticism of their past conduct.

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76. The Archdiocese recognises that this perception can cause offence. It is important to stress that our intent in updating these requirements is not to undermine the valuable contributions of long-serving volunteers, but rather to ensure that we meet current safety standards and legal obligations. The evolution of safeguarding protocols reflects changes in the broader regulatory environment and societal expectations regarding the protection of vulnerable individuals. By framing these updates as a shared commitment to maintaining a secure and welcoming environment, we aim to foster a culture of continuous improvement and mutual respect.

77. A crucial part of this balancing act involves recognising that the Archdiocese must protect the vulnerable while also providing a welcoming community to all, including those with chequered pasts. The Archdiocese strives to achieve this by carefully matching volunteers to appropriate roles. For example, a person with a questionable background may not be assigned to roles involving direct interaction with vulnerable individuals but could contribute meaningfully through roles such as groundskeeping, maintenance, or administrative support. There is always grass to be mowed and fences to be painted, and every volunteer can find a role that aligns with both their strengths and safeguarding requirements.

78. Just as we would not ask someone who does not know how to drive to transport parishioners, we equally would not place someone deemed unsuitable in a role with vulnerable people. This principle is not about exclusion but about ensuring that everyone is set up to contribute safely and effectively within their capacity. It is about matching gifts and abilities to needs in a way that protects all involved.

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79. This approach is deeply rooted in Catholic teachings, reflecting the words of Pope Francis: "The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open... everyone can share in some way in the life of the community." (Evangelii Gaudium, 47). It is also inspired by the Gospel teaching, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35), reinforcing our mission to offer both safety and compassion to all who seek to serve and be part of our community.

80. Additionally, while police certificates must be updated every three years, there is no interim system for positive reporting during that period. In contrast, Blue Card compliance operates on a more dynamic basis; if a volunteer with a Blue Card is charged with an offence of a sexual nature, the Archdiocese is notified immediately, allowing for prompt action. However, if a volunteer faces charges for offenses such as high range drink driving or reckless driving, there is no formal notification mechanism in place. This discrepancy poses a significant safeguarding risk. For instance, if a volunteer charged with drink driving or reckless driving is responsible for driving a bus, the Archdiocese might not be alerted to this risk until the next scheduled police certificate renewal. In such cases, we are reliant on the volunteer to self-disclose any changes in their circumstances, which may not always happen. This gap in real-time reporting underscores the need for more robust monitoring systems that bridge the period between the mandated updates, ensuring that all potential risks are identified and managed promptly to protect the safety of our community.

81. Internationally, there are numerous examples of jurisdictions that provide continuous offence monitoring background checks for police, Examples include:

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81.1. **United Kingdom – DBS Update Service:**[16] The UK's Disclosure and Barring Service offers an Update Service that keeps a volunteer's criminal record check current between renewals. Volunteers can subscribe (for free) to have their DBS certificate continuously updated. This means the DBS "regularly searches for updates to an individual's criminal record, ensuring that the information on their certificate is accurate and current." Organisations with the person's consent can perform instant online status checks, and if new relevant offences appear on record, the certificate's status will indicate that updated information is available, prompting a fresh check. This system was introduced to enhance safeguarding by closing the gap between periodic checks.

81.2. **United States – FBI Rap Back programme:** In the U.S., the FBI's Rap Back service provides real-time notifications of new criminal activity for individuals in positions of trust, including volunteers. After an initial fingerprint-based background check, the person's fingerprints are retained so that "an electronic notification will be generated if sometime later your applicant, employee, volunteer, or licensee engages in any criminal activity." In other words, if an enrolled volunteer is arrested or has a reportable offence after their check, the participating organisation is alerted without waiting for the next scheduled re-check. This continuous vetting mechanism helps address the risk of relying on out-of-date police certificates, as it immediately flags new offences that occur between standard renewal periods.[17]

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[16] United Kingdom Disclosure and Barring Service, *DBS Update Service: Applicant Guide*.

[17] Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Next Generation Identification (NGI)* (Web Page, 2024) https://le.fbi.gov/science-and-lab/biometrics-and-fingerprints/biometrics/next-generation-identification-ngi.

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82. Both examples demonstrate how interim, or continuous background monitoring can strengthen volunteer screening. By receiving ongoing updates or alerts, organisations can act promptly if a volunteer's criminal history changes, thereby improving safeguarding and reducing the window of risk created by infrequent rechecking.

83. Aligned with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, which state that volunteer roles should only exist where there is a genuine need and a genuine role, our approach reinforces that safeguarding is integral to every aspect of volunteer service. We are committed to restructuring volunteer roles and clarifying expectations to support all volunteers, regardless of their tenure. Efforts include streamlining training processes, offering in-person group sessions, and providing clear communication about the reasons behind updated checks. In doing so, we hope to respect and acknowledge the long history of volunteer service while ensuring that current best practices in safeguarding are maintained for the benefit of everyone involved.

## Financial Disincentives

84. Many volunteers bear the costs of their transport, training, and other expenses related to their roles, which can discourage ongoing engagement and particularly deter ad-hoc or occasional volunteering. Volunteers often personally fund items such as fuel and parking for travel, uniforms or materials for activities, and fees for training or background checks. These out-of-pocket expenses add up over time and create a financial burden. Research indicates that just over half of volunteers incur such expenses during their volunteering.

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85. In Queensland, the average cost for a person to volunteer has sharply increased in recent years – tripling from about $4.76 per hour in 2020 to $15.57 per hour in 2022–23, reflecting rising fuel prices and general cost-of-living pressures.[18] This escalation means that even dedicated individuals may cut back their hours or avoid certain roles because the personal cost is too high. It also discourages spontaneous or short-term volunteering, as people may hesitate to take on one-off tasks if doing so incurs significant expense.

86. As volunteer numbers continue to decline, addressing financial barriers through increased reimbursements, concessions, and government support will be critical in ensuring the sustainability of the sector.

87. The *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report* highlights that Queenslanders who wish to volunteer often face cost barriers, with volunteers shouldering 76.2% of these costs and organisations reimbursing only 23.8% of expenses. Despite some improvement in reimbursement rates, many Archdiocesan volunteers still cover the majority of their expenses themselves. For retirees on fixed incomes, students, or jobseekers, these added costs can be prohibitive. For example, older volunteers report spending an average of $3.78 per hour on their volunteering with only 5.2% of their expenses reimbursed[19] (State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Older Persons Report). Young volunteers also experience financial strain, with their volunteering costs averaging $19.74 per hour, of which only 19.9% is reimbursed.[20]

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[18] *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report* (Volunteering Queensland, 2024).

[19] *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Older Persons Report* (Volunteering Queensland, 2024).

[20] *State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Youth Report* (Volunteering Queensland, 2024).

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88. While volunteers do not seek to profit from their service, ensuring they are not left out-of-pocket is important for sustaining their contribution. Reducing the personal costs of volunteering through increased reimbursements, concessions, or support with equipment and training fees would enable more individuals to contribute their time without undue hardship.

89. Currently *Centacare Pastoral Ministry Volunteers* who provide prison Ministry, receive a small per diem from the Department of Corrections to cover expenses such as parking and fuel, which supports their ability to volunteer. This small Per Diem recognises the significant role that pastoral ministry can play in supporting people during challenging circumstances.

90. However, this support from the *Department of Corrections* is contrasted to volunteers in Queensland Health hospitals who do not receive such support. This is despite facing costs for volunteering, with hospitals being notorious for charging high parking costs and higher than normal food and coffee. This discrepancy has led to an imbalance where there are often more willing volunteers for prison ministries compared to hospital ministries, where the financial burden can deter potential volunteers.

## Recruitment and Retention

91. The Archdiocese, in line with broader trends, faces ongoing challenges in attracting new volunteers and retaining existing ones. The State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report indicates a 10% decline in volunteer participation rates since 2020, with only 64.3% of Queenslanders volunteering in 2023. Many long-standing volunteers within the Archdiocese are ageing or scaling back their involvement, yet recruiting the next generation of volunteers to fill these roles has proven difficult.

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92. A particular challenge is the significant drop-off in youth volunteering following school graduation. Many young people engage in volunteering through school programmes, but once they graduate, organisations often lose the ability to connect with them. Due to privacy regulations, schools cannot share graduates' contact details with external organisations, creating a gap where young volunteers are not effectively transitioned into broader community volunteering opportunities. This barrier limits the ability to maintain engagement with youth volunteers who are otherwise motivated to contribute.

93. A significant barrier to recruitment is a lack of time, with over 40% of Queenslanders citing "no time" as a reason for not volunteering more. Many potential volunteers, particularly those balancing work, family, and study commitments, struggle to find opportunities that align with their availability. Additionally, nearly one-quarter of Queenslanders who do not currently volunteer say they have never been asked or are unsure how to get involved. This points to a sizable pool of willing potential volunteers who remain untapped simply because they haven't been effectively invited or informed about opportunities.

94. The Archdiocese has observed that youth involvement flourishes when volunteer roles are more accessible and flexible. This observation has been backed up by the State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Youth Report, which found that Young volunteers – who contribute an average of 22.6 hours per month – are often deterred by traditional volunteer models requiring regular weekly commitments or daytime availability.

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95. Retention is equally important. Volunteers who feel valued and see the impact of their work are more likely to remain engaged. Recognising volunteer contributions through formal acknowledgment, providing opportunities for personal and skill development, and offering flexible volunteering options are effective retention strategies. Negative experiences, such as poor coordination or excessive demands, contribute to dropout rates. Supporting volunteer managers with training and resources is crucial for maintaining positive volunteer experiences and reducing burnout. Ensuring open communication and providing regular feedback can further strengthen volunteer engagement and commitment.

## Volunteer Fatigue and Compliance Resistance:

96. Many of the Archdiocese's long-standing volunteers have been serving faithfully for decades, and in recent years some have experienced increasing fatigue and frustration. Volunteer fatigue (or burnout) has become more pronounced as overall volunteer numbers have decreased, leaving a smaller group of people to shoulder the same or greater workload. We see this in some parishes where a handful of dedicated individuals are coordinating events, running multiple ministry groups, and volunteering several days each week to keep programmes running. Understandably, this can lead to exhaustion. Front-line reports confirm that burnout is a concern; in fact, more than one-third of volunteer managers in Queensland (38.4%) identified volunteer burnout as a key barrier to sustaining volunteer participation.

When volunteers feel overwhelmed or stretched too thin, they may scale back their involvement or step away entirely for the sake of their own health and balance – a cycle that further concentrates pressure on those who remain active. This kind of fatigue not only affects the individuals in question but can also impact the quality of services (as tired volunteers may not be able to perform at their best) and the continuity of programmes.

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97. Alongside fatigue, there is a notable resistance among some volunteers – particularly older volunteers who have been involved for a long time – to the growing compliance and administrative requirements that now accompany volunteering. In the past, volunteering in a parish setting was often an informal affair built on personal trust and community reputation. Today, however, volunteers are routinely asked to complete formal registration forms, undergo background checks (like Blue Card or police checks), attend safeguarding training sessions, follow detailed codes of conduct, and adhere to various policies. While these measures are essential for safety and accountability, they can be perceived as onerous by those not accustomed to them.

98. The Queensland Volunteering Strategy 2024–2032 notes that organisations find certain requirements around volunteering to be overly complex, with feedback that the process of involving volunteers is often "confusing, duplicative, and disproportionate to the risks".

99. This sentiment resonates with experiences in our Archdiocese: some long-time volunteers feel inundated by what they term "red tape" and may question why procedures they've managed without for years are now mandatory. We have encountered cases of volunteers hesitating to continue because the administrative load – whether it's completing online training modules or signing forms – is outside their comfort zone.

100. As one study from Flinders university observed when looking at Meals on Wheels, volunteers confronted with complex regulations sometimes end up "throwing up their hands saying, *"I can't do this anymore. It's too hard"*. The risk is that well-intentioned compliance measures, if not implemented thoughtfully, can alienate the very people who sustain our programmes.

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101. The Archdiocese is actively working to address these issues by balancing the need for compliance with the practical realities of volunteer engagement. We understand that our volunteers' time is precious, and their goodwill should not be taken for granted. In response to feedback, the Archdiocese has undertaken efforts to simplify and streamline volunteer management processes. For example, we recently reduced the number of officially defined volunteer roles (from 54 down to 28) to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and make expectations clearer. This helps distinguish truly "volunteer" roles (which carry certain obligations) from casual participation in parish life, so that someone who simply helps occasionally isn't required to go through the same extensive onboarding as a volunteer in a child-related ministry.

102. We have also increased support for volunteers navigating compliance tasks: offering in-person help or group sessions for those who struggle with online training modules and providing plain-language explanations for why certain checks or paperwork are needed.

103. By clearly communicating the reasons behind new requirements (for instance, explaining how a background check protects both the volunteer and the vulnerable people they serve), we aim to bring volunteers on board with these changes rather than have them feel imposed upon. It remains an ongoing dialogue – respecting the knowledge and contributions of veteran volunteers while also upholding modern standards of safety and professionalism.

104. Tackling volunteer fatigue and compliance resistance is crucial for the Archdiocese's volunteer programme: if we can reduce burnout and ease the compliance burden, we will retain more of our experienced volunteers and foster a culture where new volunteers are not discouraged by process. In turn, this will ensure that our mission of service continues with both integrity and heart.

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## Recommendations

105.    Considering these challenges, the Archdiocese proposes:

### Introduction of a Government-Issued Volunteer Card

106.    The introduction of a Government-Issued Volunteer Card would create a streamlined and efficient verification system for volunteers across Queensland. This card would consolidate police and blue card checks, safeguarding training, Queensland disability issued worker screening clearance, and insurance coverage into a single, portable credential. By providing a universally recognised identification, it would significantly reduce duplication and administrative burdens for volunteer-involving organisations. Furthermore, incorporating an alert system for changes in a volunteer's compliance status would enhance safety and transparency.

107.    The card would serve as a multi-purpose identification card, consolidating essential compliance requirements such as police checks, blue card checks, safeguarding training certifications, and insurance coverage. The card would function as a portable and universally recognised credential, reducing administrative burdens for volunteer-involving organisations. Volunteers would no longer need to undergo repetitive compliance checks when transitioning between different organisations, enhancing efficiency and mobility within the sector.

108.    An innovative feature of the card would be an alert system that provides real-time notifications to organisations regarding any changes in a volunteer's compliance status. This includes updates on police reports, Blue Card status, safeguarding training compliance, and any other relevant legal or accreditation changes. Such a real-time update mechanism would contribute to safer volunteering environments by ensuring that only fully compliant volunteers are active within organisations.

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109.   The card could be digitally integrated with existing volunteer management systems and potentially linked to a centralised volunteer platform, allowing for seamless registration and tracking of volunteer activities. Additionally, the card could facilitate access to financial incentives and support services, as proposed in the financial incentives section of the recommendations.

110.   Implementing a Volunteer Card system has proven successful in various regions, serving as a centralized credential to streamline volunteer engagement and compliance. For example, In Scotland, the government has introduced a program called Volunteer Scotland Disclosure Services.[21] This initiative allows volunteers to obtain a single Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) membership, which covers them for multiple volunteer roles. Instead of requiring a new background check every time they volunteer with a different organisation, their PVG status remains valid and can be easily shared with different organisations. This reduces administrative burdens, makes the process more efficient for both volunteers and organisations, and ensures that safeguarding requirements are consistently met across the board.

111.   This model demonstrates that a unified volunteer credentialing system can enhance efficiency, reduce administrative burdens, and encourage greater participation by making it easier for individuals to offer their time across various sectors.

112.   The implementation of a similar initiative here in Queensland would simplify onboarding processes, improve volunteer mobility between organisations, and ensure higher compliance with safeguarding standards, ultimately fostering a safer and more effective volunteering environment.

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[21] Volunteer Scotland, 'Disclosure Services' (Web Page) https://www.volunteerscotland.net/disclosure-services.

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## Develop a Centralised Volunteer Platform

113.    A centralised volunteer platform would significantly improve awareness and accessibility of volunteer opportunities across Queensland. Such a platform, integrated with the Government-Issued Volunteer Card, would streamline administration and reduce barriers to entry for prospective volunteers. This initiative would create a one-stop resource for finding, applying for, and managing volunteer roles across various sectors and organisations.

114.    The platform would also provide individuals with the opportunity to nominate their preferred types of volunteer work and be matched with suitable organisations. Additionally, the platform could include smart-matching algorithms that suggest roles based on individual skills, interests, and availability, ensuring a tailored and satisfying volunteer experience.

115.    For the Queensland Government, this platform would offer a dynamic and ready-to-go database of volunteers who could be mobilised quickly in the event of an emergency or natural disaster. The ability to issue targeted calls for volunteers with specific skills or in particular geographic areas would significantly enhance emergency response capabilities.

116.    Looking ahead to the Brisbane 2032 Olympics, launching this platform in advance would provide ample time for volunteers to migrate to the new system. It would also allow potential volunteers to express interest in supporting the Games, offering event organisers invaluable data about volunteer availability, skills, and preferences. Furthermore, by integrating Olympic-related volunteering with broader community service opportunities, the platform could motivate individuals to engage in community volunteering well before the Games, creating a legacy of civic engagement and community support.

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## Introduce a Daily Allowance for Hospital Ministry Volunteers

117.   Hospital ministry volunteers play a critical role in providing comfort, support, and pastoral care to patients and their families. However, many of these volunteers face significant out-of-pocket expenses, particularly in relation to parking, travel, and incidental costs. These financial barriers can deter potential volunteers and place a strain on those already offering their time and skills.

118.   We recommend the Queensland Government establish a daily allowance of approximately $50 for volunteers in hospital ministries. This allowance would help cover parking and out-of-pocket expenses, ensuring that financial strain does not become a barrier to participation.

119.   By implementing a comparable model for hospital ministry volunteers, the government would acknowledge the vital contributions of these volunteers while promoting a more sustainable and equitable approach to community service.

120.   Additionally, linking this allowance to the Government-Issued Volunteer Card would provide a streamlined and efficient method for managing reimbursements, ensuring transparency and ease of administration for both volunteers and organisations.

## Establish a Centralised Volunteer Reimbursement Fund

121.   Volunteers often incur costs related to travel, supplies, and other expenses while fulfilling their roles. These costs can be a significant deterrent, particularly for those engaging in intensive or long-term volunteering. The lack of a standardised reimbursement system can lead to inconsistencies and inequities among volunteers.

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122.	A centralised reimbursement fund could be developed to support all volunteers, particularly those involved in intensive or long-term roles. This fund would allow volunteer-involving organisations to offer consistent and equitable reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses, promoting inclusivity and reducing financial burdens on volunteers.

123.	A centralised fund ensures fairness and consistency in how volunteers are reimbursed for their expenses. It provides a clear framework for organisations to follow, reducing administrative burdens and ensuring volunteers feel valued and supported. By alleviating financial stress, this model encourages more individuals to participate in volunteering and maintain their engagement over time.

## Provide Discounts on Essential Services for Volunteers

124.	Rising costs of living, including utility bills, can make volunteering less accessible for many individuals. Volunteers who commit significant time may struggle to balance their financial obligations with their desire to contribute to the community.

125.	We propose the introduction of discounts on electricity bills and other essential services for volunteers who commit to a set number of hours annually. This initiative would serve as a practical and recognisable incentive for sustained volunteer engagement across Queensland and encourage more people to volunteer by reducing financial barriers.

126.	Offering discounts on essential services acknowledges the contributions of volunteers in a tangible way. It also provides financial relief, making it easier for individuals to volunteer without compromising their financial stability. Such discounts are a proven method of incentivising participation in other sectors, demonstrating potential for success in the volunteering space. Additionally, by lowering the cost of living for volunteers, this model can attract new volunteers who might otherwise be unable to afford the financial commitment associated with unpaid work.

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## Collaborate with Educational Institutions and Workplaces

127.   We recommend collaboration with schools, universities, and workplaces to promote volunteering as part of structured community service programmes. These partnerships would provide students and employees with access to meaningful volunteer opportunities, building a culture of service and social responsibility from a young age. Additionally, incorporating volunteering into educational curricula and corporate social responsibility initiatives could create formal pathways for skill development, leadership opportunities, and community engagement, preparing participants for future employment and active citizenship.

## Support New School Leavers' Transition into Volunteering

128.   Targeted programmes designed to help new school leavers stay connected with organisations they volunteered with during their schooling would bridge the current gap caused by privacy laws that prevent the sharing of former students' contact details. By maintaining these connections, young people can continue contributing to their communities and gain valuable experience.

129.   Research consistently shows that individuals who begin volunteering at a young age are more likely to continue volunteering throughout their lives, creating a lifelong culture of service and community involvement. Early and continued exposure to volunteering not only builds essential life skills such as empathy, leadership, and teamwork but also fosters a sense of purpose and belonging. By investing in youth volunteering initiatives, we are not just meeting immediate community needs but also cultivating the next generation of dedicated volunteers and engaged citizens.

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## Establish Short-Term and Flexible Volunteering programmes

130.    We propose the establishment of short-term and flexible volunteering opportunities to attract younger individuals and full-time workers. Tailoring programmes to accommodate varying schedules and availability would address the specific needs of these demographics, increasing overall volunteer engagement and fostering a diverse and dynamic volunteer workforce.

131.    As many workplaces are increasingly offering volunteer leave as part of their corporate social responsibility initiatives, this recommendation aligns with existing trends while offering practical support. The proposed centralised volunteer platform would play a critical role in reducing the administrative burden associated with onboarding, registration, and compliance checks. Currently, the complexity and time required for these processes often deter both employees and employers from fully utilising volunteer leave programmes.

132.    By streamlining these procedures, the platform would make it significantly easier for organisations to manage volunteer leave policies and for employees to participate in meaningful volunteer work. This is particularly valuable during emergencies and natural disasters, where a quick mobilisation of volunteers can make a substantial difference. Moreover, by facilitating easier access to volunteer opportunities, the platform can enhance overall participation rates, contributing to a stronger and more resilient community.

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## Increased Support for Emergency Response Volunteering

133.    Enhancing support for emergency response volunteering is crucial for Queensland's resilience in the face of natural disasters and emergencies. We propose the development of structured training programmes tailored for emergency and disaster response volunteers, ensuring they are well-prepared to contribute effectively. Strengthening integration between volunteer organisations and emergency services would lead to improved coordination and utilisation of volunteers during critical times. Introduce Government-Supported Volunteer Insurance Policies

134.    Volunteers often engage in activities that carry personal risks. Many volunteers may be deterred from participating if they are not adequately protected against potential accidents or liabilities. Organisations are legally required to have insurance in place to cover volunteers, ensuring that they are protected in the event of an accident or incident. For smaller organisations, the cost of providing adequate insurance coverage can be a significant financial burden, potentially limiting their capacity to engage volunteers effectively.

135.    To enhance the safety and security of volunteers, we recommend that the Queensland Government consider establishing subsidised or free volunteer insurance policies. Such a scheme would protect volunteers against personal risks associated with their service and provide peace of mind for both volunteers and the organisations they support. By offering government-supported insurance, smaller organisations could reduce operational costs, allowing them to focus more resources on delivering valuable community services.

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136. Government-supported insurance demonstrates a commitment to volunteer welfare. It mitigates risk for volunteers and organisations alike, encouraging broader participation by providing a safety net. Furthermore, ensuring compliance with legal requirements regarding volunteer insurance supports organisations in maintaining best practices and safeguarding both volunteers and service recipients. The reduced financial strain on smaller organisations also promotes equity and sustainability within the volunteer sector, enabling a broader range of community groups to engage volunteers safely and effectively.

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**Conclusion**

137.    The Archdiocese of Brisbane's submission to the Queensland Parliament's Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee highlights the profound impact of volunteering on the social, economic, and spiritual fabric of Queensland. Through the selfless service of over 15,000 volunteers, the Archdiocese not only meets the immediate needs of vulnerable communities but also fosters lasting social cohesion and resilience. The submission outlines clear, actionable steps to address the challenges faced by volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations, including streamlining compliance processes, offering practical support, and enhancing recognition for volunteers.

138.    Central to the Archdiocese's recommendations is a Government-issued Volunteer Card – a practical, innovative solution that will simplify compliance, enhance volunteer mobility across organisations, and strengthen safeguarding standards. This card embodies the principles of efficiency and safety, reducing administrative burdens while ensuring that volunteers meet the necessary compliance standards. Its introduction, alongside a centralised volunteer platform, will lay a strong foundation for increased volunteer participation, particularly as Queensland prepares for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

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139.	The Archdiocese extends its heartfelt gratitude to the many parishioners who participated in our survey, offering invaluable insights and feedback. We also wish to express our deep appreciation to our dedicated volunteers, without whom the Archdiocese could not achieve the tremendous good we do across Queensland. These volunteers are the very fabric that holds our ministries together, driving our mission forward and ensuring that the love of Christ is made manifest in every act of service. Their selflessness, compassion, and unwavering commitment are what keep us on the road, supporting vulnerable communities, providing pastoral care, and nurturing the spiritual and social well-being of those we serve. Their contributions are not just valued, they are vital to our shared mission.

140.	For many of our volunteers, volunteering is more than an act of charity; it is a living testament to the Gospel call to "love one another"[22]. Pope Francis reminds us, "Volunteers are the strength of the Church," a truth that resonates throughout the Archdiocese's ministries. Every act of service, whether in hospitals, schools, or the broader community, is a tangible expression of our faith—an echo of Christ's own example of serving the marginalized and uplifted.

141.	We also wish to express our sincere thanks to the Committee for undertaking this important inquiry into volunteering in Queensland and for providing us with the opportunity to participate. Your commitment to understanding the challenges and opportunities within the sector is a vital step towards building a vibrant and sustainable volunteering landscape. The Archdiocese welcomes this inquiry as a sign of genuine partnership between government and community organisations and stands ready to assist the Committee in any way necessary as you continue this important work.

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[22] John 13:34

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142.    Just as the Good Samaritan,[23] did not hesitate to help a stranger in need, we are called to create an environment where every volunteer is equipped, valued, and able to serve with dignity and compassion. Through well-considered reforms and strategic partnerships, we can cultivate a Queensland where volunteering thrives, where communities are strengthened, and where every volunteer can feel appreciated for their commitment to making our State more compassionate and resilient.

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[23] Luke 10:25-37

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