

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

Submission No:	551
Submitted by:	Mary-Lou Gittins OAM
Publication:	Making the submission and your name public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	

Mary-Lou Gittins OAM
Volunteer for 50+yrs
Goomburra Valley

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

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;

I have been volunteering since Year 10 in high school when I organised a committee to fundraise for our class trip from Cunnamulla to Brisbane many years ago.

Over the last 50 years, I have witnessed the increasing impact of legislative and regulatory burdens on community groups. The obligations placed on not-for-profit (NFP) organisations are comparable to those of businesses employing staff, yet there is no formal training to help these groups navigate new legislative and regulatory requirements.

As a result, the government is putting community groups at risk—not just legally but also in terms of their overall well-being. This is where community officers play a crucial role in supporting local groups on the ground, particularly within regional council areas.

A prime example of this challenge is the recent changes to ATO regulations and Model Rules. Many community groups face significant barriers in adapting to these changes, including:

1. Lack of access to computers or email to receive important notices—hopefully, those without email addresses received posted correspondence.
2. Limited capacity to understand the impact of regulatory changes.
3. Outdated constitutions—some older than ‘Hades’!

I recently joined a local community hall group, only to discover they didn’t have a copy of their constitution. When I purchased one from the Office of Fair Trading, I found it dated back to 1988.

For many grassroots organisations, “good governance” is an unfamiliar concept.

These groups are driven by local issues, community needs, and direct action. They simply do not have the time, expertise, or resources to manage the ever-increasing demands of compliance and regulation.

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

Volunteering is about community action. For example, when our town lacked doctors, the community came together to raise funds and build a medical centre. The community owns the building and leases it to a doctor to run their practice, meeting a critical local need.

These kinds of remarkable initiatives are happening across the state, often filling gaps where the government has not provided the necessary infrastructure or facilities. However, while community groups manage these assets, they are often unaware of the legislative, insurance, and regulatory responsibilities that come with their role.

Insurance costs these days take a considerable amount of group's finances before they can reinvest in activities and volunteers. Finding the right insurance is also a challenge.

Education in regional centres would be a crucial first step in addressing this issue. Providing opportunities for smaller groups to be auspiced by more experienced committees could offer the guidance and support needed to navigate these complex requirements.

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;

Our community groups are aging and slowing down. Volunteering is evolving due to the increasing demands of governance and compliance. Younger generations are more drawn to one-off volunteering experiences with no ongoing obligations. However, sports clubs continue to thrive, as parents actively participate in committees to support their children's involvement.

Schools once had student councils in both primary and high schools, where students volunteered for community events and organisations. These councils also gathered input from their peers on school needs and organised fundraising efforts to support improvements. Learning the value of volunteering from an early age is essential for the future of community involvement in Queensland.

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

Improving communication with state bodies that support community groups would strengthen the governance of grassroots organisations. Investing in these bodies would enable them to build the capacity of local groups, ensuring not only their physical safety but also their compliance with governance and administrative requirements.

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;

I live in a western rural community and our local showgrounds is excited about the Olympics as we have great facilities and are not too far out.

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;

Training existing community groups in disaster management would increase local support during times of crisis. Our local hall has developed a disaster management plan for the community, leading to improved preparedness and response within the valley. This was made possible through the support of the regional council's disaster management team.