



REVITALISING VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND

2021 – 2022 State Budget Submission
Volunteering Queensland

Contact

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Who we are

Volunteering Queensland is the state's peak body for advancing and promoting volunteering. With 300 member organisations and a wider network of thousands more, we represent hundreds of thousands of volunteers that support and enhance the lives of all Queenslanders. Our broad scope of work sees us collaborating with governments, interstate networks, organisations and individuals through training, research, advocacy, resources, advice, consultancies and capacity-building projects.

We value our partnership with the Queensland Government on a range of programs, including National Volunteer Week grants and disaster volunteer management services. Notably, the recent Care Army program saw tens of thousands of Queenslanders stepping up to support their community through the COVID-19 pandemic. Building upon this partnership, we are advocating for the critical needs of Queensland's volunteers to be included in the upcoming state budget.

The value of volunteering

Queensland enjoys enormous benefits from the goodwill of its volunteers. In 2016, the economic value of volunteering to the state was conservatively estimated as \$11.6 billion. Altogether, volunteers represent Queensland's largest workforce by population and current research indicates that volunteering provides a \$4.50 return for every dollar invested.

Volunteers are there when Queensland needs them most. Recent events such as the COVID-19 Pandemic and the 2019 Bushfires and Central Queensland Monsoonal Floods demonstrated that volunteers across Queensland will step up in times of need, but strong, effective and coordinated leadership is required to turn their goodwill into successful, impactful outcomes.

Volunteering is filled with inspirational stories of people lifting each other, communities banding together, triumph over adversity, and hope for the future. Those who engage with and support volunteers have the opportunity to connect with these stories.

The benefits of volunteering touch the lives of every Queenslander – not only in times of disaster, but also during public celebrations, community campaigns and through day-to-day services. Without additional support, many essential services that help our most vulnerable citizens will cease. Volunteer-involving organisations support communities across the state, but also require support to build their capacity and deliver programs sustainably.

The volunteering landscape in Queensland

Queensland's volunteer sector is in a state of renewal. The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching consequences for volunteer-involving organisations, such as the loss of volunteers (especially older volunteers), reduced fundraising opportunities, unforeseen expenses, workplace restrictions and an increased demand for services. These factors compound with

perennial issues for the sector, including a declining volunteer rate and limited, competitive funding.

While the current climate of uncertainty provides obstacles, it also provides opportunities. The volunteer sector has been hard at work adapting to meet the challenges of today. There is an immediate and unique opportunity to resource and promote initiatives that will ensure the sector re-emerges more innovative, resilient and sustainable. There has also been a rising interest and willingness to volunteer amongst younger people. To future proof volunteering, this surge in interest from younger Queenslanders needs to be captured, built upon and understood. By investing in volunteering, the state government would enable programs that deliver on key socioeconomic metrics and generate positive, inspirational stories for years to come.

Failure to provide this support presents tangible risk and carries an opportunity cost. Investments in the volunteer sector now, while organisations are rebuilding, can be implemented more efficiently than support delivered later. Without intervention, some volunteer-involving organisations will be forced to close, inhibiting volunteering outcomes in their community and placing additional burdens on state-run health and community services.

More than ever, now is the time to support Queensland's volunteers.

Recommendations

Volunteering Queensland recommends that the Queensland Government partners with the volunteering sector to capitalise on the current opportunity to revitalise the sector.

To best support Queensland's volunteers, Volunteering Queensland is advocating for the upcoming state budget to include:

- 1.** Ongoing investment to sustain and enhance our state's vital Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) program.
- 2.** Reinvigorate volunteering across the state with targeted recruitment campaigns and new partnerships with regional volunteer-enabling organisations, including:
 - a.** Launching a state-wide recruitment campaign, including online components and in-person expos and events. This campaign would focus on engaging youth, lapsed volunteers (including older volunteers stood down during COVID-19) and new volunteers, in partnership with neighbourhood centres, Volunteer Resource Centres and other local volunteer-enabling organisations.
 - b.** Supporting the state's existing network of 10 Volunteer Resource Centres to continue and expand the work they do enabling place-based urban and regional volunteer participation.
- 3.** A feasibility study into state-wide volunteer insurance cover to safeguard volunteers, mitigate risk and provide confidence to the sector.

Recommendation 1

Ongoing investment to sustain and enhance our state's vital Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) program

Overview

- Queensland's disaster resilience is built through collaborative approaches that are regionally coordinated, locally led and supported with state resources.
- Volunteering Queensland delivers EV CREW: Australia's leading emergency volunteering system. Further development and implementation is restricted by limited resources.
- Many Local Government Areas (LGAs) require additional training, resources and support to fulfil their responsibilities as outlined in the *Queensland Disaster Management Act 2003* and *Queensland Disaster Management Plan*. These responsibilities include preparing and implementing local plans for the management of spontaneous volunteers at times of disasters.
- Each LGA typically needs a unique and local solution that reflects its geography, capability, and capacity. Creating and executing these solutions requires time and resources. There is a clear and present opportunity for further collaboration to address this need.

Background and need

Local volunteering is what enables communities to be connected and resilient, especially at times of disaster. Through floods, storms and fire, volunteers have worked together to help Australia's most disaster-prone state prepare for, respond to, and recover from extreme weather events.

Queensland is uniquely positioned to deliver frontline volunteer participation in disasters, pandemics and other emergencies due to Volunteering Queensland's development and delivery of the EV CREW program, in partnership with the Queensland Government. Through EV CREW, Volunteering Queensland regularly collaborates with LGAs and relevant volunteer organisations to build capacity and provide expert advice on the recruitment and management and deployment of spontaneous emergency volunteers. This program:

- Provides a comprehensive database and management system that supports the pre-registration, and activation of prospective emergency volunteers.
- Places volunteers with LGAs, government agencies and other volunteer-involving organisations requesting volunteer assistance.
- Provides advice, training, coordination and other support to LGAs, government agencies and other organisations regarding building local capability and engaging volunteers in times of disaster.

- Enables the development of resources and services to support community resilience, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

With close to 120,000 pre-registered volunteers, **EV CREW is the largest spontaneous emergency volunteering system in Australia**. During the last 13 years, it has been activated over 130 times to help communities rapidly recruit and coordinate volunteer workforces in times of disaster.

The strong benefits offered by this program have been recognised within other states and territories, and on the national stage. The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements highlighted EV CREW in its draft propositions, writing:

“State and territory governments should improve arrangements for the coordination of spontaneous volunteers in relief and recovery from natural disasters, for example by adopting the Emergency Volunteering CREW model used in Queensland.”

This model has become a core component of Queensland’s emergency response and its ongoing success has led to its adoption by other states and territories. While Volunteering Queensland continues to develop, upgrade and deliver EV CREW, it does not receive funding to do so.

Volunteering Queensland recently undertook a project funded through the National Disaster Resilience Program and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority. This project worked with select LGAs and volunteer-involving organisations to develop local community and LGA capability and capacity in the management and coordination of spontaneous volunteers.

The project was very successful and demonstrates the benefits of maintaining a resource dedicated to working with LGAs and other organisations on their engagement of volunteers in disasters. Volunteering Queensland is ready to expand this project and further deliver these services, building capacity, capability and resilience in all regions of Queensland. **If LGAs are not adequately prepared before disaster strikes, they may be required to develop critical responses ad-hoc in the midst of a crisis.** This introduces the risk of duplicated efforts, inefficient recovery operations and additional harm to affected communities.

Volunteers are a key resource for surge capacity during emergencies. Volunteering Queensland is well-positioned to ensure they are engaged effectively, safely and at times when impacted communities need and want them. Just as state and local governments are supported by EV CREW, this program also requires ongoing support to maintain Queensland’s advantage in the face of adversity. Our exposure to natural disasters deems it necessary that resilience becomes ‘business as usual’ for LGAs, organisations and individuals.

Queensland is Australia’s most disaster-prone state and Queenslanders are resilient and generous by nature, ready to lend a hand when needed. Our state needs a robust, fully-functioning EV CREW to turn this goodwill into successful outcomes, now and into the future.

Objectives

- Continue to allow Queensland communities to benefit from expert, nation-leading emergency volunteer matching, management and deployment services.
- Provide secure funding that ensures the longevity of EV CREW, removing its vulnerability to future, unforeseen budgetary changes.
- Collaborate with LGAs to enhance their management of spontaneous emergency volunteers, local disaster response and recovery.

Recommended investment

Volunteering Queensland recommends that the Queensland Government sustains and enhances the vital EV CREW program through:

- A commitment for dedicated operational funding and development of the EV CREW program, improving service delivery and outcomes.
\$250,000 per year for five years, funding dedicated IT personnel, associated licences and development work.
- Engaging Volunteering Queensland to expand its collaboration with LGAs, providing tailored training, resources, processes, and advice that reflect their unique geography and capabilities.
\$200,000 per year for five years to provide a dedicated officer, administrative support and resource development for LGAs and volunteer-involving organisations.

Recommendation 2

Reinvigorate volunteering across the state with targeted recruitment campaigns and new partnerships with regional volunteer-enabling organisations

Overview

- Volunteering provides a wide range of benefits for communities, vulnerable Queenslanders and volunteers themselves. Strong volunteer participation is an indicator of a strong community.
- According to the findings of the Australian Bureau of Statistics over the past decade, formal volunteering rates are in decline. Queensland's volunteer participation has fallen short of the national average for the past five years. In the most recent 2016 census, the rate of Queenslanders volunteering with an organisation fell to a low of 18%.
- The COVID-19 pandemic applies additional pressure on volunteer-involving organisations' ability to recruit and retain their workforces. Surveyed volunteer-involving organisations express that volunteer recruitment, retention and reduced participation of vulnerable groups post-COVID-19 are their primary challenges.
- Nation-wide, a network of 52 Commonwealth Government funded Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) provide volunteer recruitment and referral services, training, networking, resources and other forms of support for their local communities. This network includes a number of VRCs in Queensland. Federal funding for general recruitment and volunteer matching services will cease in June 2021 and Queensland VRCs may lose capacity to deliver these place-based services, or close altogether.

Background and need

Recent disaster, drought and pandemic events have created a period of uncertainty for all Queenslanders, with heightened impacts upon volunteers and their ability to give time to those in need.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many volunteer-involving organisations to balance increased demand against downward pressure on their ability to fundraise and engage their workforce. It also had a profound impact for individual volunteers – particularly those who are older – facing pressing concerns about workplace safety and fewer opportunities to get involved.

The message from volunteer-involving organisations is clear: **they need assistance recruiting and retaining volunteers**. In October 2020, Volunteering Queensland surveyed volunteer-involving organisations across the state. From urban centres to remote communities, two-thirds of organisations identified volunteer recruitment and retention as a key challenge – far and away the most-cited challenge. With 85% saying they are ready to host more volunteers, the recruitment deficit has adverse and tangible effects for vulnerable

Queenslanders, community groups and the state-run services that experience increased demand as a result. Volunteer-involving organisations have described the challenges they face, with submissions reading:

“The demand on services such as emergency relief, community meal and mental health services have grown beyond our capacity.”

“Volunteers come to us less now than pre-COVID. We need to promote our opportunities more now than before.”

“Now that we have resumed face to face, we are finding it difficult to recruit volunteers.”

“COVID has decimated us.”

An additional challenge for volunteer participation is set to take effect in July this year. Currently, volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations in Queensland are supported by a network of local Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) that provide a range of services including volunteer recruitment, referral, training, and knowledge-sharing across local networks. Most VRCs operate in regional areas, using local insight and connections as a core component of their work. Across Queensland, the local VRC is the only organisation in the area whose mission is solely focused on increasing and improving volunteering outcomes.

Their work has been supported by the federally-funded Volunteer Management Activity program. This program and its funding will cease as of 30 June 2021. The funding will be diverted to a new model with a focus on online resources, and diversity and inclusion projects for targeted vulnerable people. It has been made clear that the previous funding provided for VRCs’ day-to-day operations and general volunteer recruitment services will cease and that these services will not be funded by the new model.

The transition to a new model carries many benefits but may result in VRCs suspending the work they do to enable volunteer participation in their local communities. For some VRCs, the Volunteer Management Activity program represents the majority of their funding. If these VRCs cannot secure alternate funding to deliver their services, they may close their doors.

Change can also bring opportunities. Currently, there is a window of opportunity for the Queensland Government to partner with Volunteering Queensland and VRCs, either supporting existing structures or re-aligning programs to help achieve the state government’s objectives. A sustainable, effective, place-based volunteering model can be developed to deliver targeted programs that increase participation, leverage technology and deliver on agreed priorities to strengthen volunteerism across Queensland.

With staff, sector knowledge and key infrastructure already in place, Queensland’s network of VRCs are uniquely situated to be engaged to expand the state government’s support for volunteers and communities – if action is taken before they close. The continuation of place-based volunteering services helps build strong, connected, inclusive communities and provides them with the best chance to thrive and contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of Queensland.

The compounding factors of a declining formal volunteer rate, the COVID-19 pandemic, repeated natural disasters, continuing drought, and anticipated fiscal impacts upon regional and urban volunteer-enabling organisations all place unsustainable pressure on communities and volunteer-involving organisations. A targeted, revitalising program aimed at boosting volunteer participation is urgently needed for Queensland's communities and volunteer sector.

Objectives

- Promote, increase and enable volunteer participation in Queensland.
- Build capacity of volunteer-involving organisations by improving their volunteer recruitment and retention outcomes.
- Prevent the state's network of place-based VRCs from suspending general recruitment and volunteer matching services, retaining the benefits they provide to their local communities in regional and urban areas.
- Take advantage of the opportunity to partner with Volunteering Queensland and Local Government Areas (LGAs) to support and strengthen local VRCs, leveraging existing infrastructure to deliver on the state's priorities.

Recommended investment

To reinvigorate volunteering across the state, it is recommended that the Queensland Government partners with Volunteering Queensland to engage in a state-wide program that coordinates multiple local, targeted, place-based and online approaches. This would include:

- Launching a **state-wide recruitment campaign** to tell the story of volunteering and communicate its benefits and impacts. This campaign would incorporate online and face-to-face elements to engage youth, culturally and linguistically diverse groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, new volunteers and lapsed volunteers - including older volunteers who were stood down during COVID-19 and have not re-engaged.

Face-to-face campaign activities would include local expos that target and match volunteer-involving organisations with potential volunteers. In partnership with neighbourhood centres, VRCs, LGAs and volunteer-enabling organisations, these events would seek to provide local solutions to local needs by further enabling valuable social capital in the area.

\$250,000 per year for five years to provide staff, venue hire, event management and additional marketing costs.

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- Supporting the state's existing network of ten **Volunteer Resource Centres** to continue their work enabling regional and urban volunteer participation. This support could take the form of a one-year pilot to build the capacity and capability of VRCs, re-align their existing services, and develop an outcomes framework that delivers on the priorities of the Queensland Government. This pilot would be managed by Volunteering Queensland and could include a review of existing VRC locations and the scope for new VRCs or volunteer support services to target unserved areas. \$150,000 per VRC to fund a pilot program that re-aligned and expands upon existing VRC services and capabilities to deliver volunteering outcomes in line with Queensland Government priorities.

\$150,000 for Volunteering Queensland to work with the Queensland Government to develop an outcomes framework and manage the pilot program. This may include a review of existing VRC locations and potential future sites in unserved areas.

Recommendation 3

A feasibility study into state-wide volunteer insurance to safeguard volunteers, mitigate risk and provide confidence to the sector

Overview

- To comply with best-practice volunteer management and mitigate risk, volunteer-involving organisations should purchase adequate volunteer insurance.
- Existing frameworks for Workcover, insurance and relevant legislation provides inconsistent coverage of volunteer operations. This creates barriers, confusion and differing experiences for volunteer-involving organisations and individual volunteers.
- Volunteer-involving organisations frequently cite the cost and knowledge required to purchase adequate volunteer insurance as having a negative impact on their volunteer engagement and organisational budgets.
- A Queensland Government-provided or -subsidised program for volunteer insurance would mitigate risk, build capacity and participation rates, and improve confidence for the sector.

Background and need

Understanding and successfully navigating the legal, risk and insurance requirements to appropriately engage and retain volunteers can present significant barriers for volunteer-involving organisations. In addition to the knowledge required, the cost and conditions of volunteer insurance can be prohibitive, restrictive and can exacerbate existing financial and safety risks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted significant misunderstandings and misinformation regarding volunteer insurance, leading to volunteers being unnecessarily stood down at a time of need. The pandemic environment has heightened the existing confusion about insurance for volunteers, leaving many volunteers questioning the protections afforded to them as a critical - albeit unpaid - workforce.

Volunteering Queensland conducted a survey of volunteer-involving organisations in late 2020, during the ongoing response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this survey, one-in-four volunteer-involving organisations selected insurance, risk, and associated legal issues as a 'main challenge' for their group. Many organisations highlighted insurance and its prohibitive cost in additional comments, including:

"Insurance [is] the biggest single cost to our club."

"Volunteer insurance is an issue that needs to be addressed so that volunteers are not out of pocket."

"They should be covered by a no fault volunteer insurance scheme funded by Government"

The complex insurance landscape and associated costs can present a steep learning curve for volunteer-involving organisations. State and territory volunteering peak bodies, including Volunteering Queensland, seek to educate volunteer-involving organisations about insurance and its requirement for safe and effective volunteer engagement and management.

One of the tools used to educate volunteer-involving organisations is The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement: a best-practice framework to guide organisations as they recruit and manage volunteers. It is endorsed by Volunteering Australia and all state and territory volunteering peak bodies. For all forms of volunteering, conforming to the National Standards requires that the host organisation protects their team with suitable volunteer insurance. Volunteering Queensland reinforces this by requiring volunteer-involving organisations to demonstrate that they have insurance in place before using certain services, such as listing an opportunity on the Volunteering Queensland website, or utilising EV CREW volunteers.

The Queensland Government is ideally positioned to work with the volunteering sector to enhance existing strategies regarding volunteer insurance and help address associated concerns held by the sector. The volunteering sector would benefit from the state government, in partnership with Volunteering Queensland, undertaking a feasibility study into a state-funded or -subsidised volunteer insurance scheme. This study could examine the current landscape – providing a clear base of information for volunteer-involving organisations – and also explore viable options for future insurance access and provision. This may include building off existing WorkSafe and WorkCover platforms – a unique opportunity available at the state level to provide affordable, comprehensive, trusted volunteer insurance to protect Queenslanders who generously give their time each year.

Volunteering provides a platform for Queenslanders to connect, unite and work together for the benefit of the community. We need to protect those that give their time to support us.

Objectives

- Provide clarity, knowledge, and confidence to volunteer-involving organisations on the subject of volunteer insurance.
- Reduce the financial burden and knowledge barrier that currently exist for volunteer-involving organisations seeking to procure suitable volunteer insurance to protect their valuable volunteer workforce. Removing these overheads provides more resources for volunteer-involving organisations to achieve their aims, providing additional benefits to the community.
- Provide the Queensland Government with an additional mechanism to facilitate recovery efforts and enable volunteer-involving organisations to recruit, retain and re-engage their volunteer workforce more quickly.
- Mitigate risk by reducing the number of volunteers that engage in uninsured activities, lowering the chances of physical, financial and reputational damage to individuals and organisations in the volunteer sector.

Recommended investment

Volunteering Queensland recommends that the Queensland Government conducts a **feasibility study into state-wide volunteer insurance** for volunteers.

To safeguard our workforce and provide confidence to the sector, Volunteering Queensland proposes a partnership with Queensland Government to undertake a feasibility study into a state-wide volunteer insurance scheme funded or subsidised by the state government. This study would explore successful models used in other sectors, other government areas in Australia and internationally, as well as their potential application to Queensland's unique landscape.

\$180,000 commitment for Volunteering Queensland to commission and liaise with an external, independent organisation for a feasibility study into volunteer insurance.