



volunteering
queensland

Investing in Volunteering to Strengthen Community

2024 – 2025 State Budget Submission
Volunteering Queensland

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Who we are

Volunteering Queensland is the state's peak body for advancing and promoting volunteering. We represent around 300 member organisations and support thousands more through our wider network, encompassing hundreds of thousands of volunteers, who contribute their time, money, and skills to the benefit of all Queenslanders. Beyond our direct networks, we advocate for the rights and wellbeing of all volunteers in Queensland, numbering over three million. Our broad scope of work sees us collaborating with all levels of government, individual volunteers, and diverse networks of organisations across the state and country. Our work spans training (including accredited courses), advice and consulting, research, advocacy, disaster response support, management resources, recruitment support, and capacity-building projects.

We value our partnership with the Queensland Government, which spans a range of programs, including initiatives to support best-practice volunteer management and to grow the capacity of *Volunteer Involving Organisations* (VIOs). These programs include Care Army, the Neighbourhood and Care Army Connect Workers Initiative, digital inclusion programs and disaster volunteer management services. In this submission, we are seeking to build on this partnership, encouraging the inclusion of specific measures in the next state budget to strengthen the support for and recognise the needs of Queensland's volunteers and VIOs.

The crucial role of Queensland's volunteers

Volunteering is defined as *time willingly given for the common good without financial gain*. Formal volunteering involves contributions made through groups, clubs, or other formally recognised organisations. Informal volunteering involves giving help directly to people who are not relatives, commonly at the local level.

Volunteering underpins our economy and our social services sector. The State of Volunteering in Queensland 2021 Report (SoViQ-21) found that the economic value of volunteering in Queensland in 2020 was \$84 billion. This represents the value of volunteers' time, the resources required to enable volunteer participation, and the productivity benefits from the skills and experiences gained while volunteering. It is immensely valuable to our community and a key component in preserving our Queensland lifestyle.

However, volunteering is not free. It comes with real and significant financial costs to volunteers and organisations. The SoViQ-21 found that individual volunteers spent around \$1,600 annually on their volunteering. For VIOs, managing volunteers and ensuring that their participation is safe, secure and successful requires adequate and ongoing investment of resources, energy and expertise. With support, the talent, time, and goodwill of volunteers can be maximised for the benefit of communities and the state as a whole.

Investing in volunteering can produce strong returns. Weighed against costs, SoViQ-21 found that volunteer activity in Queensland provides a \$4.10 return for every dollar of value invested. The report also found that over two million Queenslanders formally volunteered in 2020, including 500,000 who volunteered with government departments and agencies. Over 60% of Queensland volunteers use their donated time to directly help individuals.

Volunteering Queensland is currently undertaking another State of Volunteering report, which is to be released in 2024. This report will include further analysis of the social and economic impact of volunteering in our state. The clear picture, both from our ongoing research and our continuing engagement with VIOs, is that volunteering has a major multiplier effect in the social and economic benefits it delivers. Volunteers have the opportunity to deepen their sense of community connection and belonging. Volunteering can deliver uniquely valuable outcomes that are vital in building stronger, more connected, and capable communities.

There is a long-term, general social trend of declining community participation, which includes in volunteering. In Queensland, this decline is observed both in total volunteer-hours and in per capita participation.

In this context, many VIOs are facing issues relating to resourcing, and retaining volunteers, which impacts their service capacity and can lead to major organisational risks. Additionally, any decline in formal volunteering participation or in the capacity of VIOs can increase service-delivery costs for governments, especially for services that directly address immediate social needs. These include homelessness, domestic violence, disability, mental health, aged care and social isolation.

Queenslanders are still facing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and are becoming more conscious of the threats and impacts of natural disasters. Social isolation and loneliness continue to be significant issues within our communities. Cost-of-living pressures are increasing, including at the most basic levels of shelter, food, and health care.

The volunteering sector plays an essential role in helping to alleviate the impacts of these pressures. Volunteering Queensland has identified opportunities to further increase the positive impact of volunteers and to encourage more Queenslanders to volunteer.

Summary of recommendations

Volunteering Queensland recommends that the Queensland Government actively explores opportunities across all departments and portfolios to leverage the far-reaching benefits that volunteering brings to our economy, communities and lifestyle. The volunteering sector is keen to work with government to ensure that maximum social and economic value is gained from investments that support, encourage, and expand volunteering.

The approaching Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2032 provide ideal platforms to expand the size and capacity of Queensland's volunteer base, maximising the chances of successful Games' experience for the local community and attendees, as well as providing a volunteering legacy for the entire state.

As the peak body for the sector, Volunteering Queensland collects data on the factors currently constraining volunteering. We also recognise the emerging needs and opportunities to build on Queensland's economy, and the multitude of ways volunteers can enable the delivery of services and protect the unique Queensland lifestyle.

To assist in the implementation of this vision, Volunteering Queensland is advocating for the upcoming state budget to include the following items.

1. **The creation of a Minister for Volunteering as a discrete ministerial portfolio**, with resources dedicated to the implementation of the government's Queensland Volunteering Strategy over the next four to five years.

The Queensland Volunteering Strategy, announced by the state government in the Communities 2032 Action Plan, is an initiative that is keenly anticipated by the volunteering sector and welcomed by Volunteering Queensland.

- a. Additionally, funding a dedicated position at Volunteering Queensland, as the peak body for the volunteering sector, would maximise the benefits of the Strategy by providing community-based liaison in support of the government. This role would leverage Volunteering Queensland's expertise and capacity, and support with consulting, organising, the building community support, and the practicalities of implementation. An initial investment of \$275,000 plus a commitment to future funding would be required to create this position and cover wages and administrative costs, including statewide travel.
2. **Recognition of the need to energise and strengthen youth volunteering**, including:
 - a. Fund a dedicated position at Volunteering Queensland for a Youth Volunteering Engagement Officer.
This role would aim to increase the number of young people engaged in volunteering, and promote the inclusion of youth through VIOs, with emphases on developing employable skills and on positive experiences for the individuals. Positive, early experiences can help build momentum for on-going involvement in volunteering, as well as establish formative connections within a community.
 - b. A Youth Volunteering Engagement Officer would liaise with local governments and VIOs at the community level across the breadth of the state. The role would provide resources and expertise to VIOs, such as to access appropriate insurance or to

obtain Blue Cards. The role would establish a youth advisory group, and collect data to help further identify and understand the barriers and opportunities for youth volunteering.

- c. An investment of \$275,000 in the first year plus a commitment to future funding would be required to create this position and cover wages and administrative costs, including statewide travel.
- d. Development of an online tool for tracking and analysing the types, hours and impacts of youth volunteer activities at an estimated cost of \$200,000. This would also support employment opportunities for young people.
- e. Development and provision of a non-accredited training course at an estimated cost of \$140,000 specifically targeted to young people, particularly those who are at risk or disengaged. This would support employment readiness and pathways, mental and physical wellbeing, and reconnection to community.

3. Measures to address findings identified in the upcoming State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report:

- a. Provide capacity building training on the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement across the state to promote the recruitment and retention of volunteers, consistent best practice volunteer management, and a self-assessment tool to encourage continuous improvement, at an estimated cost of \$160,000.
- b. Mechanisms to promote and support the wellbeing of volunteers at an estimated cost of \$80,000.
- c. Feasibility study into volunteering supply and demands at an estimated cost of \$85,000.

4. Provide a cost-of-volunteering reimbursement fund for volunteers.

Increasing pressures from the rising cost-of-living and its impact on the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers is currently a significant barrier to people becoming or staying involved in volunteering. We propose a reimbursement fund of approximately \$1 million a year over three years, accessible by community-based volunteer involving organisations. This would assist with reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers in the performance of their work (for example, travel, fuel, protective clothing or uniforms). This would be particularly valuable for smaller volunteer-run organisations, many of which are currently struggling with increasing costs.

The cost of volunteering has been identified in both Volunteering Queensland's 2022-2023 annual sector survey and in the preliminary findings of the State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report, currently being finalised, as one of the major challenges for volunteers and reasons they are cutting back or ceasing their volunteering. The previous State of Volunteering in Queensland 2021 Report found that volunteers spent an average of \$1,600 per year to volunteer.

5. **Strengthen the positive community outcomes delivered by the Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) and the Care Army programs**
- a. Provide recurrent funding to enhance engagement and outcomes for two programs vital to Queensland’s disaster resilience: Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) and Care Army;
 - b. Resource Volunteering Queensland to recruit dedicated staff responsible for the delivery of the EV CREW and Care Army program and to increase collaboration and preparedness with LGAs and VIOs across the state. This team would provide tailored training, resources, processes, and advice that reflect the unique geography, capabilities and needs of client VIOs and LGAs. \$350,000 per year for five years would provide dedicated officers for engagement, administrative support and resource development for LGAs and VIOs across Queensland;
 - c. Commit to dedicated, recurrent operational funding and development of the EV CREW and Care Army programs, improving service delivery, sustainability, and outcomes. \$250,000 per year for five years would fund dedicated IT personnel, associated licences and development work.

Recommendation 1

Create a Minister for Volunteering as a discrete ministerial portfolio, with resourcing dedicated to the implementation of the government's Queensland Volunteering Strategy over the next four years.

Overview

The Queensland Volunteering Strategy, announced by the state government in the Communities 2032 Action Plan, is an initiative that is keenly anticipated by the volunteering sector and welcomed by Volunteering Queensland.

Communities 2032 provides a positive whole-of-government plan aimed at enabling every Queenslanders to participate fully and thrive as part of our communities. Action 48 within the initial Communities 2032 Action Plan 2022-2025 is to “develop and implement a Queensland volunteering strategy, in partnership with volunteering leaders and volunteer involving organisations.”

Volunteering Queensland believes such an important and ambitious goal would benefit from having a discrete Ministerial portfolio created. This would ensure the necessary focus is given to the finalisation and ongoing implementation of the strategy, which is particularly important given how central volunteering is to virtually all aspects of every Queensland community.

Combining this with the funding of a dedicated position based at Volunteering Queensland, as the peak body for the volunteering sector, would enhance the implementation of the Strategy by providing community-based liaison, as well as support for the government in the consultation, organising and practical implementation of the Strategy.

Background and need

The National Strategy for Volunteering was released early in 2023. It was co-created by stakeholders from across the volunteering ecosystem, and provides a blueprint for the next ten years aimed at ensuring that volunteering in Australia and the essential contribution it makes will thrive and grow.

This ten-year time frame strongly overlaps with the Queensland Government's own time frame with its Communities 2032 vision. Queensland has the opportunity to maximise these synergies by ensuring the unique characteristics and needs of our state are fully identified and properly engaged with via the adoption and implementation of a state-level volunteering strategy.

It is widely recognised that there is currently a decline in overall levels of volunteering across the country, including within Queensland. There are many reasons behind this decline, and there are still positive trends contained within this overall situation. A modest investment of resources targeted at these factors, within the context of a Queensland Volunteering Strategy that recognises the unique and varied aspects of communities in Queensland, will help reverse this trend and enable the many benefits of volunteering to be maximised.

It is particularly important that action be taken at this time as the decline in volunteering, which was particularly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, is coinciding with increased demand for the services and supports which governments and volunteers provide.

The federal government has provided \$367,000 to Volunteering Australia over 18-months to coordinate the implementation of the National Volunteering Strategy. Funding a similar role at state level in Queensland would assist our state to gain full benefit from the implementation of the National Strategy, as well as ensuring the unique state-based content and community level contexts of the Queensland Volunteering Strategy are given the targeted attention they deserve.

Objectives

- o To ensure the crucial roles and contributions of volunteering that are recognised in the state government's plan for a Queensland Volunteering Strategy receive the focus necessary to enable the successful implementation of that Strategy, and the government's overall vision for our state which underpins it.
- o To provide adequate opportunities for communities across the state, including volunteers and the organisations they are a part of, to participate in and ensure the success of that Strategy.

Recommended investment

- \$275,000 for a dedicated position, along with administrative support and statewide travel costs. The person would work with volunteer involving organisations across Queensland to deliver identified strategy actions and outcomes.

Recommendation 2

Energise and strengthen youth volunteering in Queensland.

Overview

According to the National Strategy for Volunteering (page 67), while there has been a "substantial decline in formal volunteering" since the onset of COVID-19, "over the longer-term, the rate of youth volunteering has been gradually increasing". This positive component within a concerning overall scenario presents an important opportunity.

Volunteering Queensland's work engaging with volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) and with volunteers themselves gives us direct insight into the dynamic contributions which youth volunteers directly make at community level. But there are capacity constraints faced by many VIOs, as well as a need to better identify and address the barriers specific to this age group, that impede opportunities to increase the involvement and retention of youth in volunteering.

There is a higher proportion of informal volunteering amongst younger people, compared to the greater amounts of formal volunteering which tends to occur as people get older. Apart from acknowledging the organic and dynamic aspects which are often part and parcel of informal volunteering, the extent of contributions made through informal volunteering is by its nature often underestimated. With fewer older volunteers returning to their former volunteering positions following the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, VIOs are struggling to engage enough volunteers. Strategies need to be put in place to transition younger volunteers into greater involvement with VIOs and formal volunteering, including taking on more leadership roles where appropriate.

There is a direct correlation between youth wellbeing and youth connection and engagement with their communities. While there is often a public focus on issues like youth crime, the valuable contribution that youth make to the community through volunteering and other activities must also be recognised. It is a truism that today's youth will be tomorrow's leaders. Many already perform important leadership roles, both among their own peers and within the wider community.

Making the most of the talents and enthusiasm of youth and building connection and engagement with communities for younger people is a simple concept, but it does not all happen automatically or organically. The recently released Mapping Social Cohesion 2023 report indicates that only 26 per cent of 18-24 year olds (and 31 per cent of 25-34 year olds) have "a great sense of belonging in Australia, compared with 72 per cent of people aged 65 years and over." (page 27). If we do not invest in ensuring there are more volunteering opportunities for youth and assist them in identifying, developing, and engaging with these pathways, our society will not gain the benefits today or into the future.

Targeted investment to improve youth belonging and connectedness will bring many gains for our community now and in the future. Conversely, if we fail to actively take this opportunity, it will mean extra costs for our communities.

Background and need

Volunteering Queensland's outreach and engagement with the volunteering sector provides us with frequent indications that more young people are wanting to connect and contribute further to the community, but often need assistance or support in overcoming barriers and in finding effective ways to do so.

Youth volunteers need champions to help build on the valuable contributions they currently make. Investing in establishing habits of volunteering at a young age and improving the sense of purpose and connection that comes through volunteering will deliver major benefits for the entire community, reduce youth crime, and enhance youth wellbeing.

Young people leaving education systems would have the opportunity to develop greater social capital and deeper connection with community during a period where they undergo significant life change.

In the wider context of a decline in overall rates of volunteering, there would be substantial long-term benefits in further invigorating and embedding the contributions that young people make to our communities and to the overall common good.

There is a need to counter the negative and often highly distorted stereotypes of younger people. Further involving them and celebrating their contributions, as well as strengthening foundations for contributions into the future can deliver benefits to our state for decades to come.

Objectives

- Invite and support youth volunteers to participate formally in the volunteering sector.
- Take greater advantage of the potential of youth volunteering, significant parts of which remain untapped.
- Provide opportunities for youth to identify, design and participate in ways to improve the extent and impact of volunteering by people in their own age group.
- Provide meaningful volunteering opportunities for unemployed and underemployed youth.

Recommended investment

Volunteering Queensland recommends the Queensland Government adopt an initiative explicitly aimed at energising and strengthening youth volunteering through the following measures:

- Funding a dedicated position at Volunteering Queensland for a Youth Volunteering Engagement Officer. An investment of \$275,000 in the first year, plus a commitment to future funding, would cover the work of one person and their admin and travel costs to deliver outcomes in this area.

The person would work with LGAs and volunteer involving organisations at the community level across Queensland to increase the numbers of young people engaged in volunteering, improve retention rates and skills of youth volunteers, and promote the inclusion of youth in volunteering through measures such as providing resources (e.g. help with Blue Cards for

over 18-year-olds, insurance options), identifying barriers and setting up a youth advisory group to help drive the project.

- Development of an online tool for tracking and analysing the types, hours and impacts of youth volunteer activities, at an estimated cost of \$200,000. This would support employment opportunities for young people, as well as provide valuable data to assist in better targeting future supports.
- Development and provision of a non-accredited training course at an estimated cost of \$140,000 which is specifically targeted to young people, particularly those who are at risk or disengaged. This would support employment readiness and pathways, mental and physical wellbeing and reconnection to community.

Recommendation 3

Address findings identified in the upcoming State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report.

Overview

The State of Volunteering 2021 Report is an independent report commissioned by Volunteering Queensland under the oversight of a Project Advisory Committee which included people from state government, emergency services, local government and community-based volunteer involving organisations.

The principal finding of the report is that “volunteering yields a substantial social, cultural and economic ‘profit’ that is enjoyed by all.” The Action Plan derived from the overall findings of this report, as well as ongoing research, identified six key issues that need ongoing attention.

Volunteering Queensland is currently working in conjunction with others to produce an updated version of the State of Volunteering Report, which is due to be finalised and released in 2024. At the time of writing this submission, the findings for this 2024 Report are still being identified, analysed and refined. The updated data and findings contained in this report will enable more effective targeting of financial and human investment to strengthen volunteering in Queensland, in line with the goals and vision of governments at all levels.

This provides an opportunity to build on newly identified data and findings. It will enable all stakeholders to be better informed about the unique local aspects of volunteer involvement and ensure better alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. These Standards are also currently being refreshed and updated so they fully reflect the current environment and effectively support the continually evolving volunteering ecosystem.

Background and need

The key areas identified as needing ongoing action coming out of the 2021 State of Volunteering Report were:

- Volunteer management
- Recruitment and retention
- Other forms of volunteering (remote, intermittent and informal)
- Further research
- Funding
- Barriers to volunteering and red tape

Without pre-empting the full findings of the 2024 State of Volunteering Report, the evidence gathered to date makes it clear that volunteer management continues to be a critical issue. It is a key factor in retention of volunteers, as well as in navigating and removing barriers to volunteering.

This is not to suggest that there has been no action or advances made since the 2021 Report. On the contrary, training sessions, workshops, online tools and other forms of support for volunteer

involving organisations have all been developed and conducted. This activity has shown that the needs of volunteer involving organisations continue to grow.

The newly refreshed National Standards for Volunteer Involvement will build on the federal government's National Strategy for Volunteering. These Standards contain benchmarks specifically designed to help organisations attract, manage, recognise and retain volunteers, and to manage risk and safety with respect to volunteers. As the Queensland Government moves to adopt a state-level volunteering strategy, better support for volunteer management will maximise the prospects for that strategy to be realised and to ensure that volunteering is inclusive, safe and sustainable.

There are considerable benefits for volunteer involving organisations when undertaking the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, including: increased credibility and reputation that enhances capacity to demonstrate 'best practice'; improved volunteer experience and satisfaction which lead to higher retention rates; increased efficiencies and costs savings which potentially attract more donor/funder contributions; and overall heightened capacity to achieve organisational missions and visions.

The federal government recognised this with an announcement in February 2023 of \$4 million in extra funding assistance for volunteering resource centres to adapt their activities to more effectively recruit, train, support and retain volunteers. 2024 presents an ideal opportunity to build on this investment in the context of a new state-level strategy for volunteering, fresh Standards for Volunteer Involvement, and the latest data and findings into the state of volunteering in Queensland.

Objectives

The objective of this investment would be to provide good practice guidance and benchmarks to help volunteer involving organisations attract, manage and retain volunteers, as well as manage risk and safety in their work with volunteers. It would also improve the volunteer experience for individuals, which is a key factor in maximising retention, as well as in encouraging others to also engage in volunteering.

Recommended investment

- Measures to address findings identified in the upcoming State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report:
 - Provide capacity building training and support implementation across Queensland of the refreshed National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, to promote the recruitment and retention of volunteers, consistent best practice volunteer management, and a self-assessment tool to encourage continuous improvement – cost of \$160,000.
 - Mechanisms to promote and support the wellbeing of volunteers – cost of \$80,000;
 - Conduct a feasibility study into volunteering supply/ demands – cost of \$85,000.

Recommendation 4

Provide a cost-of-volunteering reimbursement fund for volunteers.

Overview

Increasing pressures from the rising cost-of-living and its impact on out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers is currently a significant barrier to people becoming or staying involved in volunteering. We propose a fund of approximately \$1 million a year across three years, accessible by community-based volunteer involving organisations, which would assist with reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers in the performance of their work. This would be particularly valuable for smaller volunteer-run organisations, many of which are currently struggling with increasing costs.

Background and need

The cost of volunteering has been identified in both Volunteering Queensland's 2022-2023 annual sector survey and in the preliminary findings of the State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report currently being finalised, as one of the major challenges for volunteers and a key factor in them cutting back or ceasing their volunteer activity.

Rising costs and expenses are also impacting volunteer involving organisations across many of their day-to-day activities. This impedes the ability of those organisations to undertake their activities and provide their contributions to the community, including their ability to assist in covering expenses of their own volunteers.

Research for the State of Volunteering in Queensland 2021 Report found that Queensland volunteers annually spend on average of \$1,600 of their own money to volunteer. In addition to this, volunteers are also among the highest donators of money to charities. The research also highlighted that in Queensland only 11.4% of volunteer involving organisations reimbursed volunteers for their out-of-pocket expenses, with 30.3% of these organisations indicating that they use reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses to motivate or retain volunteers.

The 2023 Mapping Social Cohesion Report produced by the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute found that heightened financial pressures and growing concerns over economic inequality are “negatively impacting social inclusion and weighing down social cohesion.”

This clearly impacts on the capacity of people of all ages and backgrounds to be able to participate in their community, including through volunteering. However, the impact of these financial and other barriers to volunteering should not be seen as a sign of a lack of willingness to volunteer.

Volunteering Queensland has not identified any data or evidence, whether through our formal research or through our widespread engagement with volunteers or the organisations they are involved with, that would indicate any decline in peoples’ willingness or desire to volunteer.

If anything, the growing awareness that increasing numbers of people are struggling with the costs of living means those who do have capacity to help are more likely to want to do so. This will often be through informal volunteering, giving help to people who are not immediate family or relatives.

While informal volunteering will always have an invaluable role in its own right, the more that people are encouraged and able to engage in volunteering in coordinated, formal ways, the greater the impacts of their contributions are likely to be. Providing small amounts of assistance to reduce the cost barriers to volunteering has the potential to produce social and economic gains well in excess of the initial investment.

The cost to replace the annual labour of Queensland's volunteers was calculated at \$37.1 billion in 2020. Contributing to the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers, particularly those facing financial constraints, would be a sound economic and social investment that would deliver significant returns.

Objectives

- The objective of this measure is to address some of the cost barriers to volunteering. This has been identified as a significant factor in keeping levels of volunteering lower than they otherwise would be.
- Assisting volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) in being able to offer reimbursements to their volunteers would also assist and encourage the efforts of those organisations to meet and follow the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. This not only helps ensure those VIOs operate at a higher standard, but also benefits them in becoming a VIO of choice for more people.

Recommended investment

Increasing pressures from the rising cost-of-living and its impact on the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteering is currently a significant barrier to people becoming or staying involved in volunteering.

- We propose a reimbursement fund of approximately \$1 million a year across three years, accessible by community-based volunteer involving organisations. This would assist with reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers in the performance of their work (e.g. travel, petrol, protective clothing/ uniforms). This would be particularly valuable for smaller volunteer-run organisations, many of which are currently struggling with increasing costs.

Recommendation 5

Strengthen the positive community outcomes delivered by the Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) and the Care Army programs.

Overview

Programs that improve resilience against disasters are strongest when regionally coordinated, locally-led, and adequately resourced.

For the past 15 years, Volunteering Queensland has played an active role in supporting Queensland communities across disasters, pandemics, extreme weather, and other emergencies through the provision of the following services:

- administering two digital platforms that support the central coordination, registration, and referral of those interested in volunteering with organisations supporting their community at times of disaster and crisis:
 - **EV CREW**, Australia's leading emergency volunteering recruitment and deployment system.
 - **Care Army**, mobilising pre-registered volunteers to organisations providing immediate and ongoing support to older and vulnerable Queenslanders.
- providing advice and support to local and state government committees, agencies, and organisations to support the planning and use of volunteers in disaster and crisis settings.
- delivering projects, training, and volunteer related resources to enhance management plans and services that support capability building, resilience, preparedness, response and recovery.

Although EV CREW and Care Army provide invaluable services, many volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) and Local Government Areas (LGAs) face challenges when engaging with these programs at times of crisis. Rapidly recruiting, coordinating, skilling-up and managing volunteers is hardest when done at a time when volunteers are needed most but prior planning has not taken place.

Volunteering Queensland's experience has confirmed that the use of volunteers at times of disaster and crisis is most effective when VIOs and LGAs have been engaged and supported before disasters or crisis strike.

Resources are required to provide:

- centralised outreach, engagement, and capacity building services for VIOs and LGAs at community level to help those groups prepare for disasters and emergencies and subsequent recovery. Funding at the statewide level would enable greater engagement with and use of these supports by local organisations.
- dedicated support for innovation, refinement, maintenance and development of the EV CREW and Care Army digital platforms in order to optimise operations.

Background and need

Local volunteering is a key component in enabling communities to identify and utilise local capability and be strong, connected, and resilient, especially at times of disaster and crisis. 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.

The increasing frequency and scale of emergencies means the need is greater than ever for an effective, coordinated, and flexible approach towards the involvement of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

Queensland is uniquely positioned to deliver coordinated volunteer participation in emergency situations due to Volunteering Queensland's development and delivery of the EV CREW and Care Army digital platforms in partnership with the Queensland Government.

These programs:

- Provide a comprehensive database and management system that supports the pre-registration, and activation of prospective emergency volunteers.
- Place volunteers with LGAs, government agencies and VIOs requesting volunteer assistance.

Volunteering Queensland's EV CREW platform occupies an essential space for the coordinated engagement of volunteers before and during disaster as well as during post-disaster recovery, and to encourage people to transition into regular volunteering roles during times of 'peace'.

A key learning from EV CREW is that if LGAs have not adequately prepared for the involvement of both formal and informal volunteers before disaster strikes, they may be required to develop critical responses in the midst of a crisis or preclude the use of volunteers who are offering their assistance. This introduces the risk of duplicated efforts, unsafe practices, gaps in assistance and untapped community resources.

Fortunately, the appropriate means of support to these challenges has been identified – namely dedicated and centralised operational funding to proactively engage VIOs, LGAs and other leaders across the state before disasters strike.

With EV CREW and Care Army databases having the same digital system, support can be provided efficiently through one aligned stream. This results in benefits for Queenslanders whose local leadership hasn't yet engaged these programs but could do so with additional outreach and guidance.

Volunteers are a key resource for surge capacity during emergencies and contribute significantly to the resilience of Queensland Communities. Just as volunteer involving organisations and governments are supported by EV CREW and Care Army, these programs also require dedicated support to maintain Queensland's advantage in the face of adversity.

Objectives

- Recruit and utilise volunteers to support response and recovery and enhance the state's resilience to natural disasters, pandemics, extreme weather, and other emergencies.
- Secure ongoing funding that:
 - maximises the value of local volunteers and their contributions to building resilience by engaging, training and co-designing solutions with VIOs and LGAs in order to improve volunteering outcomes before, during and after their next adverse event.
 - enables Queensland communities to continue benefitting from the mobilisation of volunteers in disaster (EV CREW) and pandemics (Care Army).

Recommended investment

- Volunteering Queensland recommends that the Queensland Government provides recurrent funding to enhance engagement and outcomes for two programs vital to Queensland's disaster resilience: Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) and Care Army.
- Resourcing Volunteering Queensland to recruit dedicated staff responsible for the delivery of the EV CREW and Care Army program and to increase collaboration and preparedness with LGAs and VIOs across the state. This team would provide tailored training, resources, processes, and advice that reflect the unique geography, capabilities and needs of client VIOs and LGAs. \$350,000 per year for five years would provide dedicated officers for engagement, administrative support, and resource development for LGAs and VIOs across Queensland.
- A commitment for dedicated, recurrent operational funding and development of the EV CREW and Care Army programs, improving service delivery, sustainability, and outcomes. \$250,000 per year for five years would fund dedicated IT personnel, associated licences and development work.
- This recommendation would build upon existing EV CREW and Care Army arrangements, as well as positive outcomes from NCAC and VOAD, to assist communities across the state in becoming more connected, prepared, and resilient. To further this alignment, both programs could be engaged through the Human and Social Functional Recovery Group and Community Recovery team within state government.