



ADVOCACY
PLAN for the
**STATE OF
VOLUNTEERING
IN QUEENSLAND
2024** REPORT



volunteering
queensland



INTRODUCTION

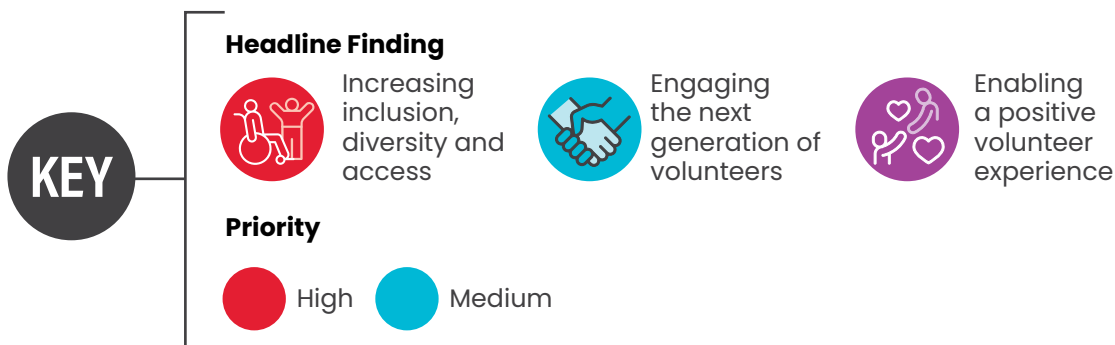
This plan explores the key findings identified in the State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report. It identifies actions that can be explored and implemented by Volunteering Queensland in collaboration with the Queensland volunteering sector to better place volunteering in this State to ensure a robust future that supports the multifaceted, critical work that volunteers undertake. The plan also identifies actions that will continue to provide diverse, rewarding opportunities for Queenslanders that will enable them to meaningfully contribute back to their community through volunteering.

























A key initial activity will be to engage and consult with the broader volunteering sector to determine and gain feedback on agreed actions. Through consultation, collaboration and codesign Volunteering Queensland will continue to refine and add to the plan based on sector feedback, emerging issues and changing needs.














KEY FINDINGS
















Three headline findings have been identified in the State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report. It is strongly recommended that these be addressed so that volunteering is adequately supported, valued and recognised, enabling this valuable resource to continue contributing to the economic and social advancement of Queensland.

1. Increasing inclusion, diversity and access
 - Providing pathways to increase inclusion, diversity and accessibility to volunteering experiences and programs.
 - Addressing cost barriers to volunteering.
2. Engaging the next generation of volunteers
 - Engaging more young people in volunteering.
 - Ensuring there is alignment in volunteering opportunities and the way young people are wanting to volunteer.
3. Enabling a positive volunteer experience
 - Supporting volunteer managers to optimise volunteer recruitment and retention.
 - Enhancing training and knowledge sharing opportunities around the State.



Action	Lead	Headline Finding	Priority	Timing
Host a series of consultations with the volunteering sector across Queensland to consider further actions and/ or proposals arising from the Report	Volunteering Queensland	  		Short term
Advocate and lobby for change to combat the current cost of living issues	QCOSS (Volunteering Queensland as a partner)	  		Short – medium term
Support the development of a Queensland Volunteering Strategy	Queensland Government (Volunteering Queensland as a partner)	  		Short term
Design and implement a targeted statewide marketing and educational campaign to inspire more people to volunteer	Volunteering Queensland	  		Medium term
i). Advocate and lobby further for a centralised volunteer reimbursement fund for Queensland	Volunteering Queensland	  		Medium term
ii). Encourage leaders of volunteer involving organisations to include adequate reimbursements of volunteer out-of-pocket expenses in their budgets	Volunteering Queensland	  		Medium term

Action	Lead	Headline Finding	Priority	Timing
<p>i). Encourage and support volunteer involving organisations to adopt and implement the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement</p> <p>ii). Encourage and support volunteer involving organisations to take up a free, online self-assessment tool leading to a best practice quality 'tick '</p>	<p>Volunteering Queensland</p> <p>BNG (Volunteering Queensland as a partner)</p>	 		<p>Short - medium term</p>
<p>Identify opportunities and barriers to youth volunteering</p>	<p>Volunteering Queensland</p>	  		<p>Short - medium term</p>
<p>Implement a small volunteer grants program for volunteer involving organisations to maximise the potential of their volunteer programs, including through effective volunteer management capabilities</p>	<p>Volunteering Queensland</p>	 		<p>Short - medium term</p>
<p>Launch Certificate I, II, III in Active Volunteering to volunteer involving organisations and into the public domain while further promoting the courses to schools as accredited pathways to volunteering and potential employment</p>	<p>Volunteering Queensland</p>	 		<p>Medium-long term</p>

Action	Lead	Headline Finding	Priority	Timing
Advocate for funding to undertake a skills assessment gap of the volunteering sector including a scope of supply and demand in localised areas across Queensland	Volunteering Queensland	  		Long term
Design and implement a program to encourage greater inclusion, diversity and access to volunteering	SBS, FECCA (Volunteering Queensland as a partner)	  		Medium term
Develop capacity building and collaborative strategies to strengthen knowledge, capability and capacity, and share resources and opportunities for volunteer involving organisations	Volunteering Queensland	 		Short-medium term
Continue to advocate for tax subsidies for volunteers	Volunteering Australia (Volunteering Queensland as a partner)	  		Long term





Setting the scene

It was predicted¹ that increasing inflation, rising interest rates and full employment would result in people having less money and time to volunteer. We are currently seeing that prediction being realised in Australia and indeed in many nations around the world with a contraction in the volunteer labour force and market as a result of challenging economic and social environments.

Increasing cost of living expenses are recognised as a major issue, including rapidly rising housing costs, growing wealth inequalities, and increasing homelessness. Yet, Queensland and Australia have relatively low unemployment rates and strong company profits across many industry groups. Wage growth is still negative in some industries but improving in others.

A relatively low overall unemployment rate sits alongside a significant amount of underemployment, as well as many people being in insecure casual work or other forms of paid work that requires them to take on a second or even third job and be available at short notice or at irregular hours. This is a reality that makes it harder for the types of volunteering that rely on people being consistently available on regular days and at specific times.

With many people often needing to work multiple jobs and irregular or longer hours, those who do have spare time, such as grandparents, friends, acquaintances and neighbours are increasingly being called upon to help and take on caring duties and/ or local neighbourhood work. This leaves them less time for other more structured activities such as formal volunteering through an organisation.

Increasing costs not only impact volunteers but also charities themselves, making it harder for many to adequately support their volunteer workforce through training and development opportunities, recognition events, and reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses. Rising costs, even something as simple as higher petrol prices, contribute to making volunteering unaffordable for many volunteers and prospective volunteers.

The State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report has found a 10% decline in the rate of volunteering in the State since 2020. This is consistent with the national average, as well as with international trends, with volunteering rates declining in many nations including

¹ "The future state of volunteering"- Institute of Project Management presentation to C4V Conference 2022

the USA and Canada. In addition to the declining rate, the cost to volunteers to undertake their volunteering has increased nearly 300%.

So how does volunteering fit into this current environment? Are these influencing factors contributing to the State and national declining rates of volunteering? Are there structural changes in policy settings and/ or funding investments that can reverse this, or are there wider societal factors causing a Queensland, Australian and international decline in volunteering?

More importantly, is the need for volunteers increasing or perhaps decreasing in line with the volunteering rate or are we seeing a fall in the interest and availability of people to volunteer in the current economic and social environment?

Summary of Key Findings

This report is underpinned by one of the largest-ever population-representative surveys conducted exclusively on volunteering within Queensland, with over 1,500 individual responses. An additional survey, run concurrently and focused on volunteer managers, received 833 responses, which is an increase of over 40% compared to the previous State of Volunteering in Queensland 2021 Report.

As expected, and in-line with other demographic research, our research shows a decline in overall rates of volunteering since the 2021 Report. This 2024 report found that 64.3% of Queenslanders (aged over 15 years) volunteered in the previous 12 months. This is a decline of just over 10% in three years. Formal volunteering, which is volunteering with an organisation, declined more than informal volunteering, which refers to spontaneous, self-organised and non-affiliated individual and group activities such as helping a neighbour or collecting litter along a beach with friends. The findings indicate that the total hours volunteered in Queensland is 719.8 million hours, also representing a decrease by a comparable percentage.

However, Queenslanders want to volunteer. Around 30% of surveyed residents, regardless of whether they currently volunteer or not, would like to volunteer more. Most people who currently volunteer wish to keep on volunteering. The reason people don't or can't volunteer more is multifaceted, but this research identifies several key barriers, most notably people's restrictions on time, health factors and the rising costs of living. These factors were identified by volunteers, non-volunteers and volunteer managers alike.

Those who perform the valuable work of managing volunteers identified additional barriers, such as a lack of appreciation or recognition, a feeling of loss of connection or interest, or just something as simple as a lack or loss of confidence.

The research also identifies ways to encourage Queenslanders to consider volunteering for the first time. Most people want to help others and it can be easy to overlook the simplest thing of all – just asking someone if they can and/ or want to help. Almost one quarter of people who do not volunteer stated that they are not sure how or where to help or that they have simply never been asked if they want to volunteer.



This research highlights the critical need for strategic investment to support Queensland's volunteers and the generous work they do



Across the 12 months of 2023, the value of volunteering to Queensland was over \$117 billion. This is the sum of commercial benefits (\$22,786 million) civic benefits (\$40,502 million) and individual benefits (\$54,455 million). This figure includes the \$31 billion it would cost to replace the labour that volunteers contribute to Queensland.

This represents a healthy return of \$4.70 for every dollar currently invested in volunteering.

As phenomenal as this is, it costs volunteers \$15.57 for every hour they volunteer (an increase from \$4.76 in 2020), with volunteers shouldering 76.2% of this cost to volunteer and organisations reimbursing their volunteers 23.8% of these costs.

This research highlights the critical need for strategic investment to support Queensland's volunteers and the generous work they do. The more we can reinforce the message that volunteers make a positive difference and are highly valued, and that as a society we understand and support their essential role in maintaining our quality and way of life, the more likely it is that people will volunteer and continue to volunteer.

We celebrate volunteers, not only to put the spotlight on their vital contribution and commitment to service to advance our State and community, but also to encourage others to also contribute as, when and where they are able to do so.

Detailed Insight into Key Findings

Increasing Inclusion, Diversity and Access

Providing pathways to increase diversity, inclusion and accessibility to volunteering programs

A primary reason for seeking to increase diversity, inclusion and accessibility is to inspire and enable volunteering for all Queenslanders. This will future proof and strengthen the resilience of the volunteering ecosystem, our broader community and volunteers themselves. Diversity, inclusion and accessibility embraces and unites all:

- Ages
- Cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds – including First Nations People and those new to Australia
- Income levels
- Education and skill levels
- Geographic locations
- People living with disabilities and differing abilities, including neurodiversity
- Sexuality and gender identities

Volunteer inclusion and diversity was a theme identified several times during focus groups held with volunteer managers. Additional research, resource development and training in these spaces is strongly recommended to foster a more comprehensive understanding, acceptance and enabling of volunteering in all its diversity across Queensland.

We know that volunteering – the willing giving of one’s time, skill and talent without expectation of financial gain – has a profound reciprocal impact that not only benefits the receiver of the service but also the life of the giver, the volunteer. The report found that from the sample of over 6,800 Australian residents, being a volunteer was associated with a 4.4-point increase in life satisfaction, a proxy for wellbeing. When this value is extrapolated to the entire population of volunteers in Queensland, it translates into a wellbeing benefit of \$54.5 billion.

Volunteer managers have cited that organisational culture, inclusion and diversity is the number one organisation-related issue for volunteer managers. This suggests that there is a significant opportunity to work with volunteer involving organisations to enhance their approaches to culture, inclusion, diversity and accessibility to identify and promote more and more flexible and wide-ranging volunteering opportunities.

Increasing diversity, inclusion and accessibility in volunteering programs will both increase the pool of available volunteers and strengthen the overall resilience of volunteering programs, providing a positive impact to the individuals and groups involved.

Providing more effective pathways to meaningful volunteering is dependent on strengthening diversity and inclusion in and accessibility to volunteering programs. Reducing barriers to volunteering and improving ways for people to engage with volunteering in the first place is an obvious way to increase levels of volunteer participation and retention.

The report found that the top three barriers that make it harder to volunteer are:

- Living with a disability
- Age (for persons over 75 years)
- Care giving responsibilities

Health reasons were cited as the second largest barrier to existing volunteers giving more time and the third barrier identified by non volunteers for not becoming involved in volunteering.

The 2024 report found that there was a slight increase in the volume of volunteering done online or at home compared to the 2021 report. The 2024 report also identified that people living with a disability were far more likely to volunteer online or at home.

Looking at these statistics and articulated barriers, it could be deduced that restructuring



Costs are identified by both volunteers and non volunteers as the most common barrier to volunteering



volunteer roles and programs to allow more flexibility to volunteer online and/ or at home may offer one achievable solution for increased diversity, inclusion and accessibility.

Collaborating as a sector to identify, co-design and implement solutions to the above and to other barriers to volunteering identified in the report offers an important and timely opportunity to increase volunteer participation and future-proof volunteering in Queensland. This includes barriers such as rising costs, never being asked, health reasons, uncertainty about where to go or how to help, and lack of confidence.

Interestingly, the research found that the younger people are, the more likely it is that they are unsure how or where to volunteer or to have been asked to volunteer. This was also the case for people who identified as being from a multicultural background. There is a need and an opportunity to target these two significant (and overlapping) demographic groups in a more direct and meaningful way.

Addressing cost barriers to volunteering

Costs and time are identified by both volunteers and non volunteers as the most common barrier to volunteering (or volunteering more). Lack of recognition or appreciation was also identified by existing volunteers as the third most common barrier. While recognition is about more than financial costs, offering basic out-of-pocket reimbursements or small gratuities is often an appreciated form of recognition.

The cost of volunteering was identified in Volunteering Queensland's 2022-23 annual sector survey as one of the major challenges for volunteers and reasons for reducing or ceasing their volunteering. The previous State of Volunteering in Queensland 2021 Report found that volunteers spent an average of \$4.76 per hour to volunteer. This has increased dramatically in 2023 to \$15.57 per hour. Even in the absence of wider cost of living pressures, this cost alone is enough to deter many people from volunteering, or to limit or reduce the amount of volunteering they do.

While the 2023 research found a welcome increase in the amount volunteers are being reimbursed by the organisations in which they volunteer, compared to 2020, reimbursements still only amount to an average of 21.0% of their expenses (compared to 11.4% in 2020).

Volunteering Queensland has proposed a reimbursement fund be provided by State and Commonwealth Governments that would be accessible by community-based volunteer

involving organisations to 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 and decreasing numbers of volunteers.

Cost of living challenges are currently front and centre in advocacy campaigns on many social issues. Volunteering Queensland is a foundation partner in the recently launched Make Queensland Fair campaign, which is being overseen by the Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS).

This campaign provides positive opportunities to incorporate an increased awareness of the critical role that volunteering plays and the solution volunteering offers in helping to alleviate the impacts of cost of living. This increased awareness has a threefold target – politicians, the Queensland public/ community, and the social services sector itself.

Despite relying heavily on volunteers, the social services sector doesn't always highlight this vital resource or measure its contribution and impact. This could be due to an understandable focus on ensuring there is adequate funding available for paid staff and infrastructure to deliver critical services that address growing social needs.

The 2023 report of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) found that by industry, the health care and social services sector was the largest employer group in Queensland, but also included over twice as many volunteer workers than paid employees.

If volunteer rates continue to decline, the ability of this crucial sector to deliver essential social supports and services will be significantly impacted. The same applies with other sectors that rely heavily on volunteers, such as sporting and recreational clubs, education, disaster and emergency and environmental and animal welfare groups, just to name a few.

Engaging the next generation of volunteers

Engaging more young people in volunteering

It is self-evident that building a sustainable, broad-based volunteering ecosystem into the future requires the participation of as many young people as early as possible. Some of this can be addressed by working to provide more pathways, addressing potential costs and making the volunteering experience as positive and worthwhile as possible.

In addition to this, there is the important matter of how younger people perceive what 'volunteering' is and understanding and accommodating their perceptions and expectations of and motivations for volunteering. As with other cohorts, if something is perceived positively, and promoted using language and concepts appropriate to that group, the likelihood that they will engage is significantly increased.

Volunteer managers cited that although there was a marked increase in volunteering by young people during the Covid pandemic, they have now observed 44% less young people wanting to volunteer with their organisations.

Interestingly, this does not correlate with data provided in our Population Survey, which indicates that the under 25 age cohort is the third largest group by age to volunteer. Strategies and narratives that will better engage more young people in volunteering clearly need to be strongly informed by and ideally driven by young people.



Volunteer retention was cited as the number one issue by volunteer managers in Queensland



Ensuring there is alignment in volunteering opportunities and the way people are wanting to volunteer

The changing nature of volunteering, including engaging more via online mechanisms, means that the ways people want to or are able to volunteer are changing. While this might seem a challenge for the future of traditional structures and models of volunteering, it also offers exciting new opportunities.

Whilst we are only monitoring the participation rate through the State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report, not the actual supply and demand issues, we can still conclude that the declining rates are an issue that needs addressing. This is particularly so given that volunteer involving organisations report that over the past three years they have observed a 42% decrease in the number of hours people are volunteering and a 46% decrease in the number of people expressing an interest in volunteering.

The report found that there is a disconnect in data related to perceptions of the number of young people volunteering versus the number of young people who are volunteering, and the preference for more flexible volunteering roles versus the ability to offer and take on such roles.

Such disconnects are important to understand, explore and support the evolution of the volunteering ecosystem into the future. We appreciate that changing societal and environmental factors influence peoples' motivations and ability to volunteer. These also offer opportunities for people and volunteer organisations to explore, adopt and experience exciting new models of volunteering, models that still meet the needs and purpose of the organisations and their volunteer programs.

This is an area that warrants further research. The research would explore changes to the ways people want to volunteer and the alignment of these changes with existing and new volunteering opportunities that need volunteers for their execution.

Creating a positive volunteer experience

Supporting volunteer managers to optimise volunteer recruitment and retention

Volunteer retention was cited as the number one issue by volunteer managers in Queensland. This is followed by health and safety, volunteer recruitment, volunteer burnout and a lack of interest in continuing to volunteer.

These are all real and major concerns and volunteer managers need to be better supported to better understand, address and manage these issues. It is well promoted and understood by volunteer managers and that the solution is axiomatic – the more positive experience a volunteer has in their role, the more likely they are to continue volunteering or potentially volunteer more should they have the capacity.

For effective volunteer recruitment and retention to occur, a dual approach is needed implementing strategies that address the above issues and ensure outcomes that deliver positive experiences for volunteers.

Volunteer managers also listed volunteer training and development and personal relationship building as their top retention factors. In the same way that volunteering itself is often under-recognised, the role of volunteer manager also needs more support and recognition.

During focus groups held with volunteer managers, they expressed a keen interest in exploring new and innovative approaches to enhance their ability to attract volunteers, specifically through the use of digital marketing, stronger relationships with organisations such as education institutions to tap into the energy and enthusiasm of younger generations, and expanding the scope of volunteer roles to include more skill-based and professional opportunities.

The experiences shared indicate that volunteer managers are crucial in creating a structured, cohesive environment for both the organisation and its volunteers. It is important to have a volunteer manager and to recognise the value of dedicated volunteer management.

Key benefits of dedicated volunteer management included structured processes and clear messaging, volunteer recruitment and retention, centralisation of processes, volunteer inclusion and team integration, better program outcomes and sustainability, to name a few.

To ensure volunteers have a positive experience and remain with an organisation (retention), volunteer managers currently utilise a range of strategies including recognition, social events, flexibility in scheduling and more. Expanding on these strategies, having time to fully know individual volunteers and tailoring retention strategies to their goals and expectations will have positive benefits. Organisations with a dedicated paid volunteer manager have cited better outcomes in these areas.

Dedicated volunteer management is a key element to addressing the issues identified in the 2024 report. Supporting volunteer managers in their crucial task of managing successful, impactful volunteer programs will deliver a positive volunteering future for Queensland and is an essential goal and recommendation of this research.

Enhancing knowledge sharing opportunities around the State

Underpinning all of the issues highlighted in the 2024 report is the opportunity for the volunteering sector to collaborate, share knowledge, learn from each other and enhance the things that are working well by replicating them.

Furthermore, to build on the findings in the report, it is essential that the evidence-based



Organisations with a dedicated paid volunteer manager have cited better outcomes in these areas



findings, knowledge, actions and resources are shared throughout the entire Queensland volunteering ecosystem.

A pivotal role for Volunteering Queensland, as the State's peak body for volunteering, is to strengthen the capacity and capability of Queensland's many and diverse volunteer involving organisations. This can be done by building connections, partnerships, knowledge, skills and understandings to help maximise the impact and positive outcomes of their volunteer programs.

Research such as The State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report provides a critical evidence-base to enable volunteering to develop and advance.

Volunteering Queensland is committed to working with all volunteer involving organisations, volunteer managers and the wider volunteering ecosystem to continue to share best practice, new innovations and tried and tested as well as new strategies that work and are informed by the 2024 report.

We invite the sector to collaborate with us developing, co-designing and implementing mechanisms to share ideas, knowledge, learnings, systems, experiences and resources to better enable volunteering throughout the State.

Volunteering Queensland's Role

Volunteering Queensland is the State's peak body for volunteering, solely dedicated to advancing and promoting volunteering to enable strong, inclusive, connected Queensland communities through volunteering.

As the lead voice for volunteering, supporting our essential sector to thrive, we advocate for volunteering. We collaborate statewide and nationally with myriad diverse volunteer involving organisations, all levels of government, and networks of community, educational and business organisations that engage with, have an interest in, and represent volunteering. We work closely with volunteer managers and with volunteers themselves.

Volunteering Queensland's work spans advocacy, advice, capacity building, influencing policy and decision-making, training (including accredited courses), information sharing, research and development, disaster volunteering, and more.

Our work also includes specialist volunteer engagements and management, resource development, best practice volunteer management, inclusive volunteering practices,

promotion and recognition events, communication and marketing campaigns.

Volunteering Queensland will lead the implementation of this advocacy and action plan as an outcome of the findings of the State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report by:

- Advocating for change and adequate investment to better support, sustain and advance volunteering, including building the capacity and capability of volunteer involving organisations, volunteer managers, and existing and prospective volunteers.
- Working with the volunteering ecosystem to implement achievable changes that have been identified.
- Putting together an educational/ marketing campaign to address opportunities that have arisen in the advocacy and action plan.
- Continuing to undertake further research to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the Queensland volunteering sector and where effort needs to be directed to maximise the potential of volunteering for the benefit of the State.

Next Steps

The first important step in finalising this advocacy plan is to undertake statewide consultation with the volunteering sector to gain their feedback on the report's findings, advocacy plan and on agreed key actions that need to be added to this plan.

Consultations will be undertaken during June and August 2024 and will include:

- Two to four face to face consultations in various locations across the State.
- Two to four statewide online consultations to enable all those interested to contribute their views.
- Questions in Volunteering Queensland's annual sector survey to gain additional feedback.

Once these consultations are complete, an updated version of the advocacy plan will be released, including sector feedback and agreed actions gained through the consultations.

Moving forward, the advocacy plan will be updated annually to include progress against each identified action, any new directions and to keep our sector informed on progress.





ADVOCACY PLAN for the

STATE OF VOLUNTEERING IN QUEENSLAND | 2024

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