

## Submission: 2025 Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

Submission to	The Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee
On	2025 Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland
By	Business Chamber Queensland
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## About Business Chamber Queensland

Business Chamber Queensland is the state's chamber of commerce and industry. We're Queensland's largest business body and represent businesses in every industry, of every size and in every region in Queensland. For more than 157 years, we have supported Queensland businesses to create a resilient, diversified and competitive economy. We're an independent, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting Queensland businesses to thrive.

Our extensive business knowledge, built on decades of data, research, and direct engagement with businesses, provides invaluable insight into Queensland business sentiment, expectations, and conditions. Our consistent and timely reporting of issues affecting Queensland businesses ensures regular and comprehensive research and consultation are undertaken to drive policy decisions across all parts of government.

As the state chamber of commerce, we worked with more than 100 local chambers of commerce across Queensland to gain comprehensive insight into every business community in the state. Our working groups and roundtables have provided us with valuable information relating to the issues and challenges facing volunteer organisations.

In particular, this submission considers the current volunteer environment for local chambers of commerce in Queensland and makes recommendations for reform to support individuals, organisations, and communities.

## Introduction

Chamber of commerce presidents and committee members consistently report significant changes in the dynamics of volunteering, particularly the challenges in attracting and retaining volunteer committee members. This submission encapsulates the findings from a recent survey conducted among local chambers, supplemented by insights from a roundtable meeting.

People generally enjoy and are willing to volunteer. People's motivations to volunteer include:

- To support the local business community (41.6%,)
- Genuine passion and sense of fulfillment (12.5%)
- To increase their personal or business profile (4.17%)
- Due to a lack of other volunteers (2.08%)

Our data shows 43.75% of respondents volunteer for one or two organisations while 56.25% volunteer for more than three organisations.

Unfortunately, where there are limited volunteers, individuals can't step down when they need to and cannot fulfill the projects that they know will benefit their community. In this case, volunteer committees risk burnout, stress, mental health issues, resignations, and chamber closures.

The feedback underscores the indispensable role volunteers play in supporting local communities and economies, while highlighting the barriers and adverse impacts local volunteer chambers face due to volunteer shortages and other challenges in attracting and retaining volunteers.

## The current Queensland volunteering environment

### *Barriers to volunteering*

During our roundtable discussions, chambers reported the difficulty in securing volunteers significantly impacted their ability to transition out of their roles, leading to burnout and a lack of succession planning. Several Presidents indicated they had held their positions for many years and wanted to retire, but no suitable successors could be found. Consequently, they are compelled to remain in their roles to ensure the chamber's continued operation or face the prospect of the chamber becoming inactive and closing.

*Our data shows only 12.24% of organisations consistently reported success in finding willing and capable volunteers. In contrast, 61.22% indicated they were sometimes able to secure volunteers, while 30.61% reported they rarely succeeded.*

*"We are finding an increasingly ageing volunteer sector; more encouragement needs to be directed at our younger generation to encourage them to volunteer for the future of our organisations and community events. We find we are utilising and relying on the same group of people year on year."*

The increasing complexity and time demand of running a business has significantly reduced the availability of business owners to volunteer. Regulatory burden and compliance requirements were identified as major contributing factors.

The majority of volunteers within the chamber network also run their own businesses. The difficulty in finding staff has necessitated business owners to undertake more hands-on work to fill gaps, often requiring them to withdraw from volunteer commitments at short notice due to staff absences

*More than 60% of respondents reported time constraints as the primary reason for the inability to volunteer. This was followed by other commitments or conflicts (18.75%), lack of interest (6.25%), and insufficient relevant experience (2%).*

*“In regional Queensland sport, P&C and other organisations fail without volunteers, there are not enough members to pay the exec positions, and the associations fail without them.”*

### **The impact on Queensland communities**

Chambers which had previously organised events, markets, and other activities to support local businesses and the community are now limited in their capacity due to a shortage of volunteers. This inability to attract sufficient volunteers has resulted in negative impacts on the community, local businesses, and the broader local economy.

*68.75% of respondents indicated due to the challenges in securing volunteers, the workload and responsibilities are largely borne by a few individuals. Additionally, 10.2% reported this situation diminishes their capability or capacity, while another 10.2% that it adversely affected their chamber's sustainability and viability. Furthermore, 2.8% reported they were compelled to reduce the number of services or programs offered to members in order to manage the workload.*

*“Regional Queensland cannot survive without our volunteers, but in the last 10 years people have stepped back as the treasurer of a sporting club now is responsible to the ATO. The President of the P&C is liable for ATO and WHS, ie when a tuckshop is run on a government site, in a government-maintained building why should a volunteer P&C President be held accountability for WHS standards-building maintenance is the government's responsibility. The volunteer President is responsible for a staff they don't supervise or see in their workplace- yet is WHS responsible officer.*

*“We could not get enough people for a quorum for a meeting for our funding.”*

*“Our last two meetings didn't reach quorum. They wanted to be on the committee, but we are not getting the numbers at the committee meetings.”*

### **Recommendations:**

- Commit to a series of key measures to reduce regulatory burden including:
  - Communicating and consulting with industry and end users when developing new regulations.
  - Engaging with industry to ensure a full regulatory impact statement for each new piece of legislation.
  - Reducing regulation duplication between levels of government and across state departments.
  - Reducing the frequency of reporting requirements to a minimum.  
Reducing the amount of information requested to a minimum.

- Providing a single location for all regulatory information and announcements. Committing to one central economic agency that drives regulatory reform.
- Implementing pre-populated forms and reports and establishing reliable electronic and web-based reporting.
- Amending regulation release so businesses can prepare and be compliant.
- Continue to work with Business Chamber Queensland in forming the Productivity Commission to ensure it is enabled to review ways to reduce the costs, address regulatory burden, lift productivity and support innovation and resilience.
- Work with national cabinet to provide income tax relief and other tax incentives for volunteers.

### **Government support rating: extent, efficiency and effectiveness**

*More than 91% of the chambers we surveyed rated the extent of support available as below average highlighting concerns about accessibility and adequacy.*

*Similarly, 93.3% of respondents expressed disappointment with the efficiency of support with a rating of average to very poor.*

*Most notably, 95.75% rated the effectiveness of support as average to very poor, indicating that even when assistance is provided, it may not be meeting the intended needs.*

These findings underscore a critical gap in government support, calling for substantial improvements in accessibility, responsiveness, and overall impact.

#### **Recommendation:**

Fund peak bodies to provide online volunteer organisation training specific to their industry, including, resources, templates and coaching and micro-credentialling to deliver a stronger volunteer and organisation experience and better outcomes for Queensland communities. This investment in personal and professional upskilling will also support volunteer attraction and retention and equip a willing and motivated volunteer economy with transferrable skills and experiences.

## **Opportunities**

### **Local community and economic benefits of volunteering**

Chambers are consistently motivated to do more to support local businesses and the community with events, training, markets and festivals, but are significantly constrained with a volunteer shortage.

*Chambers provide a valuable service to their regions with 37.5% of respondents providing local business promotion and support. A further 31.25% provide educational and networking events for their local business with 6.25% providing crucial advocacy for the region.*

#### **Recommendation:**

- Work with national cabinet to provide income tax relief and incentives for volunteers who have separate paid jobs.

### **Improving the volunteer experience**

Enhancing the volunteer experience is essential to encourage new and continued participation and requires targeted support and strategic initiatives to foster long-term engagement.

*37.5% of respondents said administrative support would improve the volunteer experience, 18.75% suggested a public information program about the benefits of volunteering and 14.58% said better government support was needed to attract and retain volunteers.*

*4.17% of respondents indicated reforming the legislative and regulatory burden is necessary, while another 4.17% suggested training for chamber committees would be beneficial. Additionally, 2.08% expressed the need for ongoing industry consultation to enhance the volunteer experience for both individuals and organisations.*

These insights point to key areas where improvements can be made to strengthen volunteer participation and impact.

*“Chambers need solutions to limit governance and administrative burden so they can focus on their programs and services.”*

*“(There needs to be) removal of association members being liable to ATO, WHS, people don't volunteer in fear off what ifs.”*

Recommendations:

- Support volunteer organizations like chambers of commerce to reduce administration burden and costs.
- Provide grants for volunteer organisations to access accountancy and business management software, with additional funding for training to optimise software usage.

## Summary

It was clear from our survey and discussions that for many chamber organisations the lack of volunteers is creating significant challenges and stifling their ability to support local businesses and communities effectively. This in turn could also lead to the demise of local chamber organisations, leaving the local business and community unsupported.

The difficulty in finding volunteers was also reflected in the responses showing that 57.15% volunteered on 3 or more committees, further increasing the chance of volunteering fatigue and burnout.

It was also clear that chamber organisations feel unsupported by all levels of government.