

Submission to the Federal Inquiry into the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme

Introduction

As an SES volunteer, I have firsthand experience with the rewards and challenges of volunteering. I would like to share my personal insights, particularly the barriers I have faced as a prospective and current volunteer. This submission also provides recommendations for improving volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition across Australia and Queensland.

Key Barriers to Volunteering

1. Financial Costs:

- Volunteers often bear significant personal expenses, such as fuel, food, and equipment needed for operations. These costs can deter individuals from volunteering or limit their ability to participate fully.

2. Lack of Early Education on Volunteering:

- There is insufficient education about the value of volunteering in schools, particularly in high schools. Many young people are not exposed to the importance of community service or the benefits it brings to society and personal growth.

3. Limited Recognition and Incentives:

- While volunteers do not seek monetary rewards, their efforts and time are often unacknowledged or underappreciated, which can lead to disengagement.

4. Inconsistent Support for Training Programs:

- Programs like SES cadets, which cultivate early interest and skills in volunteering, are no longer active. Additionally, the availability of VET qualifications through SES varies, which limits opportunities for volunteers to develop skills and gain formal recognition.

5. Cultural and Leadership Challenges:

- Complex procedures, poor leadership, and an unsupportive culture can discourage potential and current volunteers.

6. Workplace Support:

- Many workplaces are unsupportive of employees who volunteer during disasters, often due to a lack of understanding about volunteering roles. This creates a significant barrier for those wanting to contribute during emergencies.
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Recommendations

1. Education and Awareness in Schools

- ☐ Introduce volunteering education as part of high school curriculums to instil the importance of community service at an early age.
- ☐ Highlight the personal, social, and professional benefits of volunteering through campaigns and programs targeted at young people.

2. Reinstatement of SES Cadets Program

- ☐ Relaunch the SES cadets program to engage young individuals and provide a pathway into volunteering.
- ☐ Ensure supportive insurance and liability policies are in place to facilitate safe and effective training programs.

3. Financial Incentives and Support

- ☐ Introduce tax incentives for volunteers, such as:
 - Deductions for fuel, equipment, and food expenses incurred during operations.
 - Claims for hours volunteered against wages or tax rates.
- ☐ Implement financial recognition for after-hours contributions to volunteering activities.

4. Acknowledgment and Non-Monetary Incentives

- ☐ Provide discounts on goods and services, such as:
 - Theme park and movie tickets.
 - Field-use gear like backpacks and multitools.
- ☐ Recognize volunteers' contributions through public acknowledgment, awards, and community events.

5. Sustaining VET Training Opportunities

- ☐ Ensure that SES and similar organisations continue to offer nationally recognized VET qualifications to volunteers.
- ☐ Promote access to training as a way to reward and motivate volunteers, while also building their skills and capabilities.

6. Improving Leadership and Culture

- ☐ Invest in leadership development programs to ensure volunteer organisations foster a supportive and respectful culture.
- ☐ Streamline processes to reduce unnecessary complexity and improve volunteer satisfaction.

7. Workplace Education and Support

- ☐ Encourage workplaces to support employees who volunteer during disasters by:

- Educating employers about the roles and importance of volunteering in disaster management.
 - Providing incentives for workplaces to allow employees time off for volunteering, especially during emergencies.
 - Recognising businesses that actively support volunteerism through awards or public acknowledgment.
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Conclusion

Volunteers play a crucial role in supporting communities across Australia and Queensland. However, to sustain and grow volunteerism, we must address the financial, educational, workplace, and cultural barriers that hinder participation. By implementing these recommendations, we can build a more inclusive and supportive environment that attracts and retains volunteers, while recognizing their invaluable contributions to society.

Thank you for considering my submission. I hope my insights and recommendations will contribute to meaningful improvements in the support and recognition of volunteers.
