



Queensland Fire Department

Volunteerism Strategy

2026 - 2030

DELIVERING
FOR QUEENSLAND



Queensland
Government



J FORRESTER

RURAL FIRE
SERVICE

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Queensland Fire Department**

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Acknowledgement

The Queensland Fire Department acknowledges Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and custodians of country throughout Queensland and their connections to land, sea, and community.

We pay our respect to the Elders – past and present – for they hold the memories, traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the state. As an emergency services organisation, we look to our First Nations communities for their knowledge and wisdom – developed over tens of thousands of years – in caring for country, and to learn how we can support in healing country, now and into the future.

Human Rights

QFD is committed to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights, and our obligations under the *Human Rights Act 2019*.





Foreword by the Minister

Our volunteers undertake selfless work all year round, helping communities respond to and recover from disasters through their invaluable contribution to emergency services.

They step up and make a difference in times of need, often under great pressure and with many competing demands. In return, volunteering fosters pride and builds connections within communities.

Our Government is committed to backing our volunteers.

Since coming to Government we have made several changes as part of our efforts to re-empower our volunteers.

So far we have changed legislation to allow rural fire volunteers to act with greater autonomy, we have increased the number of appliances being delivered to brigades by over 400% and we have returned interest on brigade finances back to brigades.

There is a lot more work to do and today's strategy will help deliver that support to our frontline volunteers.

I would like to thank all the volunteer members of QFD who contributed to this strategy, once again volunteering their time and sharing their experiences to help shape the future of volunteering.

The invaluable role volunteers play in keeping Queenslanders safe where they live cannot be understated, and we thank you for your selfless service to our communities right across our state.

Ann Leahy MP

Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers Queensland Government





Foreword by the Commissioner

Volunteers are fundamental to our department, and every day they are out making a difference in Queensland communities.

Queenslanders know they can rely on our volunteers' support before, during and after disasters. In times of need, our volunteers even put their hands up to support communities interstate and overseas.

Maintaining a dedicated volunteer workforce within emergency services brings unique challenges and to address these QFD launched the Volunteerism Strategy in 2018. Our vision was to develop a volunteer membership that was sustainable and capable, more adaptable, more technically accomplished and more closely connected to the community.

We have since worked hard to create an adaptive and modern workplace for volunteers to best serve their community.

This work culminated in 2024 when we became QFD, all while delivering high-quality fire and emergency services in the face of bushfires and floods.

The formation of QFD is an opportunity to consider what has worked in the past and how we can continue improving the way we support our more than 27,000 volunteers.

The QFD Volunteerism Strategy 2026-2030 guides our department to implement a contemporary, best-practice approach to volunteering.

Aligned with QFD's overall strategic direction including the QFD Strategic Plan and Our People Strategy, the Volunteerism Strategy focuses on recruitment, training and retention to equip volunteers with the knowledge and resources they need to keep Queenslanders safe.

The Parliamentary Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland (the Inquiry) highlighted the experiences, barriers and challenges faced by emergency service volunteers. Our goal is to continue to support growth and strengthen volunteering across Queensland within QFD.

In collaboration with our partners and stakeholders, our focus areas moving forward will include prioritising safety and wellbeing initiatives, promoting continuous learning, enabling access to equipment and celebrating volunteer contributions.

The voice of our volunteers is central to this strategy. We created it in consultation with Rural Fire Service Queensland volunteers, Peer Support Officers, Volunteer Scientific Officers, Volunteer Auxiliary Support Officers and Technical Rescue volunteers, all of whom generously shared their feedback.

Volunteers are ordinary people who put their hand up to do extraordinary things. They sacrifice their time to safeguard lives and property across the state. It is in recognition of their service that we put forward this strategy to shape the future of volunteering in QFD.

Stephen Smith AFSM

Commissioner
Queensland Fire Department



Introduction

Volunteering empowers people to make a positive impact and contributes to more inclusive, connected, and flourishing communities by offering opportunities for civic engagement. Volunteering is a unique indicator of community wellbeing, as it captures social connectedness, physical and mental health, sense of purpose, and connection to place; providing pathways to skill development and employment.

Volunteering is embedded in the fabric of the QFD, bringing social, cultural, and capability benefits. The spirit of volunteering underpins our values: to act with courage, uphold integrity and respect, show loyalty, and build trust in pursuit of community safety and resilience.

Environmental and social factors are impacting volunteering in all sectors. Rigorous analysis of the volunteering environment has found that the most significant impacts on emergency service volunteers include:

- **Changing weather patterns** – changes in Queensland’s weather is causing an increase in the number, concurrence and longevity of events which require a response from volunteers within QFD’s services. This has resulted in more complex, compounding, and simultaneous calls for service and a greater investment of time from our volunteers.
- **Health and wellbeing** – our volunteers need to invest more time participating in specialised training to adequately manage their health and safety in action when undertaking their volunteer roles. Ensuring a minimum understanding of hazard exposure is essential when responding to fire and other emergencies.
- **Decline in volunteering numbers** – generally, less people are committing to formal volunteering and there is increased competition amongst organisations seeking volunteers. This can be particularly challenging in smaller, and regional or remote communities (Volunteering Australia, 2023).
- **Increased cost of living** – limitations are increasing on individuals’ time and availability to volunteer due to being time poor and working more to combat the increased cost of living.

Despite the challenges facing volunteering and emergency services, opportunities also exist for QFD to strengthen its approach as a model volunteer manager through planning for improvement and adaptability, which are detailed in the Key Focus Areas.



The QFD Volunteerism Strategy 2026-2030, provides a robust guiding structure to best support our volunteers. By investing in activities, resources and models that support volunteers, the QFD is seeking to remove barriers to participation to strengthen our volunteer membership. Genuinely valuing volunteering requires action to support it, including recognition of both volunteering impact on community cohesion and to delivering fire and emergency services.

The Strategy design has incorporated an environmental and inputs analysis, followed by a review and consultation period with volunteers and stakeholders.

Implementation will be supported by the Sustainable Volunteerism Model, which identifies the phases of the volunteering journey, presenting opportunities to deliver practical solutions and enhancements that address the Key Focus Areas.



Executive Summary

The **Guiding Principles** capture the essence of volunteering. What drives people to volunteer and remain engaged will underpin the success and outcomes derived from this strategy.



Research shows that there are a range of reasons people volunteer, including:

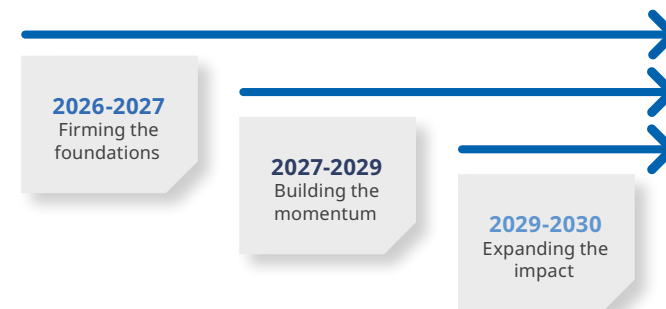
- A desire to make a difference by helping others
- Contributing to their communities
- Personal fulfillment
- Social connections
- Opportunities for skill development.

To apply these principles as the foundation for this strategy is to truly understand volunteer motivation and prioritise initiatives that feed the drive to be involved.

The QFD Volunteerism Strategy metrics of success include:

- Increased proactive reporting of hazards and near misses
- Increase the year-on-year volunteer retention rate
- Increase volunteer member participation in training
- Increase the number of volunteers receiving formal recognitions.

Supported by the Guiding Principles, the **Key Focus Areas** have been developed through the lens of the volunteer experience and lifecycle.



Purpose

The strategy aims to reflect a contemporary approach that meets the needs and expectations of modern Queensland communities by supporting volunteer members of QFD services to deliver exceptional outcomes.

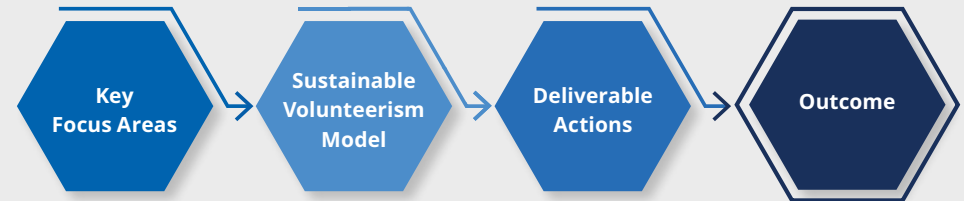
This strategy will:

- **Strengthen volunteerism across the Department by championing a volunteer-centred approach, ensuring that all actions, initiatives, and support mechanisms are designed to empower volunteers and enrich their contributions to their local communities.**
- **Ensure a contemporary approach aligning with leading practice in volunteering, demonstrating a commitment to being a model volunteer organisation, ensuring actionable support for all volunteers within QFD.**
- **Enrich the volunteer experience through a sustainable, inclusive and rewarding environment and grow the volunteer capability within the Department.**
- **Provide the opportunity for Services to self-determine priorities and projects aligned to departmental strategic priorities.**

Successful implementation will contribute to resilient Queensland communities that are informed, connected, protected and thriving, supported by the strength and capability of the QFD volunteer network.

Measures of success will be indicated by increased and sustained rates of membership, with volunteers representative of the communities they serve; greater volunteer and community satisfaction; and enhanced engagement.

The Volunteering for Queensland and QFD Community Insights Survey results will be utilised as annual assessment tools to assist in measuring the effectiveness of this volunteer-centric approach.



From Strategy to Outcomes

Outcomes will be achieved through QFD staff and volunteer members commitment to:

- Supporting local, Australian, and international communities through safe and effective emergency service and disaster management activities
- Supporting actionable projects and initiatives that enhance prevention, preparedness, response and recovery capabilities
- Creating a positive culture of volunteerism within the Department, where all members are welcome, supported, respected, and connected.

The Key Focus Areas support projects that fall within the Sustainable Volunteerism Model which collates programs of work managed by the Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ), Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR), State Operations (SO) and Strategy and Corporate Services (SCS).

Each QFD Service will thoroughly and consistently consider the Department's volunteers in the development of strategies, annual service/business plans, policies and procedures, delegations of approval, reporting lines, resourcing, project management and integration into operational and business as usual.

QFD's governance framework will support accountability of this strategy through a number of mechanisms, complemented by effective communication and engagement. The governance framework will bring together the respective services with improved oversight and consideration for key opportunities and improvements across the Department.

Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland

In 2024, the Queensland Government committed to deliver an Inquiry into Volunteering in Queensland (the Inquiry) and tasked the Local Government, Small Business and Customer Service Committee with investigating and reporting on the following aspects of volunteering in Queensland:

- The current state and value of volunteering in Queensland
- Sector and individual views on volunteer motivations, experiences, opportunities and challenges
- Sector and individual recommendations for change and how to expand volunteering, including those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and diverse backgrounds
- The extent, effectiveness, efficiency and opportunities to expand government support for volunteers, volunteerism and volunteering.

Importantly, the Inquiry highlighted the experiences, barriers and challenges faced by emergency service volunteers and explored opportunities to enhance and expand emergency response volunteering in Queensland. The Inquiry released its report on 18 September 2025.

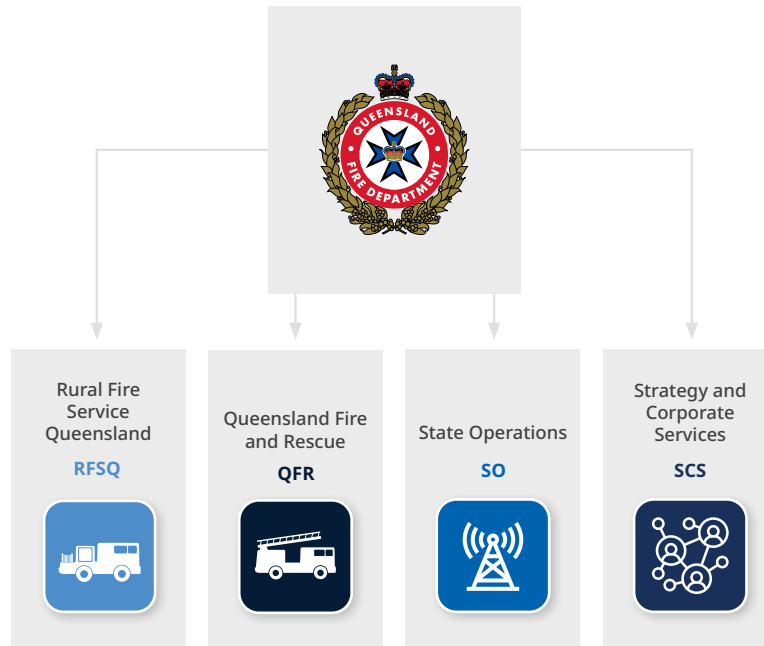
The Queensland Government Response to the Inquiry, supports all Inquiry recommendations in principle (subject to further investigation). Of particular note is the theme of enhancing the volunteer experience across government, supporting those who support us. QFD is committed to delivering initiative 17, which is to investigate ways to build positive culture and improve the volunteering experience for RFSQ volunteers.

The QFD Volunteerism Strategy 2026-2030 is part of QFDs commitment to being a model volunteer organisation and to working across government to better support and respect volunteers. In the following pages you will see alignment between the QFD Volunteerism Strategy Key Focus Areas, and the themes identified in the Government Response to the Inquiry Recommendations.



Volunteers across QFD

The Queensland Fire Department comprises the Rural Fire Service Queensland (RFSQ), Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFR), State Operations Directorate (SO) and Strategy and Corporate Services (SCS).



Volunteer members provide valuable contributions to fire and emergency prevention, preparation, response and recovery across the different service streams of QFD. In addition to approximately 27,000 RFSQ volunteer members, we also incorporate the expertise of Volunteer Scientific Officers, AUS-01 Disaster Assistance Response Team volunteers, Volunteer Auxiliary Support Officers and Peer Support Officers.

Our volunteer members come from all walks of life. Volunteers are our family, our friends, teachers, business owners, farmers, doctors, nurses—anyone willing to lend a hand in protecting our communities, helping them to become more resilient.

Our membership is diverse in age, gender, geographic locations, professional training, life experience and abilities; all combining to provide a world-class fire and emergency response service to communities across Queensland.



Volunteer Functions



Rural Fire Service Queensland Volunteers

RFSQ volunteer members provide vital front-line emergency service response covering the majority of the State. Whilst bushfire activities are the most widely recognised function, vehicle accident response, search and rescue, flood response, and many other community preparations and engagements fall within their remit. The Permit to Light Fire system is administered by the RFSQ volunteer Fire Warden network. RFSQ Volunteers also deliver operations through deployments and incident management capabilities.



Peer Support Officer Volunteers

Volunteer Peer Support Officers play a significant role within the Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN), by providing a first point of contact to access a broad range of emotional and personal support services for volunteers, staff and their immediate family members. These officers promote positive mental health, and support those who serve in protecting their communities.



Regional Volunteer Scientific Officers

These highly qualified specialist volunteers respond to Hazardous Material emergencies and provide advice and guidance to the responding crews whenever a requirement is identified outside South-East Queensland. These regional volunteers have access to 24/7 support from Scientific Unit staff members to assist them in their duties.



Technical Rescue - Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) Volunteers

QFD's AUS-01 DART are one of two internationally classified Urban Search and Rescue teams within Australia. The team is deployed as a self-contained unit both nationally and internationally in response to natural disaster events. Specialist volunteers in the roles of highly skilled and trained doctors, structural engineers, and canine handlers and their dogs form a vital part of the DART response capabilities.



Volunteer Auxiliary Support Officers

This volunteer cohort provide non-operational support and assistance relative to their skills, knowledge and abilities. Auxiliary Support Officers may assist with a range of duties including community education and messaging activities, maintenance and repair of station facilities, training activities, administration and record keeping.

Key Focus Areas Summarised

1.

Provide effective communication and engagement

- Gain an understanding of what communication methods and efficiencies are required and explore volunteers' preferences to receive information.
- Improve processes, systems, and resources to ensure volunteers have access to and receive necessary information and communications.
- Implement communication and engagement strategies that actively listen, analyse and respond meaningfully to volunteer feedback.
- Explore opportunities to capture and communicate shared learnings.

2.

Embed a 'Safety First' culture to ensure volunteers' safety and wellbeing is prioritised

- Highlight the importance of creating a safe environment where staff and volunteers hold a responsibility for personal safety.
- Provide protections and access to safety training and equipment for all volunteers.
- Adopt and continually refine rigorous safety protocols and risk management strategies to minimise hazards and risks facing volunteers.
- Commit to initiatives that promote and prioritise volunteer welfare, health and resilience, including physical and psychological support systems.

3.

Ensure efficient access to essential equipment and resources based on a comprehensive resource to risk methodology

- Identify volunteer capability requirements and facilitating provisions of tools, information, and support needed to perform functions effectively and efficiently.
- Ensure appropriate allocation, timely issue, and maintenance of the following to foster capability readiness:
 - ✓ Equipment
 - ✓ Uniforms
 - ✓ Personal Protective Equipment and Clothing
 - ✓ Work instruction
- Explore new technology and next generation equipment and system enhancements to improve efficiency.

4.

Improve the volunteer experience to deliver sustainable volunteerism

- Develop efficient onboarding systems and practices.
- Broaden the volunteer base by utilising recruitment and attraction strategies that appeal to a broad range of people.
- Supply resources and guides to support growth in membership.
- Explore opportunities for diversification, enhancing an inclusive volunteer environment.

5.

Foster an environment of continuous learning and development

- Provide comprehensive, ongoing training and development opportunities tailored to equip volunteers with critical skills to safely and effectively respond to emergencies in the community.
- Ensure efficient volunteer competency maintenance is supported by systems and place-based access to required training.
- Develop retention strategies, promoting pathways and succession planning in line with opportunities and volunteer skills.
- Capture data to inform program improvements to programs that foster continuous development.

6.

Recognise and celebrate volunteer contributions and achievements

- Enhance a streamlined system of recognition and awards to celebrate volunteer achievements and milestones.
- Support timely delivery of recognition and awards through key events and initiatives.
- Support community-led recognition initiatives to build volunteer morale and commitment to the community.

7.

Promote and foster stakeholder relationships

- Provide resources to enhance proactive community engagement, education, and disaster preparedness initiatives.
- Build genuine and constructive partnerships with service delivery partners.
- Support place-based initiatives and events.
- Develop and implement targeted, risk-based community education and engagement programs to foster knowledge and understanding. Encouraging communities to:
 - ✓ Plan and Prepare
 - ✓ Be informed, ensuring their safety when responding and recovering from all emergency situations.
 - ✓ Develop a local knowledge base that is able to inform operations both during prevention, preparation, response and recovery.

KEY FOCUS AREA 1

Provide effective communication and engagement

- Gain an understanding of what communication methods and efficiencies are required, and explore volunteers' preferences to receive information.
- Improve processes, systems, and resources to ensure volunteers have access to and receive necessary information and communications.
- Implement communication and engagement strategies that actively listen, analyse and respond meaningfully to volunteer feedback.
- Explore opportunities to capture and communicate shared learnings.



QFD Values

As model volunteer managers, we show respect for our volunteer's time, skill and commitment to their service. Our volunteers show **Respect** for each other, the service they represent, and the community they serve through positive interactions. Through the most appropriate channels for their role and geographical area, our volunteers are provided with clear and **consistent communications** and resources to keep them well **informed and engaged**.

QFD Strategic Links

QFD Strategic Plan

Make our information and communication technology simplified, smarter, connected and user friendly.

Provide proactive and engaging messaging and advice relevant to local risks to inform communities and stakeholders across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

QFD Our People Strategy

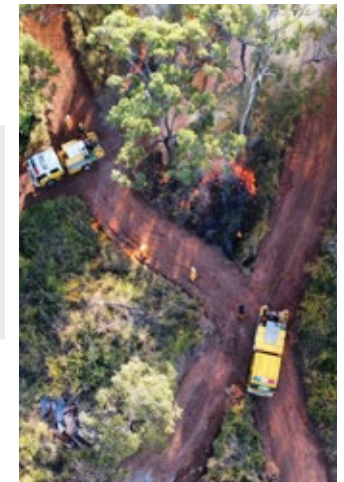
We communicate in every direction across the organisation.

Volunteer Voices - What will this look like in action?

"I see benefits like shared outcomes and reducing risk through shared learnings."



"Better communications, more engagement from and with volunteers."



KEY FOCUS AREA 2

Embed a 'Safety First' culture to ensure volunteers' safety and wellbeing is prioritised

- Highlight the importance of creating a safe environment where staff and volunteers hold a responsibility for personal safety.
- Provide protections and access to safety training and equipment for all volunteers.
- Adopt and continually refine rigorous safety protocols and risk management strategies to minimise hazards and risks facing volunteers.
- Commit to initiatives that promote and prioritise volunteer welfare, health and resilience, including physical and psychological support systems.



QFD Values

Our volunteers act with **Courage** when undertaking activities - which can place them in potentially high-risk situations. They are to be supported through access to **safety and wellbeing initiatives**. Our volunteers **Trust** that the equipment and resources provided to them will keep them **safe** as designed and intended during utilisation.

QFD Strategic Links

QFD Strategic Plan

Safely maintain and enhance our operational response capabilities.

Ensure health, safety, and wellbeing of our staff and volunteers.

QFD Our People Strategy

We complete the training we need to succeed in our roles.

We are committed to our wellbeing.



Volunteer Voices - What will this look like in action?

"Being active firefighters... competent on basic skills and drills."



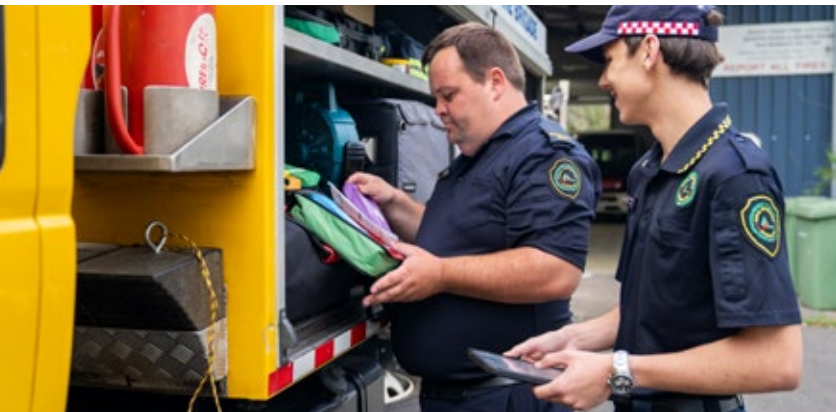
"We will be more agile and fit volunteers.."



KEY FOCUS AREA 3

Ensure efficient access to essential equipment and resources based on a comprehensive resource to risk methodology

- Identify volunteer capability requirements and facilitating provisions of tools, information, and support needed to perform functions effectively and efficiently.
- Ensure appropriate allocation, timely issue, and maintenance of the following to foster capability readiness:
 - ✓ Equipment
 - ✓ Uniforms
 - ✓ Personal Protective Equipment and Clothing
 - ✓ Work instruction
- Explore new technology and next generation equipment and system enhancements to improve efficiency.



QFD Values

Our volunteers need to be able to **Trust** in the training they receive and the validity of the briefings they are given. Our volunteers require **efficient access** to **essential equipment and resources** so they can operate both safely and effectively.

QFD Strategic Links

QFD Strategic Plan

Optimise capabilities by ensuring assets and technology are aligned with risk and evidenced community need whilst delivering public value and respecting Queenslanders' money.

Volunteer Voices - What will this look like in action?

"Fully equipped and informed volunteers."



"Having better health."



KEY FOCUS AREA 4

Improve the volunteer experience to deliver sustainable volunteerism

- Develop efficient onboarding systems and practices.
- Broaden the volunteer base by utilising recruitment and attraction strategies that appeal to a broad range of people.
- Supply resources and guides to support growth in membership.
- Explore opportunities for diversification, enhancing an inclusive volunteer environment.



QFD Values

Volunteers build **Trust** in themselves, their team members, and their leaders, **strengthening membership**.

Through strong bonds formed, volunteers demonstrate Integrity in supporting each other to sustain and improve the services they deliver. **Trust** and **Integrity** creates a fundamental platform in providing further opportunities to **build** within the peer group, and their local communities.

QFD Strategic Links

QFD Strategic Plan

Build a contemporary workforce by attracting and recruiting well, fostering diversity, promoting respectful relationships.

Support, train, develop, and respect the experience of our volunteers.

QFD Our People Strategy

We attract, select and retain people the community can trust.

Volunteer Voices – What will this look like in action?

Outcome: “A higher volunteer engagement.”



“Safer, more inclusive, stronger, supportive service; improving awareness in the community.”



KEY FOCUS AREA 5

Foster an environment of continuous learning and development

- Provide comprehensive, ongoing training and development opportunities tailored to equip volunteers with critical skills to safely and effectively respond to emergencies in the community.
- Ensure efficient volunteer competency maintenance is supported by systems and place-based access to required training.
- Develop retention strategies, promoting pathways and succession planning in line with opportunities and volunteer skills.
- Capture data to inform improvements to programs that foster continuous development.



QFD Values

Our volunteers show **Loyalty** by working together as a team in sharing ideas and combining their skillsets to realise their goals. Volunteers relish the opportunity for access to **learning and development** resources, which provide them with the skills and leadership capabilities they need to **safely** and successfully undertake a variety of tasks.

QFD Strategic Links

QFD Strategic Plan

Support, train, develop, and respect the experience of our volunteers.

Continuously improve by learning, adapting, and transforming with our volunteers, staff, stakeholders, partners, and the community.

QFD Our People Strategy

We complete the training we need to succeed in our roles.

We challenge ourselves to develop, and share, our skills and knowledge.

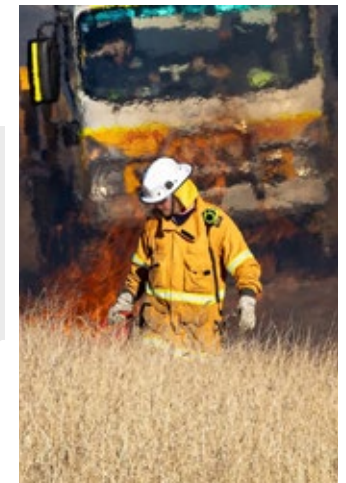


Volunteer Voices – What will this look like in action?

“Increase morale, safety, image and recruitment.”



“Retain experience and knowledge from long serving members.”



KEY FOCUS AREA 6

Recognise and celebrate volunteer contributions and achievements

- Enhance a streamlined system of recognition and awards to celebrate volunteer achievements and milestones.
- Support timely delivery of recognition and awards through key events and initiatives.
- Support community-led recognition initiatives to build volunteer morale and commitment to the community.



QFD Values

The **Respect** and **Loyalty** demonstrated by our volunteers towards their peers and the stakeholders of their community is key in providing fire and emergency responses. The **Respect** shown by the services in **recognising** and **celebrating** volunteer's **contributions** and **achievements** acknowledges the importance of the volunteers to the overall capability of the service.

QFD Strategic Links

QFD Strategic Plan

Support, train, develop, and respect the experience of our volunteers.

QFD Our People Strategy

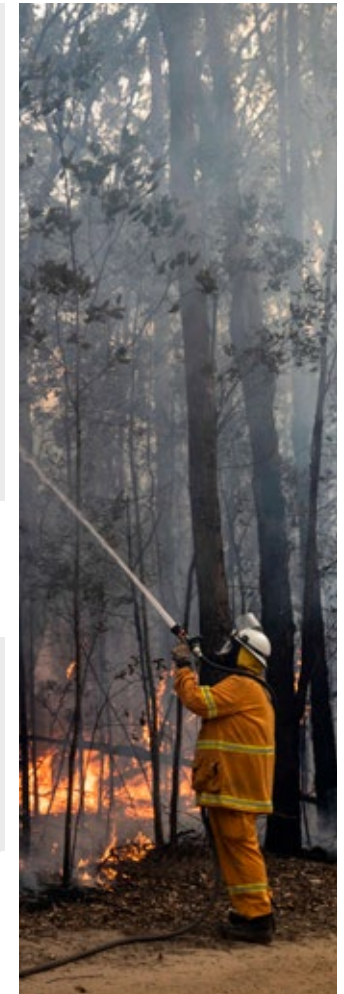
We acknowledge and recognise the work our colleagues do.

Volunteer Voices - What will this look like in action?

"Members feel valued and appreciated."



"Retain members by creating a brigade you want to be in."



KEY FOCUS AREA 7

Promote and foster stakeholder relationships

- Provide resources to enhance proactive community engagement, education, and disaster preparedness initiatives.
- Build genuine and constructive partnerships with service delivery partners.
- Support place-based initiatives and events.
- Develop and implement targeted, risk-based community education and engagement programs to foster knowledge and understanding. Encouraging communities to:
 - ✓ Plan and Prepare
 - ✓ Be informed, ensuring their safety when responding and recovering from all emergency situations.
 - ✓ Develop a local knowledge base that is able to inform operations during prevention, preparation, response and recovery.



QFD Values

The **Integrity** of our volunteers is demonstrated by the **Trust** they place in each other having accountability for actions. Our volunteers lead by example, striving to always do the right thing and maintaining high ethical standards. These attributes have a key value in developing and sustaining **stakeholder relationships** where honest communication and engagement are crucial to both initial and long-term outcomes.

QFD Strategic Links

QFD Strategic Plan

Strengthen doctrine, agreements and partnerships that enhance our contributions to emergency and disaster management.

Build genuine and constructive partnerships at all levels and work cohesively across boundaries to share information, decisions and outcomes.

QFD Our People Strategy

We collaborate and work in an interoperable environment.

Volunteer Voices – What will this look like in action?

“Providing good public relations for resilient informed community.”



“Build greater partnerships with organisations.”



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The Queensland Fire Department extends its thanks to the volunteers and staff who collaborated on and contributed to the building of this Strategy. The voices of our volunteers are reflected in the intent of the Strategy and the formulation of the Sustainable Volunteerism Model that brings it to life.





