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# Branch Handbook

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## Welcome

It’s great to have you on board as a branch volunteer with Blind Citizens Australia (BCA). As part of a network of branches, we highly value your contributions and engagement with members from specific geographic areas, or special interests, to come together to focus on local issues and to further the objectives of BCA at a state or local level. We value what each branch brings to the work of BCA and hope that your time with us is rewarding. Thank you for your generous support of our members and staff.

## About this handbook

This handbook provides information about your rights and responsibilities as a volunteer branch leader, as well as policies and procedures which are relevant to the appropriate running of a branch. This document should be read in conjunction with the branch by-laws. If you would like to receive this handbook in an alternative format, please phone 1800 033 660.

## Volunteering

All positions held at branch level are volunteer based. Please refer to the BCA Volunteer Handbook, which has been designed to support you to understand the conditions under which you are engaged as a volunteer, consistent with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement as outlined by Volunteering Australia.

For more information, please refer to [volunteeringaustralia.org](https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material/#/).

## Composition of the branch committee

Depending on its structure, the branch committee may consist of:

* a president
* vice-president
* secretary; and
* treasurer

or

* coordinator; and
* one or more assistant coordinators

plus, one or more general committee members, if elected.

Please refer to the branch by-laws **Section 6 - Branch leadership** for a description of each branch position and more information regarding branch structure and composition.

## Promoting a branch

BCA will support you to promote a new or existing branch and its activities through a variety of communication methods, including:

### BCA website

The contact details of your branch representative will be available on the website for people to contact you. You can also promote any events on our ‘Events’ page. To do this, email [bca@bca.org.au](mailto:bca@bca.org.au) with the details of your event, such as date, time, location, contact person and other important details.

### Email groups

BCA branches have the option of setting up information lists to promote their activities to members. BCA can assist branches in setting up such lists to facilitate branch internal member communications and process list subscriptions. These groups include:

* **BCA National Women’s Branch** – this email group is for all members of the National Women’s Branch and is for matters relating to the branch and its work.
* **BCA Multiple Disability List** – this group is specifically for people who are blind or vision impaired and have an additional disability.

If you are not already subscribed to one of these groups and would like to be, please contact [bca@bca.org.au](mailto:bca@bca.org.au).

### Ticketing

Branches wishing to promote events using the BCA online event ticketing and payment system will need to know that:

* BCA's online registration platform provider will deduct a percentage of each registration fee received for an event. This will reduce the total amount of funds collected to cover event costs and must be considered when calculating per head registration charges. NOTE: branches will not receive event registration money until after scheduled events.
* BCA staff will require 6 weeks` notice of a planned event; and
* BCA staff will need relevant event details (event type, date, time, location, cost, RSVP deadline, menu and/or other information to be circulated to members) to allow them to develop an online registration page.

### New Horizons

New Horizons is BCA’s weekly radio program and podcast, and a great way to reach a broader audience, or find out about what is happening in the blind and vision impaired community. Each episode runs for approximately fifteen minutes in duration, airing each week on RPH stations across the country, and on many local and regional radio stations. It is also available through the Vision Australia Information and Library Service, or by searching “Blind Citizens Australia” wherever you get your podcasts.

New Horizons regularly features information and events from BCA branches and other matters of interest to people who are blind and vision impaired across Australia.

If you would like to feature the work of your branch on the program, contact [New.Horizons@bca.org.au](mailto:New.Horizons@bca.org.au). If you know of a radio station near you which you think could benefit from broadcasting New Horizons, let them know about the program and its importance to your branch members and the wider community.

### National phone system

BCA has a phone system that allows callers to ring at any time to get information about activities and events, campaigns and any other information of interest to our members. Callers can also leave feedback or a message requesting a return call. If you would like to advertise an upcoming branch meeting or event, please contact [bca@bca.org.au](mailto:bca@bca.org.au) with the details.

### Member Update

BCA sends a weekly update via email to members across Australia. The updates include information about current campaigns, upcoming events, staffing changes, advocacy success stories and other relevant information. To include information about your branch in the Member Update, send details to [memberupdate@bca.org.au](mailto:memberupdate@bca.org.au). Details are required by Monday each week for inclusion.

### Blind Citizens News

Blind Citizens News, or BC News, is BCA’s magazine and includes special interest articles, and longer-term information. If your branch would like to share information about its work, activity, or a recent success story, you could consider writing an article for BC News. For further information, contact the editor at [bcnews@bca.org.au](mailto:bcnews@bca.org.au).

### External suggestions

There are several opportunities to get the word out to the blind or vision impaired community external to BCA’s own communication channels, including:

* Vision Australia Radio.
* your local RPH and community radio stations.
* online radio stations.
* community pages, websites and apps.
* social media groups relating to blindness or vision impairment.
* other email lists, such as VIP-l.
* client newsletters, e.g., those produced by Guide Dogs and Vision Australia.
* publications produced by professional bodies with an interest in eye health, for example, Australian Medical Association (AMA).

If you need any further assistance with finding out more about how you can promote your group or activity through social media or targeted email groups, you can contact BCA for advice and support.

## Running a branch

A link on the BCA website will store the following templates to support branch activities:

* Meeting agenda template
* Meeting minutes template
* Actions arising template
* Treasurer’s report
* Event template
* Annual branch report template
* Electronic signature set up, including use of pronouns and BCA’s Acknowledgement of Country

## Hosting activities

Branches are encouraged to organise a range of activities that reflect the needs and interests of their members, including information meetings and forums, advocacy and social gatherings. Activities may be held in-person, virtually, or a combination of both.

### Types of activities

When considering the types of branch activity, you may like to think about what is of National importance to BCA, while at the same time consider what is important to your local community. Being involved in local community events will help to lift the profile of BCA and encourage new branch members. This may include opportunities to partner, e.g., with your local council, when running events for things like International Day of People with Disability or during Seniors Week. In addition, understanding what issues and activities are important to your members, will support interest and involvement in branch activities.

### Advertising your event

BCA is committed to helping you promote your branch and is available to assist in the promotion of activities and events. For information on how we can assist, please refer to the above section on ‘Promoting a branch’.

## Communicating with members

### Contacting people in your area

Branches may consider developing additional material regarding their primary activities and up-coming events, to accompany the BCA welcome letter sent to new members.

When a new member joins, BCA will send their details to the relevant geographical or special interest branch leader (e.g., president or coordinator), including their name, contact telephone number, email address, postal address and preferred communication format. The use of these details is strictly to promote the work of your branch and they cannot be distributed, shared, sold or used for any other purpose.

While BCA seeks to keep its membership details up to date, there will be times when the personal details of a member change without being notified. If through your work, you become aware of someone’s details changing, please encourage the member to contact BCA to advise.

### Hosting a Zoom meeting

Zoom is a platform you can use to host web meetings and tele-conferences.

If you would like to host a meeting to discuss the work of your branch, plan for an upcoming event, or another reason, BCA staff can assist you by creating the meeting for you and providing you with the required link, dial in number, meeting ID, or ‘one tap’ link where people using a smart phone can be automatically connected to the meeting.

To book a meeting, please contact BCA with the date, time, topic and duration of the meeting. It is important to note that Zoom only allows a select number of meetings to be hosted simultaneously, so some flexibility may be required around the date and time of your meeting.

#### Tips on running a Zoom meeting:

* If you would like the meeting recorded, advise us of this at the time of booking.
* If you haven’t used Zoom before, log in a few minutes early as it can take a few minutes to get set up on your first go. We can also offer training, if needed.
* Zoom has lots of great features and keyboard shortcut keys to make operating easy. You can find a full list of features via the link below.

<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/205683899-Hot-Keys-and-Keyboard-Shortcuts-for-Zoom>

## Representing BCA in advocacy matters

If a branch wishes to participate in local advocacy matters, such as having a representative on a local council disability advisory group, they must do so in a manner that is consistent with the BCA Constitution, by-laws and all relevant policies of BCA. For more information, please refer to the below section on ‘Other resources.’

Before speaking on BCA’s behalf, it is best practice to familiarise yourself with any related policy published on the BCA website. If you have additional questions regarding a policy or particular issue, please contact the Policy and Advocacy Team by calling 1800 033 660 to discuss.

If your branch wishes to advocate on a matter that relates to the whole of your State, Territory or Australia, please discuss this with BCA. If you are in NSW or the ACT, please also contact the NSW ACT State Division Committee.

BCA frequently works on issues relating to particular areas. In such cases, BCA staff may contact branch leaders to seek local input. It is important for BCA and its members to convey a consistent message. Local knowledge, context and people can greatly enhance the effectiveness of that message.

## Finance and fundraising

### Grants and funding

Branches are not permitted to independently apply for funding or grant monies of any kind. It is essential to manage situations where different elements of the same organisation apply to the same funder. If a branch wishes to apply for funding or a grant, a branch representative must first contact and seek approval from the CEO or their delegate. The representative will need to provide:

* details of the branch
* details of the grant or funding they are seeking to apply for
* an overview of how they will use the funding.

The CEO or their delegate will approve or decline the proposal within 10 days. Proposals involving more than ten thousand dollars must also receive board approval, to be sought by the CEO. The decision whether the application is to proceed or not will be given in writing and will be final. In some instances, BCA may need to auspice or apply on behalf of the branch. The branch representative will communicate the outcome of any application to the CEO within 14 days after receiving it and will provide BCA with copies of any funding agreements entered into by the branch.

### Fundraising

Branches are permitted to undertake fundraising activities among members and friends. Fundraising impacting the broader community is to be pre-approved by the CEO. All fundraising must meet the requirements specified for fundraising in BCA's Expectations of Blindness Service Providers Policy, available on the BCA website. For further information on financial matters, please refer to the branch by-laws **Section 13 - Financial management of a branch**.

## Record management

Please refer to the branch by-laws **Section 11 - Records and reporting.**

## Concluding a branch

Please refer to the branch by-laws **Section 19 - Dissolution of a branch.**

## Other useful BCA contacts and resources

### Current branch list

A list of current branches and branch leaders are available on the BCA website. [Branches and State Divisions – Blind Citizens Australia (bca.org.au)](https://www.bca.org.au/branches/)

### National Policy Council

The National Policy Council (NPC) is a sub-committee of the BCA board, focused on the development and review of BCA’s policy positions. As an internal body, the role of the NPC is to help articulate to the board the views of the BCA membership across a range of public policy areas.

The ongoing work of the NPC helps to ensure that BCA’s position statements and policies continue to be an effective education and advocacy tool in order to leverage change and promote the rights of people who are blind or vision impaired.

### BCA policy

BCA publishes its policies on the [BCA website under the ‘Policy’ tab](https://www.bca.org.au/policy/). This section also contains information on current and past campaigns and submissions. These documents can be referenced when representing BCA on local matters.

### Branch liaison coordinator

The board will appoint a current BCA member to the role of **branch liaison coordinator**. This role will support branch leaders and facilitate a full and accurate two-way communication between branch leaders, staff and the board. The board maintains a position description for this role with the following responsibilities:

* To strengthen communication between the board and branches in relation to BCA's functioning, public policy implementation and advocacy campaigning.
* To provide a conduit for branches through their presidents or coordinators, to bring their achievements, needs and concerns to the attention of the board.
* To support branch office bearers in relation to the functioning and development of their branch, and the recruitment and induction of new members.

### BCA Constitution

BCA branches and members must conduct themselves in accordance with the BCA Constitution. [The Constitution is available on the BCA website](https://www.bca.org.au/branches/), under the ‘Branches and State Divisions’ page.

### Branch by-laws

The BCA Branch By-laws contain additional information on how to operate a branch. These by-laws set out BCA's expectations for branches and their leaders and is available on the BCA website, under the ‘Branches and State Divisions’ page,

### BCA National Office

Free Call: 1800 033 660

Text: 0436 446 780

Email: [bca@bca.org.au](mailto:bca@bca.org.au)

Website: [www.bca.org.au](http://www.bca.org.au)

Follow us on twitter [@au\_bca](http://www.twitter.com/au_BCA)

Like us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/blindcitizensaustralia](http://www.facebook.com/BlindCitizensAustralia?ref=hl)

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