Branch Office Bearers Guide

Liberal Party of Australia (WA) Inc
Written by the Marketing and Promotion Committee 2006
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Outline of Liberal Party Organisation

1. Introduction:
The fundamental organisational unit within the Liberal Party is the BRANCH. Branches are designed to provide grass root representation to the local community, and are organised along loose geographical boundaries. It is possible for people outside the local area to be members of a local branch. In Western Australia for a branch to be constitutional it must have 30 members in the city and 10 members in country areas.

Branches are grouped together into DIVISIONS, which correspond to the Federal electorate in the area. Branches elect members to attend Divisional meetings however members of branches, as observers, are most welcome to attend.

In Western Australia there are currently 15 Divisions based on 15 House of Representative electorates in the Federal Parliament.

Objectives of a Branch:

- to promote and contribute to the objects, policy and platform of the Liberal Party
- to work for the election to Parliament of the selected and endorsed candidate of the Liberal Party at the State and Federal levels and for that purpose to co-operate with all the other branches within the electorate and with committees in organising the electorate to that end to enlist supporters of the Liberal Party as ordinary members of the Branch
- to raise funds for the purposes of the Liberal Party and for the furtherance of its objects
- to secure the enrolment of every person eligible as an elector and the removal from the Electoral Roll of the names of unqualified persons
- to encourage within the Branch and the Liberal Party all educational work of a political, social and economic character
- to make and submit resolutions for submission to the Council of the Division or to such other committees in the Division as may be provided for in the Rules of the Division.

Decision Making Bodies of the Liberal Party:
There are SIX decision-making bodies of the Liberal Party. The nature and functions of each of these bodies, together with a short description of the branches’ entitlement to representation before them, are outlined below:
The Branch: All financial members of the branch are entitled to attend and vote. The branch is required only to hold an Annual General Meeting prior to the 15 September each year, at which office bearers are elected and delegates elected to represent the branch. Other branch meetings are held as required.

Divisional Council: Usually meets monthly with two (2) delegates from each Constitutional branch and the Division Executive. Observers welcome from branches within the Division or other State Divisions.

Divisional Conference: Meets yearly with five (5) Divisional Conference delegates and two (2) Divisional Council delegates from each Constitutional branch and the Division Executive. At the Divisional Conference the Divisional President and Divisional Executive including four State Council delegates for the following year are elected.

State Conference: Meets yearly. Delegates advised in writing by State Director regarding time, location, constitutional amendments and motions for debate at the conference. Each Constitutional branch has one delegate attend for first 50 members. A Constitutional branch with over 50 members has 2 delegates attend. Members of State Council and State Executive are also delegates to the State Conference. Observers also welcome.

State Council: The State Council is the general decision making body of the Liberal Party and is required by the Constitution to meet eight times a year. The first meeting of State Council is held within two months of State Conference and seven ordinary meetings are held in the year. Members of State Council are elected and appointed by Divisions. State Council members also include members of State Executive. Observers welcome to attend.

State Executive: This is the principal executive decision making body within the non-Parliamentary wing of the Liberal Party. The State Executive consists of Divisional Presidents, the senior office bearers (State President, State Vice-Presidents, Division Presidents and Chairs of Standing Committees.

Note: The Liberal Party also employs a decentralised system of candidate selection. Branches have direct representation on selection committees (see selection)

Divisional Women’s Committee and Liberal Women’s Council:
Each female member of the Division is a member of the Divisional Women’s Committee. The President of the Divisional Women’s Committee is a delegate to the Divisional Council, Divisional Conference, State Council and State Conference. The Divisional Women’s Committee is required to hold an AGM within fifteen months of the previous AGM. At the Divisional Women’s Committee AGM as well as electing office bearers, five delegates are elected to Liberal Women’s Council. The President of the Divisional Women’s Committee is also a delegate to Liberal Women’s Council and is a member of the Liberal Women’s Council Executive. Liberal Women’s Council has the same status in the Liberal Party as a Division.
Liberal Women’s Council meets monthly (with the exception of December and January) and is actively involved in discussing and formulating policy motions, fundraising, campaigning and other aspects of the Liberal Party’s operation.

**Senior Liberal Party Office Bearers:**
Election of the senior office bearers positions (President, four Vice Presidents and Treasurer) are made by State Conference during the State Conference of the Liberal Party which takes place annually before the end of September in each year.

**Constitutional Amendments:**
State Conference must approve (by a two thirds majority) all amendments to the Constitution which are usually considered during a special meeting at State Conference.

**Policy input from Branches:**
Branch members may put forward motions on any number of State or Federal policy issues and can then advance them through Divisional Council, State Council or State Conference.

2. **Selection of Candidates:**
Branch members have important responsibilities in terms of selecting candidates for Legislative Assembly and House of Representatives elections and Legislative Council (State) elections. Senate candidates are selected by State Council.

In the case of a branch wholly or partly within the electorate and having the majority of its members residing within the electorate or whose principal place of business or employment is within the electorate branch delegates are as follows:
- **State Legislative Council:** two ordinary members elected by the branch at the branch AGM
- **State Legislative Assembly:** six ordinary members elected by the branch at the branch AGM.

If the number of ordinary members exceeds 50 the branch is entitled to elect, for each additional 25 or part 25 ordinary members, an additional ordinary member provided that the maximum shall not exceed 12 ordinary members.

**Federal House of Representatives:** four ordinary members elected by the branch at the branch AGM.

A Selection Committee consists of the chairman or a deputy chairman of the Selection Committee, State Council delegates, Party delegates as well as branch members.

Delegates to selection committees have to be financial members of the Liberal Party for a period of not less than twelve (12) months before the closure date and a member of a branch for not less than six (6) months.
State Council convenes selection committees whenever it is deemed necessary to pre-select a candidate (i.e. prior to elections or by-elections)

Delegates to attend are notified in writing by the State Director. After the selection the candidate must be ratified by the State Council of the Liberal Party.

For the responsibilities of branch delegates to selection committees the following should be considered as a guide:

“Delegates should consider the policies and abilities of all the candidates, by what is known to them personally, by reading the resumes provided by each candidate and checking the reference provided by them. After hearing all candidates at the selection committee they should reach a reasoned view on their merits to be the best person to represent the electorate and the Liberal Party”

3. **Description of Branch Operations:**
   a. **Branch Structure:** the following sets out the scheme of authority and principal responsibilities of a typical branch. However there are no rigid rules which must be followed and each branch is entitled to adopt whatever management structure it feels is appropriate.

The **President** is chiefly responsible for the organisation of the branch and the representation of its interests at the various levels with the Liberal Party. The President’s role is therefore primarily an executive, rather than an administrative one.

The position of **Secretary** is a particularly important one in terms of compliance by the branch with rules.

The Liberal Party of Australia (WA Division) Inc is an incorporated body and the keeping of full and accurate records by all constitutional bodies in the Liberal Party, including the branches is essential in order to discharge all legal requirements.

The **Treasurer** has primary responsibility for the financial welfare of the branch. The tasks include the keeping of accurate financial records and the preparation of periodic reports of financial position.

The principal function of **Vice Presidents** is to perform those tasks specifically allocated to them by the executive. Usually tasks will be allocated by the use of portfolios such as membership, campaigning and social.

Ordinary **committee members** assist the executive in whatever way possible. Tasks may include the organisation of a social event or a debate, or the preparation of a newsletter.
Co-opted members essentially perform the same tasks as ordinary committee members, although they do not have a vote in committee deliberations.

The branch may also decide to establish sub committees to provide a pool of ready and willing members on which to draw should the need arise.

Who may be an Office Bearer:
Only financial ordinary members of the branch are able to stand for an office bearer position within the branch.

b. Office Bearer Responsibilities:

President: The President maintains responsibility for the policies and operations of the branch. The President may have a number of representative roles to play in other areas of the Liberal Party, such as the Division in which the branch is located. Usually the branch President will be elected as a delegate to Divisional Council/Conference, although this need not necessarily be the case.

The President should:
- maintain regular contact with all members of the committee
- be responsible for the assignment of specific duties or portfolios to other members of the committee, especially the Vice Presidents
- in consultation with the Secretary approve dates and agendas for all meetings and convene special branch meetings where necessary (i.e. to fill a casual vacancy on the Committee)
- chair all branch meetings and committee meetings except those which he/she is unable to attend
- support the branch Secretary and Treasurer in the discharge of their duties

As the principal office bearer of the branch the President is generally responsible for the efficient operation of the branch committees. As such it is necessary for the President to have the full confidence and respect of those working on the committee. If, for whatever reason, the President loses the confidence of a majority of the committee or the branch then the President should consider resigning to allow for a fresh election for the position.

Secretary: The Secretary’s role is predominately one of ensuring that the branch complies with its legal obligations under the Liberal Party Constitution and the general law and should have a copy of the current Constitution and Party Rules. The Secretary is one of the most important people in any organisation and this is especially so in the Liberal Party-the position is one, which demands both initiative and energy. In addition, the Secretary should have access to adequate support services including computing and photocopying services.

Branch General Meetings: the Secretary should (approximately three weeks prior to a scheduled general meeting) verify the date and location for the meeting with the President.
The Secretary should ensure that minutes of the previous meeting are complete, these should be copied and distributed to members with the notice of the forthcoming meeting.

**Notice of branch general meetings must be given to all financial members of the branch with reasonable notice prior to the date of the meeting.**

**Branch Annual General Meetings:** The Secretary should verify the date and location for the meeting with the President. The Liberal Party Constitution requires an Annual General Meeting to be convened prior to 15 September each year for a branch. If it fails in this respect the AGM can then be convened

- by the Division President
- by the State Executive

If the branch AGM is conducted after 15 September the branch will require seven days to come out of suspension.

The Secretary should ensure that the minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting are complete, these should then be copied and distributed to members with notices of the forthcoming annual general meeting. The Secretary should also ensure that the Treasurer brings to the meeting a signed “change of signatories” form if the branch operates a bank account.

**Notice of the Annual General Meeting of the Branch must be given no less than fourteen (14) clear days prior to the date of the meeting.**

Notices should also be forwarded to all Liberal Members of State and Federal Parliament for the Division, all Liberal Senators, the Divisional Secretary and the State Director. The outgoing President will normally chair the AGM until such time as elections are to be conducted, whereupon an independent person takes the chair. The chair is normally resumed by the outgoing President and the new office bearers take over at the conclusion of the meeting. Immediately following an AGM the new office bearers should arrange with the new committee for the transfer of all branch records and accounts. The outgoing Treasurer should hand the signed “change of signatories” form to the new Treasurer. The incoming Secretary must complete a Branch Office Bearers Form and forward a copy to the Divisional Secretary and the Liberal Party Headquarters. Forms are available from Party headquarters or can be downloaded from the Liberal Party e-news letter. The form should be completed as soon as possible, certainly within fourteen days.

**Membership:** It is a crucial function of the branch Secretary to maintain accurate membership records and copies of all minutes, agendas, notices and reports. An up to date list of names, addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses of all branch members is essential. It is also beneficial to have an up to date list of key supporters (for invitations to
functions) and a list of all Liberal Federal and State Members of Parliament within the Division and State wide with contact details.

**Minutes/Correspondence:** The Secretary must keep full and accurate minutes of all proceedings of the branch including branch general meetings, branch AGMs and branch committees. The Secretary is also responsible for handling both incoming and outgoing correspondence. Any accounts should be handled by the Treasurer. Correspondence out can be written by the President or Secretary and should be tabled at a branch meeting. All inwards correspondence and action taken should also be tabled at branch meetings.

**Treasurer:** The Treasurer is responsible for the financial well-being of the branch, including fund raising and expenditures. In consultation with the Secretary, the Treasurer is also responsible for ensuring that membership dues are paid promptly and renewals encouraged.

**Fundraising/Receipts:** The Treasurer has general responsibility for fund raising within the branch. If a special fundraising event is to be undertaken, the Treasurer or the President should consult the Division Executive to ensure that there are no clashes with efforts at a Divisional level. A receipt should be issued for every amount paid to the branch. Full details should be entered on the receipt (i.e. amount, date and purpose for which funds were received) Membership fees should be paid directly to Liberal Party Headquarters.

**Books:** If a branch has its own bank account then full and accurate books of account should be kept. Such records and prepared financial statements should be available to the branch members and presented to the Honorary Auditor for verification prior to the Annual General Meeting of the branch. An Honorary Auditor should be appointed at a branch meeting. The books will be necessary for the completion of the AEC return.

**Proxy for Office Bearer positions:** In the first instance the person needing a proxy because he/she is unable to attend a meeting is able to appoint their own proxy as long as the proxy is a member of the same constituent body. The President of the branch/division can also appoint a proxy from the same constituent body if the person needing the proxy is unable to do so.

Any branch office bearer unsure of procedure or protocols should contact a member of the Divisional Executive or Liberal Party Headquarters for advice.

**These guidelines are offered as assistance to those who have volunteered to take on a range of responsibilities within a branch of the Liberal Party of Australia (WA Division)**

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