



Australian Veterinary Association

Division and Branch Handbook

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Welcome to the AVA Division and Branch Handbook

The Australian Veterinary Association wishes to acknowledge the extensive contribution of our volunteers across many disciplines. Their time, energy, effort and passion helps us build a strong and vibrant professional association to provide a Voice, Education, Community and Support to our members.

The AVA Division and Branch Handbook (the “Handbook”) has been developed to provide clarity on key aspects of operations, governance and guidance in undertaking Division and Branch activities.

Every effort has been made to deliver this comprehensive guide. We always value your feedback so we can continually improve and grow. Please contact Membership Services (members@ava.com.au) if you have any questions or constructive suggestions about this Handbook.

Section 13 (13.1-13.8) of the AVA Constitution contains the sections that govern the activities of the Divisions. The AVA Board retains the authority to alter the activities of any Division or Committee at any time.

Section 15 (15.1-15.6) of the AVA Constitution contains the sections that govern the activities of the Branches. The Board retains the authority to alter the activities of any group of the AVA including Branches at any time.

[The AVA Division and Branch – Statement of Purpose](#) informs parts of this document and should be read in conjunction with this Handbook.

AVA Communications

Division Committee communication within the Committee

When you volunteer for a Division Committee, you will be added to the relevant Microsoft Office Teams site. This is a platform incorporated into Microsoft Office Suite which is secure for Committee members to communicate, share documents (including meeting minutes and agendas) and hold virtual meetings. You will need a valid email address to be granted access to your relevant Teams site. Please contact your Senior Advocacy Officer (SAO) if you have any issues relating to your Teams account. It is the responsibility of the committee member to familiarise themselves with this tool. There are a number of resources on the internet that will be able to assist if you search the term “How to use Microsoft teams”. Usage of the AVA’s Teams site is not compulsory but please be aware that you may miss out on important documents and discussions as this is the preferred method of communication between AVA staff and our volunteers. To assist with confidentiality and privacy, when you leave the Committee or when your term is completed, you will no longer have access to the Division Teams site.

Branch Committee communication within the Committee

It is not necessary for Branches to have Teams sites. However, the AVA can provide phone numbers of Committee members on request and Committees may set up their own channels such as WhatsApp, or create internal email lists once they have contacted each other. We are unable to provide email addresses due to Privacy regulations.

Division and Branch communication with AVA staff

In the first instance Committee members should communicate with AVA staff by email.

As the key role of Divisions is advocacy, each Division has been appointed a Senior Advocacy Officer (SAO) who should be their primary point of contact with the AVA team.

As the key role of Branches is CPD and networking events within their Branch, each Branch has been appointed a Branch Event Coordinator (BEC) who should be their primary point of contact with the AVA team.

It should be noted that AVA staff are likely to be allocated to multiple Divisions and Branches across multiple States and Territories. Your timely requests and patience are required so that staff can prioritise and handle enquiries efficiently. All AVA employees have the right to a safe workplace which is free of abusive, aggressive or violent behaviour. The AVA has a zero- tolerance policy on aggression and violence against its employees.

Division and Branch communication with members

The AVA is obligated by law to protect the data security of all AVA members. To minimise data-related risks, we cannot supply members details without their permission. To overcome this issue, there are multiple opportunities for Divisions and Branches to communicate with their immediate members.

1. A monthly Division newsletter for routine news and updates. This can include a Division President report highlighting recent activities or upcoming opportunities to be involved, relevant advocacy updates and events of interest to Division members. These newsletters are developed and sent by the AVA staff. Content is also posted on the AVA website. Talk with your Senior Advocacy Officer (SAO) about submitting articles for the website and newsletters.
2. For urgent matters that cannot wait until the next Division newsletter, stand-alone member communications are possible. Speak with your Senior Advocacy Officer about unscheduled urgent emails. Such communications require approval from the AVA Executive Leadership Team.
3. Upcoming events: AVA staff can send out event update emails relating to approved AVA events to Division and Branch members. Such will need to be drafted by the Division Committee or Branch Representative and approved by AVA staff no less than three (3) business days prior to the intended date of sending, with a maximum of two standalone emails for any event.

4. Brief updates: Division Presidents and Branch Representatives may also request a phone contact list of their relevant members, to contact individuals directly or as a group through a secure and private social media platform, such as WhatsApp. If you would like a contact list of your immediate members, please contact the Membership Services team via members@ava.com.au.

Advocacy issues

The Divisions and Branches provide information to the AVA around advocacy issues of importance to the profession. When Branches identify any advocacy issues these should be communicated to Division Committees directly through their Branch Representative. Division Committees can communicate advocacy issues directly to their Senior Advocacy Officer and these will be triaged by the AVA Advocacy Team. The issue may already be included with the AVA National Advocacy Strategy which sets out who is responsible for managing key external advocacy relationships. There is a process for developing policy and identifying policy gaps or tactical issues to consider. This process includes essential input from relevant Divisions, Branches and SIGs. Members representing AVA in meetings with external stakeholders are reminded of their obligations which are outlined in the policy and procedure for AVA representation on external committees.

Education and events

The AVA has designated education and event staff to assist Divisions and Branches organise and coordinate their approved events.

Education (CPD) events are defined as those where the primary purpose is to provide knowledge and skills to the registered delegates. This can include clinical and non-clinical expertise in a virtual or face-to-face environment. Education events have one or more subject matter experts to deliver the educational content.

Non-CPD networking events can be defined as those where the primary purpose is to provide an opportunity for social interaction and support, building of professional relationships and discussion of issues. Non-CPD networking events do not deliver educational content.

Education and non-CPD networking events will need to be scheduled, priced and planned according to AVA Event Policies and Procedures. The Education Advisory Committee (EAC) review all formal event proposals for the following year to assist with AVA planning and resourcing. Informal events such as spontaneous social catch-ups, cannot be supported or advertised by AVA staff.

Proposed events that are one day or longer will need to be submitted to the EAC in February of the calendar year prior to the proposed event. Smaller events of less than one day will need to be submitted for assessment 6 months prior to the event. The proposals can be completed using the [Event Request Form](#).

Guidelines for Division events:

- Divisions may propose one non-CPD networking event and up to two webinars each year.
- Webinars that are of benefit to the broader membership and are planned in collaboration with other Divisions or Groups are preferred.
- Divisions can propose to hold an in-person educational event with the AVA Conference or a Special Interest Group (SIG) Conference in their area. The Division educational event must run concurrently (i.e. as a stream).
- Divisions wishing to hold an in-person educational event in conjunction with the AVA Conference or SIG Conference will need to submit a proposal to the EAC. Events of more than one day will need to be proposed in February of the calendar year prior to the proposed event.

Guidelines for Branch events:

- Branches can propose one (1) non-CPD networking and one (1) face-to-face educational event per year.
- Branch events are likely to range from 2-hours to one day in duration.
- If a Branch wishes to hold an event greater than one day in duration (due to large geographical distance travelled by some members), there are a number of options available to them:

- Collaborate with another Branch to hold a multi-day educational event. The Branch(es) may or may not use their non-CPD networking event days at the same time.
- Collaborate with their Division to hold a networking event in conjunction with their Branch educational event.
- Collaborate with a Special Interest Group (SIG) to hold a simultaneous educational event.
- Branches will need to submit an annual Branch Activation Form (please see more details on page 11 of this Handbook) to propose an event if it has not already been submitted for that year. If a Branch activation form has already been submitted a new event can be proposed using the Event Proposal form.

Policy Development

The discussion and feedback provided by Divisions and Branches is integral to the development of AVA scientific, technical, ethical and philosophical policies. Draft policies are published for member consultation before being reviewed by the Policy Advisory Council and then ratified by the AVA Board where appropriate. All feedback provided by Divisions and Branches should be directed to the nominated Division Policy Councillor or provided directly on the relevant forum on the AVA website.

Member services

The AVA Member Services team provides support to members for a range of reasons. These include membership categories and fees, financial hardship and specific member benefits. For individual membership enquiries, the AVA Member Services team can be contacted by email (members@ava.com.au) or by phone (1300 137 309). For enquiries relating to Branch member support, please speak to a Member Services Officer. For Branch event support, please speak to your AVA staff Branch Events Coordinator.

Expenses and reimbursement process for Division and Branch Committees

At times, volunteers may incur Committee-related expenses. The AVA has a process for reimbursing volunteers for pre-approved expenses. The expense reimbursement form can be found in your Division committee Microsoft Teams site or provided to you by your Senior Advocacy Officer or Branch Event Coordinator.

Division committee expenses should be submitted to their relevant Senior Advocacy Officer and Branch committee expenses should be submitted to their relevant Branch Event Coordinator.

Public media statements

To ensure consistency of message and reduce the risk to individual members and the association, all requests for media comment should be directed to media@ava.com.au or 0439 628 898. These will be reviewed by the Communications and Marketing team and an appropriate spokesperson identified. Depending on the circumstances, this may be the AVA President, the Head of Veterinary Policy and Advocacy, a SIG or Division President, or other subject matter expert.

Media releases are developed with the assistance of the Veterinary Policy and Advocacy team. AVA CEO and President approval is required before an AVA media release is released in the public domain. Division involvement in shared media releases with other organisations requires approval by the AVA CEO and President.

Conflicts of Interest

All volunteers are required to abide by the AVA Conflict of Interest Policy and ensure that potential conflicts are disclosed at meetings prior to the discussion of relevant items. This is to ensure transparency of any potential issues and to mitigate any risk to individuals or the association.

Information for Division Executive Committees

Division Committee roles

The Division Committee consists of at least five elected members and not more than nine elected members including the President. In addition, the Division may choose to invite and involve other Group members and representatives to attend their meetings.

Role	Details
Division President (elected by the Division Committee)	The chair of the Division Committee and takes on a leadership role within the Division. Represents the Division on the Council of Presidents (COPS). Is responsible for communicating directly with the nominated Senior Advocacy Officer and Branch Representatives.
Committee members (elected by membership)	All Committee members have a role in assisting with the development and implementation of the Division's activities. They help ensure that the Division activities align with the AVA Strategic Plan and the Division and Branch Statement of Purpose.
Policy Advisory Councillor (appointed by the Division Committee)	The Division's representative on the AVA Policy Advisory Council. The role is appointed by the Division Committee with a three-year term. Policy Advisory Councillors may be reappointed for a total of three consecutive terms. They are not required to be a Division Committee member; however, it is recommended that they attend Division Committee meetings.
Advocacy Forum Representative (appointed by the Division Committee)	The Division's representative on the AVA Advocacy Forum. This body helps inform the AVA advocacy agenda. Representatives are not required to be a Division Committee member; however, it is recommended that they attend Division Committee meetings.
Student Representative(s) (invited)	Each university with a veterinary school has a representative on the AVA Student Committee. Where there are one or more University veterinary faculties within a Division jurisdiction, the relevant Student Committee member(s) should receive a standing invitation to Division Committee meetings.
Jurisdiction CVO/ government representative (invited)	Relationships with state government including Departments of Primary Industries are crucial to AVA interests. As such, it is recommended that the State or Territory CVO (or their nominee) receive an invitation to attend at least one Division Committee meeting per year.
Veterinary Practitioner Board representative (invited)	Relationships with jurisdiction Veterinary Boards are crucial to AVA interests. As such, it is recommended that the Chair of the Veterinary Practice Board (or their nominee) receive an invitation to attend at least one Division Committee meeting per year.
Branch Representatives (invited)	Where a Division has Branches, there is value in including the Branch Representatives in Division Committee meetings. In Divisions with a large number of Branches, there may be alternative methods to ensure it maintains positive engagement with branches.

Division Committee elections

Division committees are comprised of 5-9 volunteer members who must reside, or registered as being part of another Division (as per clause 13.5 of the AVA Constitution), in the Division jurisdiction. Volunteers are elected to the Committee by the membership for an initial two-year term with elections occurring in February every other year. These two-year terms may be extended subject to the decisions made on who steps down at each election. At each election at least half the committee (rounded down if there the committee has an uneven number of members) must stand down. They are eligible for re-election if they have not yet served 8 consecutive years. The committee decides who retains their role for the following two-year period and who is required to step down. This allows some flexibility to the committee in managing the ongoing membership of the committee. In the first year of transition to the new process, the current President and President-elect will not have to stand down. Each Committee member may sit on the Committee for a maximum of 4 consecutive terms (8 years in total) after which members may renominate after a one-year respite period. The Division President and Division President-Elect are ex-officio members of the Division Committee.

The process of election for the Division Committee members is outlined below.

1. Each member of a Division will receive an electronic notice calling for the nominations committee members at least twenty-one days prior to the closing date for nominations.
2. If the number of nominations exceeds the number of available positions for committee members, a ballot must be held.
3. Candidates in the ballot must provide a 250-word citation to AVA staff at least 21 days prior to the voting closing date.
4. The citations of each candidate are collated by AVA staff and provided to members at least 14 days prior to the voting closing date.
5. Clear instructions on how to vote will be provided to all members at least 14 days prior to the voting closing date.
6. Within 24 hours of the result, all candidates (successful and unsuccessful) will be informed of the election outcome by the current Division President or Senior Advocacy Officer.
7. When all candidates have been informed, an announcement of the election outcome will be made to the membership and in the next Division Newsletter.
8. New committee members take office and retiring members complete their terms on the date of the declaration of the election results.

At the first meeting following the Committee election, the process of election for the Division President and Division President Elect is as follows:

1. If the President position is vacant following a two-year term and there is no President Elect:
 - a. There is a call for nominations amongst Committee members for the President position.
 - b. If there is more than one nomination is received for the position of President a ballot must be held.
 - c. Candidates are invited to verbally present their nomination to the Committee (max 5 minutes).
 - d. Committee members vote in a blind ballot, the President position is assumed, and the new President takes office immediately.
2. If the President position is vacant after a two-year term and there is a current and eligible President Elect:
 - a. The President Elect assumes the position of President with immediate effect.
 - b. A new President Elect position is filled using the process described in 1(a-d).
 - c. NB. It is assumed that the President Elect will fulfil the role of President upon completion of the current President's term. Candidates for President Elect should factor in this time commitment at the time of nomination.

Resignation of a Committee member prior to completion of their elected term

If a committee member resigns prior to the end of their term, the committee may appoint a member to fill this casual vacancy until the next Division committee election (February every other year).

Filling a casual vacancy is not mandatory and the committee may decide to leave the position vacant until the next election.

If the President retires from office, the President-Elect will assume the role of President for the remainder of the President's term. The President-Elect will then take office as President as originally planned and fulfil the usual two-year term.

Division Committee meetings

Division Committees formally meet virtually a minimum of two and up to five times per year. These meetings are scheduled in advance to encourage maximum attendance and participation. Meeting details including the agenda, and any supporting documents will be provided with the electronic invite from the Senior Advocacy Officer.

Your Senior Advocacy Officer (or other delegated AVA staff member) will support these formal meetings whenever possible. It is not necessary for AVA committees to have formal meeting minutes, only a list of actions and who will complete these are required. As such, staff will not be taking minutes of the meeting, rather they will support the committee in their discussions and deliberations about what actions are possible and by when and they will make a list of the Action Items.

Occasionally, non-scheduled formal meetings are required. These can be organised via a virtual polling mechanism which is arranged by your Senior Advocacy Officer to check the best time for all participants.

The AVA encourages camaraderie through peer support and recognises that informal and social gatherings are essential for mental and professional wellbeing. There is no limit to the number of these informal meetings for Division Committees, either in-person or virtually. However, AVA cannot resource these informal meetings financially or with AVA staff.

The Division Committee can request a pre-approved budget to accommodate one (1) face-to-face meeting up to one-day in duration per year. It is required to submit proposals for a face-to-face meeting by end of August the preceding year so that expenses can be incorporated into the AVA National budget.

AVA Board Directors do not have a standing invitation to Division Committee meetings. However, if the Division Committee wishes to discuss a particular issue, they can request the attendance of a Board Director, with the specific topic(s) to be addressed advised at the time of the request. The Director reserves the right to decline the meeting if they are unavailable at the scheduled time.

Annual meetings

There is no legal requirement for Divisions to hold formal Annual Meetings in the same way as a legal entity conducts an Annual General Meeting. As such, there is no requirement for a quorum or to vote on any decisions or motions. This should simplify the process to conduct the following business, where applicable:

- Announce the results of the Division election and Committee positions.
- Provide the Division President an opportunity to summarise the previous year's activities and upcoming annual plan.
- Receive any other reports from AVA, Division or Branch representatives.
- Invite members to raise any other matters for discussion.

Annual meetings should be held in March or April each year, following the Division elections in February. All Division members are electronically invited a minimum of 21 days in advance to the Annual meeting. Non-members may be invited to attend by the Division President.

The Annual Meeting may be face-to-face if conducted in conjunction with another Division non-CPD event (including the Division face-to-face meeting), or virtual if conducted as a standalone event.

Division Activities Plan

Every year the Division Committee and relevant Senior Advocacy Officer are responsible for identifying specific proactive advocacy issues which are deemed to require action locally and nationally. National issues should be progressed to the Advocacy Advisory Forum, and if by consensus they are prioritised and the scope of work agreed upon they will contribute to the AVA National Advocacy Business Plan. Local advocacy issues that require action can be managed at the Division Committee level with the Senior Advocacy Officer provided the scope of work is agreed on and resources are available. Educational offerings, in conjunction with Branches or SIGs, and networking events should be aligned with AVA Events Policies and Procedures.

It is anticipated that these discussions and planning occurs at the annual face-to-face Committee meeting. The AVA activities and finances operate on a calendar year (January-December). As such the scheduling of this meeting should allow sufficient time for the Activities Plan to be developed and submitted by June the preceding year. This will allow adequate time for inclusion in the proposed budget and events calendar.

Funding for Division activities is managed by the AVA. This includes provision for Committee members to travel for one annual face-to-face Division Committee meeting per annum and any travel related for pre-approved advocacy matters (either reactive or proactive).

Variations to the Activities Plan

Whilst the Division Activities Plan is proposed in good faith, adjustments are inevitable as other priorities arise. This may occur when the Division wishes to undertake additional activities in response to unforeseen advocacy issues.

When issues arise, these should be discussed with the relevant Senior Advocacy Officer.

Information for Branches

Branch governance

The majority of Branches operate by geographical region. However, a Branch may be proposed to bring together members of similar non-clinical interests.

To form a Branch, the following principles should be followed:

- A minimum of seven (7) members, who reside in the nominated region or group of non-clinical interest, need to sign the Branch Formation/Activation Request Letter, which has been endorsed by the relevant Division Committee.
- Members can only be a signatory on the Branch Formation/Activation Request Letter for one Branch per year.
- One Division Committee member may also be a signatory on the Branch Formation/Activation Request Letter
- If a Division Committee member is one of the signatories on the Branch Formation/Activation Request Letter, the Division endorsement will need to be signed by a different Division Committee Member.
- All new Branches require Board approval where the Board will consider:
 - That the proposed Branch does not overlap with an existing Branch either by region or interest
 - That the size of the proposed Branch is sufficient to organise and attend Branch events.
- Existing established Branches are identified through an annual activation process using the Branch Activation Form.

Each Branch appoints a member to take on the role of Branch Representative. The role of the Branch Representative is to:

- Liaise with the Division President on advocacy and member issues.
- Work with their Division Committee and the Branch Event Coordinator to plan and organise educational and networking events.
- There is no requirement for a Branch Committee to have a President or office bearers.

Branch Committee meetings

Branch Committees are encouraged to meet either face-to-face or virtually as frequently as is necessary to fulfil their role in provision of member support and CPD. The AVA encourages camaraderie through peer support and recognises that informal and social gatherings are essential for mental and professional wellbeing. There is no limit to the number of these informal meetings for Branch Committees, either in-person or virtually. However, AVA cannot resource these informal meetings financially or with AVA staff. For planning meetings, it is recommended that minutes are recorded using the template provided. These can be passed to the Division President and/or Branch Event Coordinator where specific actions arise.

Branch events

Branches can hold one, formal, educational event and one non-CPD networking event per year. These events range from evening meetings of 2-3 hours duration to full-day events. All educational and non-CPD networking events require approval from the AVA Head of Education and Events before they can be included in the AVA Education and Event Calendar. Events need to be proposed as set out in the [AVA Event Scheduling Policy and Procedure](#).

If a Branch would like to hold an event longer than one day, they need to collaborate with another Branch, Division (non-CPD networking only) or SIG (refer to page 5).

Event proposals will include:

- Branch(es or Group) requesting the event
- Name of the event (if known)
- Anticipated number of paid delegates and complimentary delegates
- Preferred month or date of the event
- Event duration – if longer than one day, both Group hosts need to be identified
- Event format – non CPD networking, CPD
- Location – physical location and venue (if know) or online
- Topic(s) – if a CPD event (if any)
- Speakers – number of paid speakers (if any)
- Primary purpose of the event (i.e. new graduate and/or local member support, local CPD, etc.)

Event proposals can be made using the [Event Request Form](#) on the AVA website. Please note you will need to be logged in to view the form.

Branch and Division event sponsorship

The AVA encourages sponsorship of all AVA events, and the AVA staff will continue to seek sponsorship for all events on behalf of Branches and Divisions. However, there is significant competition for sponsorship and existing AVA-sponsor contracts need to be acknowledged. Due to commercial in confidence, it is not possible to disclose the details of all these contracts to Division and Branch Committees. Sponsorship arrangements made by individual Committee members could risk breaching these contracts. Therefore, all potential sponsorship opportunities must be approved by the AVA Staff Branch Events Coordinator prior to any planning of the event commences. Again, this is to reduce risk to the individual member, Branch, Division, sponsor and Association. Once the details of the potential sponsorship are assessed, the relevant AVA staff member will advise if the opportunity can progress.