

2011 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA - INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES FOR BOARD ELECTION

Aim and objectives of the Refugee Council

Formed in November 1981, RCOA's purpose is to promote the adoption of humane, lawful and constructive policies towards refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons by the Australian and other Governments and their communities.

To achieve this purpose, the RCOA has a number of key aims:

- (a) To act as a unifying organisation and to represent its members.
- (b) To promote the empowerment of refugee communities and individuals in Australia and internationally and support the capacity building of Australia's refugee sector.
- (c) To monitor, research and present information on issues relating to the needs and circumstances of refugees and asylum seekers.
- (d) To assist governments and inter-governmental organisations to formulate policy and improve support and services for refugees and asylum seekers.
- (e) To increase public awareness and media sensitivity towards refugees and asylum seekers.

RCOA's work

RCOA does not provide direct services to individual refugees or asylum seekers but is the representative body for organisations which do. It has 149 organisational members and 560 individual members (as at July 2011).

A non-profit organisation with tax-deductible charity status, RCOA receives some core funding from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (around 25 to 30 per cent of annual income). Other funding is through public donations, fees from its organisational and individual members, by foundations and through project work. The project work is funded by government agencies, philanthropic trusts and other non-government organisations.

The priority activities for RCOA are set by its members, as represented by an elected Board. The organisation's policy and representation work is informed by a constant process of consultation - convening regional forums and national teleconferences, attending interagency gatherings and meeting regularly with organisations and individuals across Australia.

RCOA represents Australians concerned with refugee issues at key national and international forums, including: national and state advisory committees; government dialogues on migration and human rights issues; key international meetings of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); and regular meetings with politicians, government officials and representatives of UN and international agencies.

As part of its training and community education work, RCOA conducts professional training in working with refugees, assists organisations with training and research strategies, develops public information on refugee issues and engages with the media to present perspectives on policy debates.

Organisational structure

RCOA is governed by a Board elected by the organisation's members. The board consists of:

- four office bearers directly elected by the membership - President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer;
- six elected representatives of the members (five representatives of the organisational members and one representative of the individual members);
- up to six co-opted board members, selected by the board to maintain more balanced representation of relevant sectors of the organisation's membership;
- the Immediate Past President, who can also be appointed to the Board.

RCOA has a secretariat of four full-time and three part-time staff (equivalent of 5.5 full-time staff), headed by a Chief Executive Officer. The organisation has offices in Sydney and Melbourne.

The role of RCOA's Board

The Board of RCOA has two roles:

- to act as a national council on matters of refugee policy, determining the focus of the organisation's national and international refugee policy work;
- to decide on governance and finance matters related to the running of the RCOA secretariat.

The Board sees its national role in refugee policy as its key role – and, as a result, discussions on matters of refugee policy are the main focus of Board meetings. It has two subcommittees which assist in the formulation of refugee policy – the Settlement Subcommittee (which looks at issues of refugee settlement) and the Legal and Policy Subcommittee (which looks at national asylum issues and international refugee policy not related to settlement). These subcommittees meet, as necessary, between Board meetings. Given the complexity of the refugee policy matters being considered, a larger Board of up to 16 members is necessary to provide expert input on the breadth of issues under discussion.

While the full Board decides on critical governance and finance issues, more minor administrative matters are delegated to the Governance and Finance Subcommittee or the CEO. The CEO and the Governance and Finance Subcommittee report to each Board meeting on matters decided and seek approval for any decisions which reasonably require the full Board's agreement.

Meetings of the Board

The RCOA Board generally holds three face-to-face meetings each year. In 2011, the Board met in February (Melbourne), July (Sydney) and November (Sydney, in conjunction with the Annual General Meeting). Shorter additional Board meetings are held by teleconference – generally to approve the budget in June and to approve the audited accounts in October.

The Governance and Finance Subcommittee meets at least five times per year by teleconference, while the Settlement Subcommittee and the Legal and Policy Subcommittee generally meet twice a year (also by teleconference) separate from the face-to-face Board meetings.

Election of Board members at 2011 AGM

All Board members are elected for two-year terms and can seek reelection at the end of each term. Of the 10 Board positions directly elected by the membership, five fall vacant at each Annual General Meeting. At the 2011 Annual General Meeting, the following positions will be contested:

- President;
- Secretary;
- Three representatives of RCOA's organisational members.

Only members of RCOA – either nominated representatives of member organisations or individual members – are eligible to stand for election to the Board. Each candidate must be nominated by a current member (either an individual member or a representative of an organisational member) of RCOA.

For nomination forms, contact the RCOA secretariat on (02) 9211 9333 or see the Refugee Council website (<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/about/agm.php>).