

LEADING THE WAY

A guide for group convenors



AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Amnesty International Australia New Group Convenor Guide

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Cover: Rally for refugee and asylum seeker rights, Melbourne, April 2014. © AI

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Have feedback about this guide? Let us know at publications@amnesty.org.au

WELCOME

Leading an Amnesty action group is a pivotal role in our movement. People want to do something with their passion – they usually just need some leadership and guidance.

The outrage, hope and action of ordinary people is critical to our grassroots movement. As a convenor, you will be leading activists in your local community to harness this power, shaping it into a tool for human rights globally.

Whether you are taking over the convenor role from someone else, or starting up a new group – thank you for leading the way in defending human rights!

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This guide is for:

- action group convenors
- people interested in starting a group and becoming a convenor
- group members who are ready step-up and tackle more tasks in the group.

You should have some knowledge of Amnesty International and action groups before reading this guide. If not, read the [New member guide](#).

Need more help?

Regroup Kit

If you are convening a group and need extra help, or if you want to focus on one skill area, the [Regroup Kit](#) on the activist portal provides skills-based group exercises for many of the areas covered in this guide.

Talk to us

A community organiser, activist support coordinator or group organiser is there to assist your group. To get in touch, contact your action centre (details at the back of this guide).

WHAT DOES A CONVENOR DO?

If you want to lead activists in supporting Amnesty International's human rights campaigns, then the group convenor role is for you.

DUTIES

The role of convenor is a leadership role. The duties vary depending on your group but can include:

- Inspiring and coordinating group members in organising activities and events.
- Liaising with your community organiser or GO and sharing the activities of the group (planning, events, successes etc.)
- Organising and leading regular meetings.
- Organising roles within the group.
- Receiving and sharing information and updates with the rest of the group.
- Identifying people's skills and provide opportunities for others to lead.
- Ensuring the group is working together effectively.

Hours

Approximately 3–6 hours a week.

What skills will you need?

A convenor is someone who:

- Can do things quickly and efficiently and does what they commit to.
- Has the time to regularly communicate with group members, especially with the other lead activists.
- Has a friendly, polite and outgoing approach.
- Is able to communicate well with a range of people.
- Has excellent organisational skills.
- Has a strong commitment to human rights.

What's in it for you?

- Experience in leadership and organising.
- Being a key part of grassroots campaigning.
- Connecting with like-minded people.
- Making a difference for human rights!

"Libby (convenor of the Melville group) and I share a passion for creating new and inclusive ways to bring human rights to the general public."

Group organiser and previous campus group convenor Sarah Gooderham

HOW TO START A GROUP

Ok – I’m going to start a group. What do I do?

Below is a rough guide to setting up a new group. It may seem daunting, but you are not alone. Let us know what you are planning and we will support you.

If you are taking on an existing group’s convenor-ship, it is also a good idea to read through this section so you are prepped for your new role.

1. GET INFORMED

- Talk to your community organiser or GO.
- Regularly check the [activist portal](#) for information and updates.
- Visit the action centre and grab some of the latest resources.
- Ask your CO to be signed up to the Amnesty Leader, and sign up online to the [Urgent Action Network](#).
- Attend an Amnesty event eg another local group’s meeting, a film screening or a Get Active evening. It will give you ideas for your own group. For a list of current events and action groups visit the [Amnesty International Australia website](#).

2. FIND NEW MEMBERS

There are unique challenges to both starting up a brand new group and taking on the convenor role of an already-established group.

Either way, recruiting new group members is important for every group:

- More hands means your group’s human rights impact will increase.
- New members mean less workload on current group members.
- When people leave the group, there are other people there to keep your group going.

Your CO can help you map your local community to find new members. For ongoing groups remember to discuss with members what they have done in the past to attract new people.

2.1 Promote

Many people want to get more involved with Amnesty International, but just don’t know who to contact. Promoting your group lets people know that you exist!

Decide what to advertise – just your new group and contact details? What about promoting your next meeting too? Giving people a date, time, place and a contact person for your meeting will improve your success.

Or, if you are starting a new group and feeling really confident, do you want to organise a kick-off event with the few people you know already? Please talk to your community organiser who can help make your ideas a reality.



An Amnesty activist gathers petition signatures at a music festival, Woodford, 2010. © Kylie Jury/AI

Ways to promote

- Talk to friends, family and neighbours to see if they are interested in being involved.
- Create a Facebook page and invite your friends.
- Place posters or flyers in local cafes and businesses. Do a letterbox drop (you can find flyer and poster templates on the [activist portal](#)).
- Place an article in your local newspaper.
- Ask your community organiser about contacting Amnesty supporters in your local area and inviting them along.
- Get in touch with newsletter@amnesty.org.au to advertise on the regional website and in the regional e-newsletter.
- Organise a stall for a market day. Have a sign-up sheet at the stall and let people know the time and place for the next meeting.
- Research other ways to promote your event eg community notice board, library, community events calendar or website.
- Invite members from other local community groups eg churches, Rotary or Lions Clubs, Local Parents and Citizens Groups.

Tips for promoting your group

- Be specific. Have a flyer with dates, times and locations for meetings or events.
- Make it easy. A convenient time and place for your first event or meeting goes a long way to getting new members. Your community organiser or GO can help you choose a suitable venue for your first meeting.
- Be excited. If you are excited others will be too.
- Have an elevator pitch. Practise explaining what Amnesty is about and what your group does in less than 30 seconds.
- Don't feel embarrassed. Most people who approach you will want to get involved with Amnesty International.

See the [Regroup Kit](#) for more information and activities on finding and keeping new members.

Promotion success: Townsville group

In June 2013 the Townsville action group held a public lecture with guest-speaker Julian Burnside. The forum was a fantastic success – there were well over 200 attendees, and at the lecture the group added 28 email addresses to their contact list.

So how did they get so many people to the event?

The group used \$400 raised at an earlier fundraising movie night to publicise the Julian Burnside forum through Facebook ads.

Around 100 of those who came to the forum found out about it through Facebook. The group could measure this because these attendees 'bought' free tickets from Eventbrite, as instructed by the Facebook ads.

During the promotion the 'likes' on their Facebook page also increased from 120 to 258.

MEETINGS

HOSTING YOUR FIRST MEETING

So you are now finally ready to hold your first meeting. But first – make sure you are prepared.

Before the meeting

- If you like, invite your community organiser to the meeting. They can be a great help.
- Organise Amnesty International information for people to read and take home – contact your action centre for resources.
- Print an agenda for people to follow – they are less likely to interrupt if they can see you will answer their question next.
- Organise an action for the group to complete, like signing a petition or writing a letter.
- Think about a way to make sure people feel at home. Do you have food or drinks? An ice-breaker game?

On the night

- Prepare a display of Amnesty International literature.
- Organise someone to take the meeting minutes.
- Start the meeting with an ice-breaker activity.
- Have everyone introduce themselves. This applies during the entire year whenever a new person attends.
- Ensure that everyone is on a group member list and make sure all contact details are correct.
- Aim to accomplish something tangible at the meeting, as this is a big interest booster eg sign a petition or write a letter.

Develop expectations as a group

Making sure everyone is on the same page from the outset is the best way to minimise group conflict and make sure everyone enjoys themselves!

- What do people hope to do?
- Which Amnesty campaigns does the group want to focus on? Do you also want to work on Urgent Action appeals, human rights education, fundraising?

- Who (if anyone) fills positions such as chair, treasurer or secretary? Do you want to recruit for these positions now or in the second meeting?
- When is the best time for the group to meet? Set a time and date for the next meeting.
- What meeting rules do you want? Any speaking protocols – speaker lists, hands up, as directed by chair or not to worry?
- What is the expected member time commitment and levels of activism?
- How will you delegate tasks between members and ensure actions are completed?
- As well as defending human rights, the group should be social. When do you want to socialise? Before or after the meeting, at a bar or café? Or in your own creative way?

MAKING MEETINGS WORK

Once you have done the first meeting, the next meetings will be easier. Remember to follow up on anything not resolved from the first meeting.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind for all your meetings:

- Plan early and have a clear agenda.
- Don't plan too many agenda items for each meeting. People like to feel they accomplished something rather than fell short.
- Make the meeting time and place convenient. Hold the meeting in a comfortable, quiet setting.
- Make sure someone has been elected to take minutes. They remind members of what was decided and provide information for absentees.
- Do include something new and interesting as an incentive to come. As well as letter writing, schedule speakers or time to plan an event.
- Organise an action for every meeting eg sign a petition, write a letter.
- Use visual aids and distribute information.
- Make an effort to talk to new members and make them feel included.

- Ensure everyone gets the chance to speak and participate – try assigning roles in the meeting, such as one person to explain the letters to be written, and another person to talk about a new campaign.
- Hold open forums on controversial topics eg the death penalty.
- Clarify and summarise items as need be, and bring disagreements to consensus.
- Leave time for discussion.
- Keep to the allocated meeting time.
- Allow time to socialise.

Avoid:

- too much to do and too little time
- only letter writing
- conflicting schedules (eg other clubs or lectures)
- a stressful atmosphere
- one person doing all the work
- a lack of unity
- a lack of publicity
- a few people controlling the discussion.

Communicating between meetings

Keep people on board with targeted, timely and hassle-free communication. Here are some suggestions:

- Email out the next meeting's agenda a week before the meeting and follow up meeting minutes a week after the meeting.
- Rather than forwarding to your group every email you receive from your community organiser, can you save them up and email key points with the meeting agenda email?
- Can you maintain two separate lists for different emails – one for supporters who have signed up and might attend events but haven't come to a meeting yet, and another list of meeting attendees?

See the [Regroup Kit](#) for more information and activities on facilitating meetings.

EXAMPLE MEETING AGENDA

What's new

- What campaign updates have occurred since our last meeting?
- What has been in the news regarding a particular campaign?

Last task

- What tasks were delegated at the last meeting?
- Who has done something for the group that needs to be recognised eg petitions signed at work, spoke to council?

Next steps

- What are the next steps for our event, the campaign?

Allocate tasks

- Allocate tasks to group members.
- Walk and talk group members through the tasks eg "To get the permit you will need to speak to Liz at the council, can you do that?"

Innoculation

- Strategise alternatives if something doesn't go to plan. "What happens if the council won't grant us the permit? Would we change the date of the film night or find a different venue?"

Next meeting

- Decide on the next meeting and if there is to be any follow up before then.

RETAINING GROUP MEMBERS

So why do people come along to groups and how do you make sure they come back?

People usually come to groups for three reasons:

- To understand human rights issues, share their knowledge and develop campaigning strategies. (Heads)
- To connect with people who feel as passionately about issues as they do. (Hearts)
- To use their skills to create change. (Hands).

If these are fulfilled at your meeting, people will enjoy the experience and be more likely to come back.

HEADS

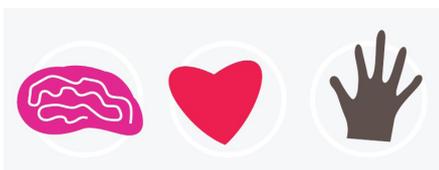
Key points

- Give group members the opportunity to learn more about campaigns.
- Give group members a chance to contribute their knowledge.
- Reinforce that all perspectives and contributions are valuable.

An action group meeting needs to be more than just information. Yes – it is an opportunity to watch documentaries, get campaign updates etc – but it also needs to be a place where they can use this information to strategise. As the group convenor, it is your job to facilitate this.

Collect petition signatures at the train station or host a film night? Which would impact our community more? Which would affect more change for the campaign?

Give everyone the opportunity to engage in group planning. It shows that each group member is valuable and that their contribution is important.



HEARTS

Key points

- Identify any particular human rights interests they feel strongly about.
- Make sure people are socially connected in the group.

The group is an opportunity for people to express their outrage at human rights violations and find others who share the same values. So make sure people have a chance to make friends.

Foster a positive group dynamic – whether through an ice-breaker game at the start of each meeting, or a glass of wine at the end.

Having a social element to your group's work will also increase human rights impact. For example, the Manly group held a simple letter-writing day at a pub last year. Just by getting their friends and families to come and have a drink, they got over 200 letters written.

Ask your group members if there are particular issues they feel strongly about. Tailoring your group's campaigning to members' particular passions will keep them engaged.

HANDS

Key points

- Make sure hands-on action is part of your group's work.
- Delegate tasks.
- Identify group members' skills.

Take action and make change! People like to do things, so try and have some kind of action at each meeting – whether it be a petition to sign or a letter to write. It is also important that your group plans towards bigger things – whether it be a rally, information stall or a meeting with your MP.

Delegating responsibilities makes people feel included and important too. Giving people specific tasks to complete between meetings goes a long way in making people feel valued.

Remember to tune in to what skills each individual has. Is someone a good writer? Or public speaker? Do they have creative flair? What task will best use their skills?

See the [Regroup Kit](#) for more information on retaining group members.

ROLES AND DELEGATING

Once you have recruited group members, remember to set the foundations of a group that shares the load. Impress upon your group that the group's health is up to all of you. However, avoid the temptation to do it all yourself – you will burn yourself out.

BASIC ADMINISTRATION

Every group needs to do a few things to function well. Make sure the following happens regularly in your group:

- An updated group member list is maintained, and everyone knows about meetings and activities.
- Elections for group roles are held each year.
- Planning sessions are held once or twice a year.
- The group keeps in contact with the CO/GO/ASC and any changes to the group's contact details are passed along.
- Materials are ordered from the action centre in a timely manner.
- The Branch Committee is informed about events you are planning.
- Group members are invited to become financial members – which means they can vote at Branch Annual General Meetings (BAGMs) and be involved in governance decisions.

Delegating

The experience of other groups shows that the more responsibility is divided up, the more the group will retain members.

You can delegate small tasks on a monthly basis:

- Sharing or rotating the chairing, agenda-setting and minute-taking of each meeting.
- Appointing 'buddies' to new members.

You can ask for volunteers to look after particular group roles on an ongoing basis, or hold an informal election to choose people. The key roles are:

Convenor(s)

Coordinates the group as a whole. They plan activities, provide leadership, run meetings, and receive and digest the group's mail. You may choose to share this role between two people (co-convenors).

Treasurer

Responsible for all the finances, purchasing, posting letters, and all the money the group raises. They will ensure that all money goes straight to the action centre.

Secretary

Takes and distributes minutes of meetings and handles any correspondence.

There may be additional roles that the group wishes to establish, such as:

- publicity officer
- events coordinator
- letter-writing coordinator
- fundraising officer
- social media officer
- membership coordinator.

You can find examples of [role responsibilities](#) on the activist portal.

PREPARING FOR ACTIVITIES

Congratulations on getting your group to this stage! Now the only thing left to do is roll up your sleeves and get out into the community. Here are a few steps to ensure your group activities run smoothly.

1. PLAN

Remember to plan your events to ensure they achieve as much human rights change as possible.

As a guide, your events should:

- Be an opportunity for community members to learn about human rights issues.
- Facilitate community members to take action for human rights.
- Find new group members and Amnesty supporters.

Not sure how to plan a strategic event? See the [activist portal](#) and the [Regroup Kit](#) for more information and ideas for group events.

2. SUBMIT AN EVENT PROPOSAL FORM

For most events, your group will need to submit an event proposal form at the '[host and events page](#)' on the activist portal.

Submit your event proposal at least six weeks before your event.

Once your branch committee and community organiser have received your event proposal they can support your group in a number of ways eg getting resources like posters, pamphlets and action cards, help with funding and promotion.

Make sure you check the [activist portal](#) too. It has lots of resources to help plan a good event, including event ideas and poster templates.

Event proposal forms are needed for:

- insurance purposes
- funding (if needed)
- communicating your plans to Amnesty International.

FUNDING

Funding from your Branch

If your group requires a large amount of money for an event or other purpose, you can apply for funding from the Branch Committee. For event funding, please fill in an [event form](#). For other funding requests, please speak to your activism support coordinator.

Raising funds through group activities

Any funds raised by your Amnesty International group should be used only for activities that fall clearly within the [Statute](#). The group should not, for example, use funds to send medical supplies to El Salvador.

Groups are to send any funds raised to your action centre as soon as possible. This is because Amnesty International Australia must account for any money raised in Amnesty International's name, whether raised through donations directly to the organisation or through a group's cake stall. For this reason groups are discouraged from opening their own bank accounts.

Your group may maintain a small float to cover general expenses, such as stationary, aerogrammes, postage, photocopying and other necessary items.

If your group decides that maintaining a small float is insufficient for its needs please contact your activism support coordinator to organise a group bank account.

Accepting funds from elsewhere

If your group is approached by an individual or organisation that wishes to make a large donation, contact your action centre for advice. In no case should the group accept money with conditions attached, such as 'only for work in South Africa', as this threatens Amnesty International's independence, autonomy and effectiveness. Remember, Amnesty International does not accept funds from governments or political parties.

WHO WILL SUPPORT ME?

If you ever need some guidance in defending human rights, there are heaps of people to give you a helping hand.

Community organiser (staff)

Community organisers work directly with activists and groups to develop their community engagement skills. They support, facilitate, motivate and educate convenors and group members. Regular training sessions are run to develop convenor and group skills. Contact your action centre or community organiser if you would like to hear more about development opportunities.

Activism support coordinator (staff)

Activism support coordinators run the regional offices and support activists, interns and volunteers as required. They can assist you with materials, finance and activist recruitment. There is an activism support coordinator in each region – contact your action centre to get in touch.

Branch Committees (volunteers)

The seven branch committees consist of elected members of Amnesty International Australia. They are responsible for governing their regional branch.

Elections occur once a year at the branch annual general meetings (BAGMs).

All Amnesty International Australia members are eligible to stand for election and to vote for the Branch Committee.

Branch Committee responsibilities include:

- Developing an annual plan and budget for their region.
- Approving events and campaign activities that groups and members wish to undertake.
- Representing their region within Amnesty International Australia and externally.
- Overseeing the use of regional resources.
- Communicating with the National Executive Committee about matters that affect their region or that are raised by local members.

Group organiser (volunteers)

Group organisers (GOs) are lead activists who work one-on-one with action groups. Each GO volunteer supports two or three action groups, assisting them to be effective human rights campaigners.

If your group would like to learn more about the GO Program or would like a GO, please contact your community organiser.

Activism team (staff)

The activism team is the link between campaigners and activists. They provide advice on tactical things your group can do to achieve our campaign targets. Contact the team at activism@amnesty.org.au

Media team (staff)

The Amnesty International media and public affairs team is based in Sydney. The team can assist you with any regional media work eg promoting an event or writing a media release. Email regional.media@amnesty.org.au

For regional media tips, see the [Regional Media Guide](#) on the activist portal.

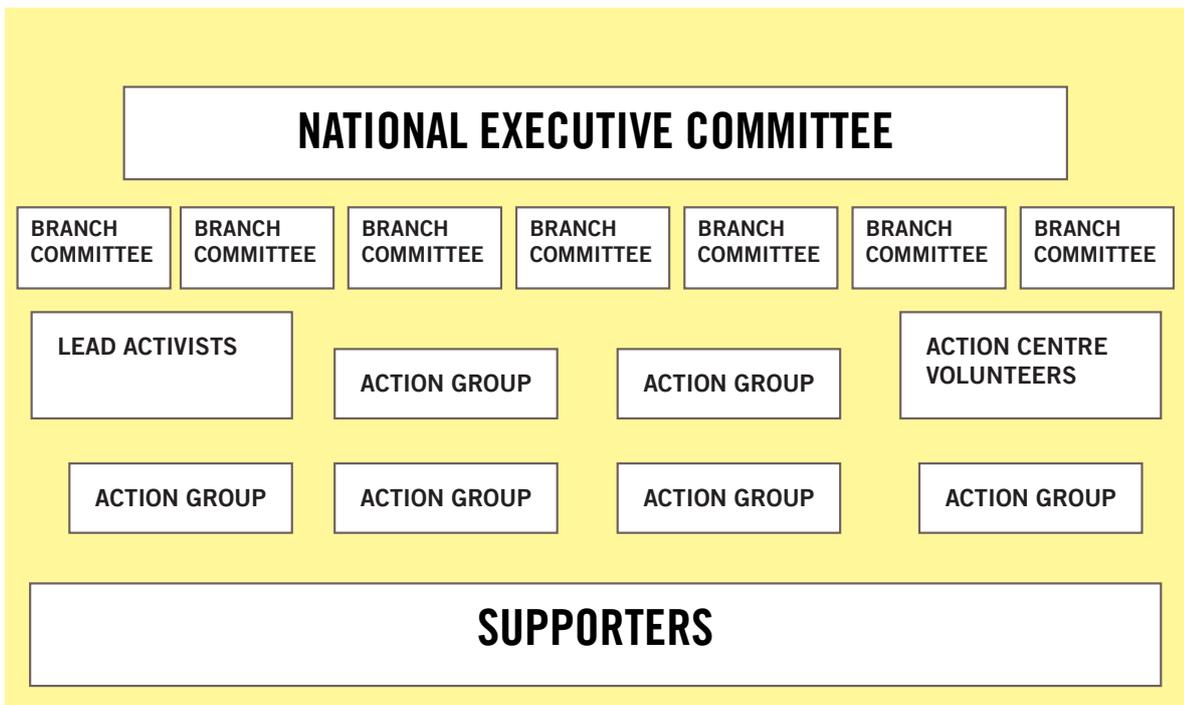
Government relations team (staff)

Amnesty International has a government relations team located in Sydney and Canberra. They can provide advice on regional advocacy matters eg meeting with your local member of parliament. Please contact your community organiser if you have any queries – they can put you in touch with our government relations team.

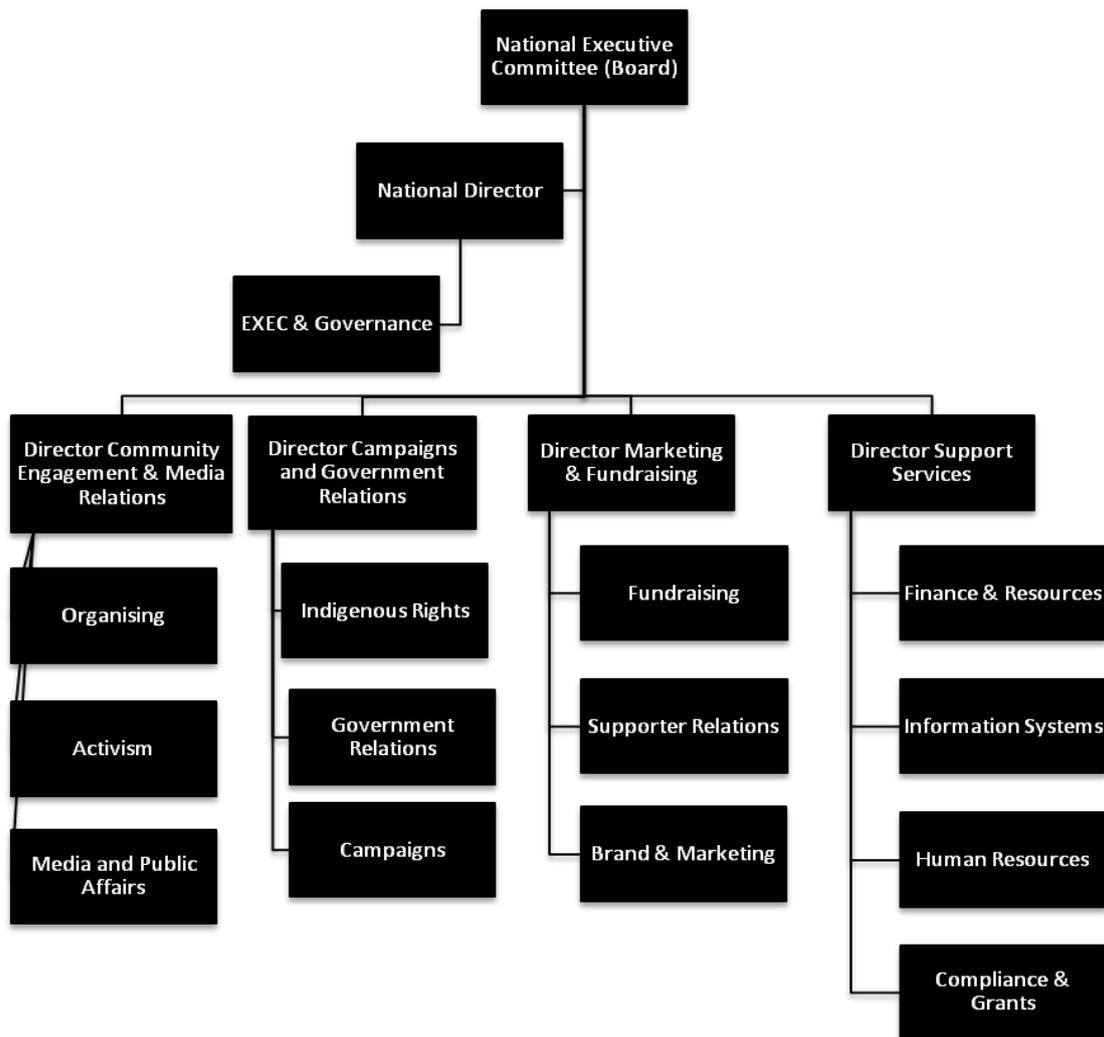
For regional advocacy tips, see the [Regional Advocacy Guide](#) on the activist portal.

If you would like to get in touch with any other staff teams, please contact your community organiser.

ACTIVIST ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



STAFF ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE



WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

<p>Your local action centre</p> <p>Our offices (or action centres) are at your disposal. You are welcome to use all of our facilities – meeting rooms, computers, copiers, campaign materials and more.</p> <p>Each state and territory has an action centre except the Northern Territory. Activists in the NT should contact the South Australian action centre.</p>	<p>Please contact your ASC to discuss what resources are available at your action centre or to book an office induction – contact details at the back of this guide.</p>
<p>Amnesty International Australia website and social media</p> <p>Our website and social media pages are the online face of Amnesty International Australia. They are packed with what we do, press releases, blogs, actions, news, fundraising options and success stories.</p> <p>Some groups have their own facebook or twitter as well.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.amnesty.org.au • www.facebook.com/AmnestyOz • www.amnesty.org.au/get-involved/events_groups
<p>Activist portal</p> <p>This website houses resources and information for activists and groups.</p> <p>Trying to find tips on how to engage with your local MP, or how to write a media release? Looking for something campaign specific, like an activist toolkit? Need a flyer template? It's all on the activist portal.</p>	<p>www.amnesty.org.au/activist/existing-activists</p>
<p>Activist portal events page</p> <p>Is your group holding an event? Submit your events at the 'host an events' page on the portal.</p> <p>NB Submitting your event to the 'host an events' page is an important step for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insurance purposes • funding (if needed) • communicating your plans to Amnesty International • advertising your event on the Amnesty website. 	<p>www.amnesty.org.au/activist/host-an-event</p>

<p>Leader Bulletin</p> <p>The <i>Amnesty Leader Bulletin</i> (the Leader) is a fortnightly email bulletin for Amnesty group convenors and highly-engaged activists.</p> <p>It has campaign updates, activist hook-up dates, governance updates and opportunities, action groups' successes, new resources and toolkits.</p> <p>For send dates and submission guidelines, check the activist portal's 'general resources' page.</p>	<p>Subscribe at amnesty.leader@amnesty.org.au</p>
<p>Activism calendar</p> <p>An online calendar that outlines key campaign dates. Use it to help plan your activism throughout the year.</p>	<p>www.amnesty.org.au/activist/activism-calendar</p>
<p>Face-to-face and videoconference training</p> <p>Campaigns generally focus on a specific issue and require specific training. From time to time, your community organiser or group organiser might come and meet with you to train you on a new campaign, so you can confidently talk about it in your community.</p> <p>We also hold training by videoconference when we have to roll out training to lots of groups.</p>	<p>Check out training dates at www.amnesty.org.au/activist/skill-up</p>
<p>Activist hook-ups</p> <p>The staff activism team and campaign coordinators run phone conferences with activists across Australia on a regular basis. These hook-ups are usually about a current campaign that activists are working on, and are a place to discuss ideas with other activists.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added to the activism calendar as they are scheduled. • Advertised through the <i>Leader Bulletin</i>.
<p>Activist campaign toolkits</p> <p>These outline what activists can do to support campaigns.</p> <p>Toolkits include key facts and information, background reading, activism and event ideas, and important dates such as global campaign days and when petition signatures are being presented to governments.</p> <p>Toolkits also share ideas and success stories from action groups. Send group success stories to activism@amnesty.org.au</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.amnesty.org.au/activist/campaign-news-and-resources • Advertised through the <i>Leader Bulletin</i> as they are released.

ACTION CENTRES

Your action centre is here to assist you in defending human rights, whether you need to use a computer, pick up some resources, book a meeting space or speak to a staff member.

ACT / Southern NSW

P: 02 6202 7500 F: 02 6202 7508

actaia@amnesty.org.au

Lower Ground Floor, 33-35 Ainslie Place
Canberra City ACT 2600

PO Box 1028, Civic Square, Canberra ACT 2608

Queensland / Northern NSW

P: 07 3136 6400 F: 07 3216 0235

qldaia@amnesty.org.au

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QLD 4006

PO Box 1061, Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

New South Wales

P: 02 8396 7670 F: 02 8396 7677

aiansw@amnesty.org.au

Level 1, 79 Myrtle Street Chippendale NSW 2008

Locked Bag 23, Broadway NSW 2007

South Australia / Northern Territory

P: 08 8110 8100 F: 08 8110 8101

sant@amnesty.org.au

Ground Floor, 14 Grote Street, Adelaide SA 5000

NT mail: GPO Box 228, Darwin NT 0801

Western Australia

P: 08 9476 4800 F: 08 9476 4801

waaia@amnesty.org.au

Suite 70, City West Centre, Plaistowe Mews,
West Perth 6005

Tasmania

P: 03 6221 1000 F: 03 6221 1010

tasaia@amnesty.org.au

First Floor, 130 Macquarie Street Hobart TAS 7000
(NB: Enter via the laneway)

GPO Box 968, Hobart, Tasmania 7001

Victoria

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