



**AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
ACT BRANCH**

# **AIIA ACT BRANCH STRATEGIC PLAN 2009-2010**

## **Summary of Recommendations**

- Branch to continue to hold two/three events per month as lunchtime or evening meetings.
- Council member to be appointed to monitor prospective visits by individuals and groups of interest.
- Council to adopt a particular theme each year to serve as a reference point for Branch activity.
- Branch President to discuss with DFAT and representative of the diplomatic corps hosting by-invitation briefing sessions on government policy matters for diplomatic representatives and other joint initiatives.
- President to consider options on event organisation and management.
- Branch President to explore with the National Executive Director how to maximise co-location and other synergies.
- Council member to be appointed to represent the Branch on the AIIA Programming Group coordinated by National Office.
- Council member to approach UN Association of Australia to discuss arrangements for an early joint event, eg, on the topic of international food security.
- Council member to serve as AIIA (ACT) Youth Network coordinator and recommend ways to enhance future activities.
- Council member to be appointed to approach University of Canberra and schools in the ACT to foster links.
- Council member to be appointed to approach other Council members and selected ordinary Branch members willing to participate in a Branch Mentor Program with a view to compiling a register of expertise within the Branch.
- Council Member (desirably Treasurer) to explore options for computerisation of Branch financial records, including membership renewal invoices and revenue-raising through sponsorship.
- Council member to be appointed to promote web-based communication and outreach activity within the Branch and ensure the Branch website is current and relevant.
- Council to endorse the Communications Strategy (Attachment A) and Action Plan (Attachment B).

## **Aim**

For the Australian Institute of International Affairs (ACT Branch) to be recognised for its role in promoting public awareness about international affairs, especially regarding Australia's role in the world; for building the knowledge of its members on international issues; for comparing the views on international affairs of other countries and peoples; and utilising the knowledge of existing members to build the skills and knowledge of its interested and younger members.

### **Objectives**

- Promote and protect the common interests of the members of the AIIA (ACT Branch)
- Provide forums for discussion on issues which concern or may affect Australia's national interest and inform key decision makers of these matters
- Engage with stakeholders to monitor policies and international affairs that impact on Australia's national and foreign policy interest
- Ensure the right mix of professional, experienced and technically skilled individuals are placed on the AIIA (ACT Branch) Executive Council and staff

To achieve these objectives, we believe the Branch should devote attention to four core activities, namely

- Events
- Membership
- Branch administration
- Publicity.

We consider each of these in turn below. We recommend adoption by Council of the attached key Communications Strategy (Attachment A) and Action Plan, Moving Forward – 2009/10(Attachment B)

### **Events**

We endorse the conclusions of the Events Working Group report in April 2008 that recommended around 20-25 events annually would be an appropriate target for the Branch. This target should be affordable taking into account fixed venue hire charges at Stephen House, administrative costs (I.e. salary of the Executive Assistant) of holding a particular event and the cost of providing catered lunches. We recommend two or three events should be held every month given that the 'working year' of the AIIA is February to early December. In light of the constitutional requirement to hold an Annual General Meeting and the networking advantages of holding an annual Christmas event, we consider free-of-charge AGM and Christmas functions for members should be retained.

The Events Working Group concluded that the majority of events should be in the form of lunchtime presentations with evening events lending themselves more easily to the summer months. However we are of the view that as some of the Branch's most successful events have been in the evening, we should remain flexible when programming lunchtime vis-a-vis evening events. It appears the driver of good attendance at Branch meetings has not been timing so much as the calibre of the speaker. The working group considered holding a formal dinner event to invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs or Minister for Trade as guest of honour. We assess there is not much appetite at present for a dinner function within the Branch and we do not advocate actively pursuing this option.

It is important that the Branch maintains its reputation for high calibre speakers. For most members, the basic rationale for joining AIIA is access to high-quality, informative presentations on international relations topics of general interest and which are of relevance to Australians' world view. The Branch is fortunate in having good access to a wide range of policy-makers, foreign and Australian diplomats and representatives of non-government agencies resident in Canberra. Also, the Branch has successfully attracted in the past and should continue to pursue a large number of senior

overseas official visitors to Canberra. Several avenues have been utilized for this purpose, including the DFAT list of visiting Heads of Australian Overseas Missions, links with foreign Embassies, High Commissions and Information Services in Canberra, and informal links with other associations promoting international affairs in Canberra such as the United Services Institute (USIACT), ASPI, and the UN Association of Australia. These avenues need to be strengthened so that high-level visitors do not 'fall through the cracks' without being offered the opportunity to make presentations at ACT Branch events. We recommend a Council member be appointed to monitor in a systematic way visitor lists and media releases on prospective visits by individuals and groups that might be of interest to the Branch and report to Council regularly through the President.

We believe Council has been able to bring forward speakers to meet each of the Branch's stated objectives: to promote international affairs, especially Australia's role in the world; to build the knowledge of members on international relations, and; to compare international views on foreign affairs. We consider Council should continue to provide a diverse menu of speakers to meet the broad interests of members. To promote diversity of presentations, we would not recommend a rigid allocation of speakers' slots to cover any particular theme. Our aim is not to compete with other forums in the ACT which already cater for groups with particular interests. We believe Council should aim to provide presentations on a variety of themes as we need to cater for a wide number of interests within the Branch. Such themes would include political or strategic events, especially regional, that impact on Australia's interests, Australia's bilateral and multilateral relationships, international economic issues including the global financial crisis, transnational issues such as people smuggling, narcotics and international crime, international development assistance especially regional aid programs, international law and human rights issues, and international security issues including climate change, energy, food, water.

We endorse a strategy of adopting a theme to guide the selection of speakers over the course of a year. The United Nations' use of a particular theme each year, for example the Year of XXXX, could frame Council's selection of speakers. Another possibility would be to set a theme in line with topical global events, for example climate change or the global financial crisis, and consciously solicit presentations in line with that theme. For the reasons set forth in the preceding paragraph, we would favour a flexible approach to the selection of speakers. We recommend Council decide to adopt a particular theme or agree not to adopt a theme for the year at an ordinary Council meeting held soon after the AGM. We would suggest an approach of encouraging quality speakers to make a series of presentations during the year to fully explore topics and take advantage of their expertise.

Links with Canberra-based institutions are positive and evolving. The Branch President has written to the DFAT Secretary offering to host special announcements that Ministers or senior Departmental officers might wish to make, launch Departmental publications and organise presentations by DFAT-sponsored overseas visitors. We endorse the President's recent discussions with DFAT to explore the scope for further collaboration on events. One initiative already successfully implemented with PM&C and also discussed with DFAT involves the Branch hosting public or invitation-only seminars or workshops involving Australian and foreign officials and other selected non-Government interlocutors where it is desirable that exchanges be 'informal' in nature. We endorse the initiative taken by the Branch President that the Branch offer to host by-invitation-specific briefing sessions on government policy-related matters for Canberra-based diplomatic representatives. We recommend the President continue his discussions with DFAT and the diplomatic community on this and other initiatives.

The Branch should continue to take advantage of its strong relationship with the National Office of AIIA to offer to launch National Policy Commentaries on particular subjects where they are considered topical and of interest to members. We recommend continuing close liaison between the Branch President and the National Executive Director to reap these benefits. The AIIA Programming Group consists of National and Branch representatives and meets every two months or

so through the year to exchange ideas on speakers. We recommend a Council member continue to provide input to the Programming Group on the Branch's speaker program.

We are of the view that more could be done to cultivate mutually beneficial partnerships with other associations in Australia contributing to the debate on international relations. A mutually productive relationship has already been established, for example, with the Institute of Public Affairs, the USIACT and ASPI, and could also be developed with the United Nations Association of Australia, ACT Branch. The UNAA has approached the Branch with a view to co-organising seminars on topics of mutual interest. We support building closer relations with the UNAA. The UNAA carries forward a busy program of speakers on United Nations and multilateral issues of concern and would be amenable to co-hosting events that met the interests of both our memberships. UNAA fully understands that jointly-badged events would need to have agreement beforehand on cost splitting and division of labour. We recommend a member of Council approach UNAA to discuss arrangements for an early joint event, for instance on the topic of international food security.

We endorse the view of the Events Working Group that there should be closer consultation between the ACT Branch and ACT students. The AIIA (ACT) Youth Network has organized several successful events at the ANU in consultation with outside players, for example the United States and Israeli Embassies. We would support a more strategic focus of the AIIA (ACT) Youth Network to tap into the innate enthusiasm of the student body and source potential future Branch members from campus. We recommend the continuing appointment of a Council member to serve as a coordinator between the Branch Youth Network and students, and suggest to Council ways to leverage future activities to mutual advantage. As a corollary of this, we should aim to expose high-quality speakers to both AIIA audiences at Stephen House and student audiences on campus through Branch AIIA Youth Network auspices.

In terms of venue for events, we endorse the recommendation of the Events Working Group that Stephen House should continue to remain the principal venue, in light of its housing the National Office, its long association in the public mind with AIIA, and its excellent conference facilities. We consider there would be value in finding suitable ways to publicise Stephen House as the AIIA ACT Branch's home in Canberra, possibly by highlighting it on the AIIA website, both nationally and on the ACT site. Any public material eg media releases about Branch events should identify Stephen House as the AIIA home and clarify its location at Deakin. At the same time, we consider other venues, for example at the Australian National University, should be utilised on certain occasions to attract particular audiences or where a speaker desires a particular location for the sake of convenience or some other reason. Our Branch Youth Network representatives contend that holding more events on campus would increase the level of student participation, and possibly lead to additional membership gains.

#### AIIA Mentor Program

The Branch has yet to develop a systematic means of achieving its fourth Constitutional objective; namely to utilize the knowledge of senior and professional members in the interests of younger members. We believe there would be value in establishing a mentor program to draw on the deep experience of several Council and other long-standing members as a Branch-wide resource. A mentor program could be promoted both within the existing Branch membership and to prospective members who are studying international relations topics at Honours or Masters level at a tertiary education institution. We recommend that a Council member be appointed to approach other Council members and selected ordinary Branch members willing to participate in the scheme with a view to compiling a register of expertise within the Branch. The register would detail professional resumes, publications and memberships of individual Council members and senior members and provide contact details. The register could be promoted to prospective members as a benefit of membership and to those seeking to register their expertise as an opportunity to mentor upcoming professionals in an understanding of international relations and Australia's view of the world. The Branch website could

include an index of members and areas of expertise with a facility for members to have a short bio-note included or links thereto.

### Membership

We endorse the conclusion of the Membership Working Group in April 2008 that the Branch should aim to be a sustainable, membership-driven organisation. In the past various devices have been employed to achieve this including, membership surveys (the last one in 2004 formed the basis for a revision to the Branch constitution) and feedback at annual general meetings.

Branch membership is again looking healthy after a dip in numbers in late 2007 occasioned by difficulties in following up renewals at the beginning of the 2007-2008 financial year. Membership records indicate that we currently have around 230 financial members. We note the Branch has been able to maintain this level of membership over the last few years despite the ‘competition’ from alternative international relations forums established in recent years, for example the Lowy Institute, ASPI and the Kokoda Foundation. We also note that numbers have held up well despite an increase in membership fees for the 2008-2009 financial year. It is pleasing the Branch’s recently secured a number of Parliamentarians as new members, including four members of the House of Representatives and five Senators. We recommend a Council member be tasked to follow up this initiative and seek to increase the number of new members from amongst Parliamentarians and Parliament House staff.

A ‘best endeavours’ membership target of 250 should be set. We consider that drivers for expanding the membership base should continue to be access to ‘soft’ membership benefits such as networking and ‘hard’ benefits such as transcripts of speaker presentations and subscriptions to ‘The Diplomat’ and the ‘Australian Journal of International Affairs’. The Membership Working Group noted that these publications were especially attractive incentives for students who were considering joining the Branch because of our Youth Network activities at the ANU.

We recommend establishing links with selected schools in the ACT region. Secondary students are a potential membership ‘feeder group’ for the Branch and could yield long term membership benefits. We note in this regard that in 1999 the Branch signed on to support the AIIA Young Diplomat Program coordinated by National Office.

#### *AIIA (ACT) Youth Network*

The Branch should seriously consider strengthening links with other tertiary education institutions in the ACT, notably the University of Canberra. The Chancellor of UC is an active Branch member and would be a good intermediary for any approach to that institution. We endorse the conclusion of the Membership Working Group that in developing links with the university sector, greater priority should be given to postgraduate scholars and research fellows. We recommend a Council member be appointed to approach UC with a view to establishing links and fostering AIIA (ACT) Youth Network involvement with staff and students.

We support the endeavours by the Branch’s Youth Network to obtain DFAT youth initiative funding to establish itself as a ‘must-join’ forum for students and young professionals researching or working in international relations. We also support the Youth Network seeking to become an ANU-affiliated organisation. Such a status would facilitate efforts to lift the Branch’s profile on campus and attract stronger student and staff participation in Branch activities.

### Branch Administration

The Treasurer has an important role to play to improve the Branch’s book-keeping. One option would be to increase the level of computerisation of Branch financial records, for example by using

one of the commercially available accounting packages, such as the popular MYOB program or by optimising the National Office's facility (Affiniscape). Implementation of online payment options for members should be relatively easy to achieve. The NSW Branch has already introduced this payment option.

Maintaining a healthy budget balance will continue to be important. The Council should give early consideration to exploring different ways and means of raising additional revenue over and above membership subscriptions. Options for raising revenue could include: corporate sponsorship, either for individual events or on an annual pro-rata basis; organising a major raffle; arranging with the National Office to hire out the Stephen House conference room and taking a proportion of the fee; pursuing submissions for grant funding from AusAID or DFAT; and organising a special event, for example a golf day.

We recommend a Council Member (desirably the Treasurer) explore these options in greater detail in consultation with the President. In terms of fund-raising we would draw the Treasurer's attention to the recommendations of a national-level fundraising taskforce that AIIA should aim to maintain numerous and balanced sources of income to avoid becoming over-dependent on one source of income.

A further idea worth considering would be to set up an administrative sub-committee that would meet between Council meetings and report to Council. Members could be the President, Vice President, Treasurer and the Executive Officer. While such an approach had proved effective in some not-for-profit organisations, it would be necessary to ascertain whether the profile, skills and experience of individual Council members suited the requirements of an administrative sub-committee for the ACT Branch.

Previous consideration has been given to borrowing the services of interns employed in National Office to assist the Branch. So far, however, it has been difficult to identify substantial policy development work within the branch that would justify placement of an intern in the ACT Branch.

One of the perennial difficulties faced by event organizers is making catering arrangements for those people who indicate they will attend events and order refreshments but who do not show up on the day. We recommend the President and, where appropriate other Council members, continue to urge members to 'do the right thing' and refrain from ordering refreshments for functions where there is some doubt they may actually be able to attend. Members should continue to be reminded of their personal obligation of not partaking of refreshments that have not been paid for in advance. Given that following up recalcitrant members is inevitably a time-consuming and sometimes fruitless exercise, we would not recommend sending invoices to those who order food but don't show up. A gentle reminder to all should suffice.

In terms of event organisation and oversight by members of Council, several possibilities present themselves. One option would be for the Events Co-ordinator to oversee arrangements for all events. This person would take responsibility for each event and delegate where he/she could not be in attendance. A second option would be for a roster system nominating individual Council members in turn to handle arrangements for any particular event. A roster system would spread the burden of responsibility for organising events amongst Council members. A third possibility would be to include responsibility for catering for functions and event management in the duty statement for the Branch Executive Officer. Until a suitable long-term appointment to this position can be made, however, this option will not be feasible. We recommend the President consider further options on event organisation and management.

### Publicity

We consider use of the Internet to conduct the Branch's communication and outreach activities is becoming increasingly important. Younger prospective members relate well to information delivered through the Internet and, we believe, would respond well to its increased use by the Branch. While we can continue to produce hard-copy membership brochures and other material, the Branch should begin to think in terms of communicating the bulk of information on events, newsletters, transcripts of speaker presentations and ad hoc announcements via the web. This would bring us into line with other Branches (eg Queensland) which communicate with their members primarily through the internet. In the future, it may be possible to host video content of presentations on our website, if approved by a speaker.

We encourage all Council members to become familiar with the Branch (and AIIA national) website so that individual Council members can contribute to its development and maintain the site. Once we get our membership data base loaded onto the web we should be able readily to send out group alerts. This would be an effective means of communicating information about events about which there is often little forewarning and facilitate putting out reminders at short notice with the aim of getting bigger audiences to our events. There may also be ways we can establish hyper-links to associated sites so that non-Branch members can be made aware of our activities and hopefully decide to join the Branch as members.

#### **AIIA (ACT Branch) Strategic Plan Drafting Team**

Heath McMichael  
Andrew Blyth  
Allan Barden  
Janet Tomi

Draft submitted to Branch Council on 5 December 2008  
Approved (with amendments) by AIIA (ACT Branch) Council , April 2009

ATTACHMENT A

**AIIA (ACT BRANCH): KEY COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES**

1. Position AIIA (ACT Branch) to be a leading and active membership organisation in Canberra
2. Increase awareness of the importance of foreign policy issues among key decision makers and the wider community
3. Improve dialogue and communications with key stakeholders
4. Raise AIIA (ACT Branch) professional awareness as an avenue of dialogue through effective speaker and networking opportunities
5. Develop strategic alliances and to partner government in knowledge building
6. Monitor government activity and respond to government reports (where applicable)
7. Identify appropriate sponsorship opportunities

## Action Plan: 'Moving Forward 2009-2010'

<b>Value drivers (what drives value for members)</b>	<b>Strategy (how we will achieve this value)</b>	<b>Key success indicators (how we will measure our results)</b>
<i>Shared aims</i>	Focus on areas of high policy priority for members	<p>Focused and priority driven program, with strategy regularly reviewed</p> <p>Engaged membership through effective speaker and networking program</p> <p>Holding 20-25 events annually</p> <p>Membership target 250</p>
<i>Knowledge</i>	Ability to access external specialists for forums and presentations	<p>Contributions to policy debates</p> <p>Respected and positive feedback received</p>
<i>Professionalism</i>	Reliance on evidence-based, moderate and credible presentations by speakers	<p>Produce innovative and practical membership program</p> <p>Influence government decision making process</p>
<i>Communication</i>	Targeted communications activities internally and externally	Consistent organisational profile in media focused on member priorities and current issues
<i>Relationships</i>	Tailored stakeholder management	<p>Advice and input sought by stakeholders</p> <p>Engaged membership operating through AIIA structure</p>
<i>Efficient coordination of resources</i>	Close and effective management of member resources	<p>Association managed to budget</p> <p>Application of members fees to highest priorities</p>