

AUSTRALIAN UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' UNION

National Structure Document

(OVERVIEW)

Written by Alex North as National Coordinator*

(*In consultation with Operations Coordinators, State Coordinators, and Committee of Management members).

*Passed at the Committee of Management meeting on the
18th of November, 2019*

Version 1.0.



| | |
|--|-----------|
| Abbreviations/Definitions | 2 |
| Introduction | 3 |
| 1. Outline AUWU National Structure | 5 |
| 1.1. What the Union Does | 5 |
| 1.2. The Six Core Functions of the AUWU | 6 |
| 1.3. Overview of Current AUWU Structure | 9 |
| 2. The Executive arm - (Committee of Management). | 11 |
| 3. The Operations Arm - (Operations Committee) | 13 |
| 3.1 What is a "Working Group"? | 14 |
| 4. National Branch Structure (local/state/national) | 16 |
| 4.1. Overview of National Branch Structure | 16 |
| 4.2. Local | 18 |
| 4.2.1. What is a local branch? | 18 |
| 4.2.2. Forming a local branch. | 19 |
| 4.2.3. Typical structure of a local branch | 20 |
| 4.3 State | 21 |
| 4.4 National | 21 |

Abbreviations/Definitions

| | |
|------|--------------------------------------|
| AGM | Annual General Meeting |
| AUWU | Australian Unemployed Workers' Union |
| CoM | Committee of Management |
| NDWG | National Division Working Group |
| OC | Operations Committee |

Introduction

Who we are

The AUWU is an Australian union representing unemployed, underemployed, and unwaged workers', as well as all recipients of Social Security in Australia. The AUWU is a national organisation, with divisions and branches operating in every State/Territory in Australia.

The office holders of the AUWU are unemployed, underemployed, or unwaged workers' themselves. We are run by unemployed workers' *for* the unemployed workers'¹. Our vision is for an Australia in which everyone has the right to dignified employment and social security

Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to explain the structure and functions of the Australian Unemployed Workers' Union (AUWU) as an organisation. Position descriptions and membership definitions are not included in this document (see the companion piece "AUWU National Structure Document - *Position Descriptions*").

Our constitution is a very limited document aimed at providing the minimal non-for-profit structure for the AUWU executive, and is designed not to go into the concrete organising structure of the AUWU as a developing and dynamic union. The AUWU is unique in synthesising aspects of a non-for-profit structure and a more traditional trade union structure to achieve its ends for members.

Although the AUWU is ultimately more than an organisation - namely the movement of unemployed, underemployed, unwaged workers' - the collective power that is achieved by being an organisation, cannot be underestimated. The fact that the AUWU exists at all, and especially at a national level with branches in every state/territory, is a remarkable feat that is unparalleled in Australian history. Even the great Unemployed Workers' Movement (UWM) in the 1930's or the proliferation of Unemployed People's Unions (in the 1970's) never reached such degrees of coordinated organisation and cooperation as the AUWU has achieved.

With this in mind, it is crucial to remember that this is simply an overview of the "office holding positions" and structures in the AUWU as an organisation. It does not reflect the

¹ Throughout this document we will use the term "unemployed worker" for a shorthand for underemployed, unwaged, *and* unemployed workers'.

countless volunteers - through local branches and members of working groups - that regularly have (and still do) contribute to the movement.

In order for you to learn more about your union's structure, this document is written for you.

If any members have any further questions about our structure, please contact membership@auwu.org.au.

Important Note:

As the AUWU is still growing and changing, the nature of this document is subject to change. Changes in our structure need to be passed by a majority of the Committee of Management, and in genuine consultation and assent by the Operations Committee and the National Division Working Group.

1. Outline AUWU National Structure

1.1. What the Union Does

To better understand the structure, it's important to understand some of the key activities the union does.

The unemployed workers' movement has a rich history in Australia, and has existed in various incarnations since the 1840's. The movement has historically responded in resistance to the fluctuations of the boom and bust cycle of the capitalist economy. During periods of economic downturn or crisis, workers' found themselves newly unemployed or underemployed and swelled the ranks of the pool of underemployed and unemployed workers'. Contrary to popular belief, this "Reserve Army of Labour" has not accepted their poverty, social and economic exclusion and precarity lightly. They have organised and fought back as to what they perceived as the injustice of unemployment and demanded the right to work. A short history of this movement can be found elsewhere, but what is important to remember is that the AUWU is the inheritor of this diverse history and respects our comrades previous struggles for social justice.

The Australian Unemployed Workers' Union began as a small advocacy group of unemployed workers' in 2014 that wanted to know what rights unemployed workers' had in the privatised job provider system (then known as "Job Services Australia"). In 2015, the AUWU launched its free hotline service to assist other unemployed workers' to know their rights and share what they'd learned. But in order to assert their rights, unemployed workers' had to organise. From then on, unemployed workers' groups emerged organically all throughout Australia - from Perth to Cairns - and resulted in the AUWU becoming a National organisation to represent the expanding unemployed workers' movement.

Advocacy still forms the core of the AUWU's services (through our rights guide, hotline, online advocacy services), but it is the grass-root branches that campaign for unemployed workers' issues to be heard. As a union, the AUWU consists of local branches, a state branch (or simply state coordinator depending on state/territory development), and a national team (the Operations Committee's Working Groups) (see section 4).

Since its humble origins, the AUWU's actions have expanded enormously. The AUWU is now recognised as the peak body/major stakeholder for unemployed workers' in Australia. As such the AUWU carries out research and reports on behalf of its

membership, as well as pressures government and Non-Government Organisations to demand that change occurs.

1.2. The Six Core Functions of the AUWU

Taking a reductionist approach, if we were to reduce the AUWU into “core” activities, six key areas can be categorised (in no particular order):

1. **The National Branch Structure**

The AUWU exists as a national union with branches in every state and territory in Australia. Each local branch sends a delegate to the state branch, which, in turn, sends a delegate (the State Coordinator) to represent that State's interests and concerns in the National Division Working Group to influence national direction.

The local branches are the blood and the muscle of the union, they are the movement on the ground organising in their local community. A remarkable feature of the AUWU is the autonomy and power local branches have to shape their activities and structure to fit their local conditions. (For more information, see section 4).

2. **Advocacy Services**

Advocacy is the heart of the AUWU. The AUWU is proud to be the only national organisation offering free advocacy advice to unemployed workers' in the jobactive, Centrelink, and Social Security system. Our trained volunteers operate the **National Advocacy Hotline**, run the **Online Advocacy services** (over our national facebook page, our twitter, and via email/intake forms), offer **in-person advocacy support**, and ensure that the latest advocacy information is available via our “**AUWU Rights Guide**”.

3. **Campaigns**

Campaigning is a central strategy of the union to influence political discourse and agitate for political, economic, and policy reform. (For a list of past and current AUWU campaigns, please visit www.auwu.org.au)

Campaigns vary from the National level and the Local Level, and often they come together. A great example of this is the “Raise the Rate Campaign”/“AUWU Dignity Not Dole”. Nationally, the AUWU committed itself to Raise the Rate campaign and ran alongside it the “Dignity Not Dole” campaign (a highlight of which was a panel in Melbourne with various political candidates, academics, and the journalist/academic Virginia Eubanks), and organised various activities through the branch structure. Locally,

South Australian and New South Wales AUWU branches organised independently and lobbied local councils to pass motions supporting a raise to newstart.

4. **Communications/Media**

The AUWU has a strong presence in the media as the recognised peak body for unemployed workers' in Australia. Engaging with the media (whether old media or new media), allows our members voices and list of demands to be heard on a national level.

In order to get our news out there, the AUWU has several social media platforms for members and the public to keep informed. As of November 2019, the AUWU has a [National Facebook Page](#) (as well as pages for local and state divisions), a [Twitter](#), instagram, a [YouTube channel](#), and of course a website.

5. **Research, Policy, and Reports**

Ever since its inception, the AUWU has published research and reports to engage with the public discourse and reveal the realities of the vicissitudes of unemployment.

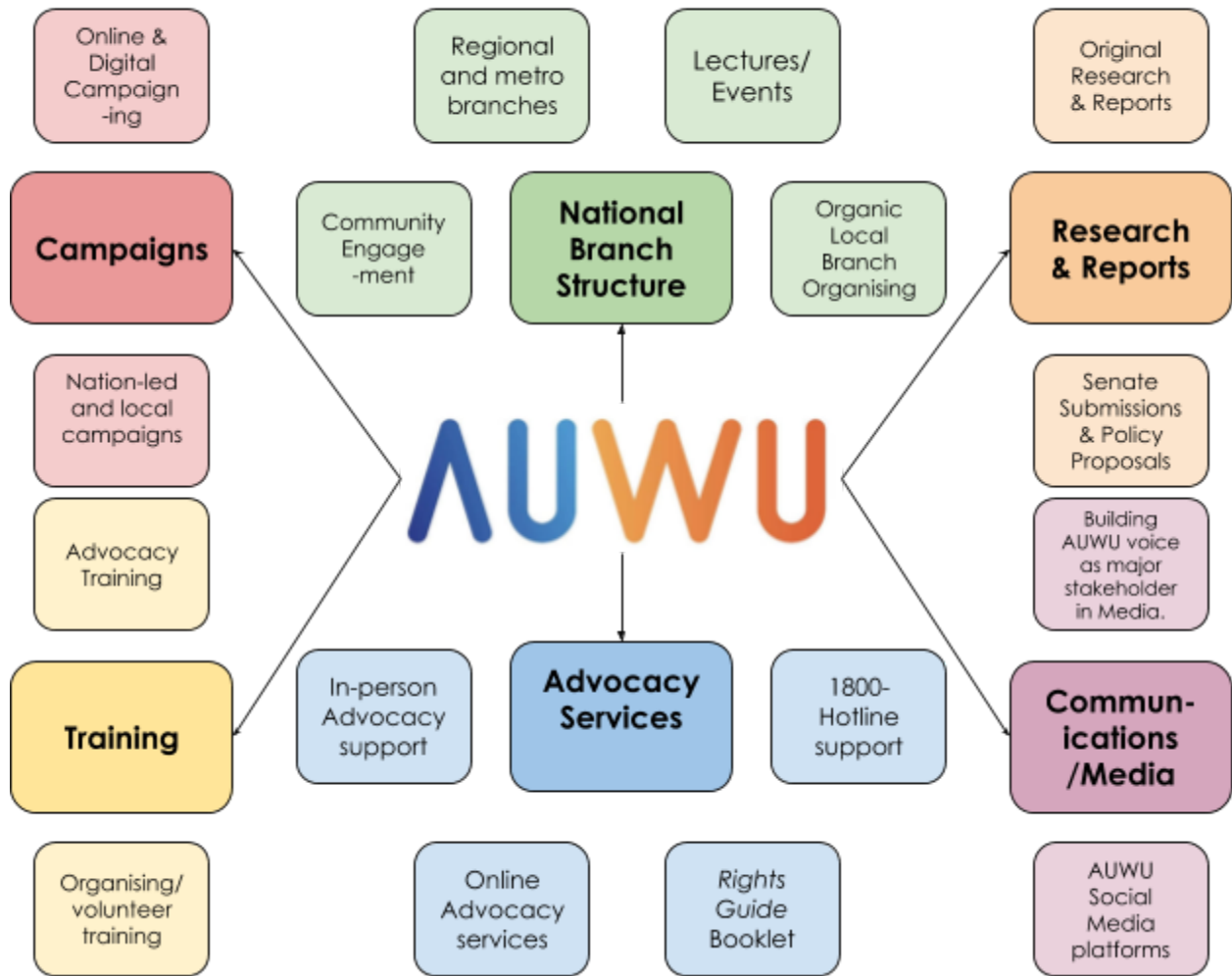
The AUWU has submitted and presented evidence to dozens of **senate inquiries**, published **original research** with PerCapita (in "Working It Out: Employment Services in Australia"), conducted **reports** into the Cashless Welfare Card Trial in Ceduna (the "Ceduna Report"), and continues to publish material revealing the unemployment crisis.

6. **Training**

Training is an essential aspect of the unions operations. **Advocacy Training** is one of the AUWU's chief activities, empowering our members to understand what their rights are and to learn how to assert those rights. The members of the Advocacy Working Group work tirelessly to roll out national training for members and try to hold an in-person training in every state each year.

Additionally, members of the National Team work with local branches to mentor them and provide resources and assistance.

Figure 1: AUWU Core Activities



For further information, please visit our website www.auwu.org.au, follow our Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/unemployedworkersunion>) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/AusUnemployment>), or contact volunteer@auwu.org.au

1.3. Overview of Current AUWU Structure

The AUWU can be broken down into three sections: **an executive arm** (see section 2), **a national operational arm** (see section 3), and **a national branch structure** (see section 4).

Each arm is responsible for an activity, function, or aspect of the AUWU. As the AUWU is a national organisation, it is necessary to have some degree of democratic centralisation to carry out the day-to-day operations and coordinate the AUWU as a national body. This is the responsibility of **Operations Committee** (see section 3), which delegates tasks to Working Groups that coordinate, plan, and deliver the activities defined by it by the Operations Committee.

As a union, the AUWU has a National Branch Structure to allow members to get involved and organise in their local communities. The branch structure is organised into National, State, and local divisions (see section 4). It is the responsibility of the **National Division Working Group (NDWG)** (see section 4.4) to assist and coordinate these branches. However, unlike other Working Groups, the National Division Working Group is directly elected by the local members through the National Branch Structure and cooperates closely with the Operations Committee.

In order to ensure good governance, the operational arm of the union is separated from the governance arm. The **Committee of Management (CoM)** (see section 2) is responsible for AUWU's legal responsibilities, its policy, its finance, its governance, and reviewing the operations of the union.

STRUCTURE OF THE AUSTRALIAN UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' UNION



Membership

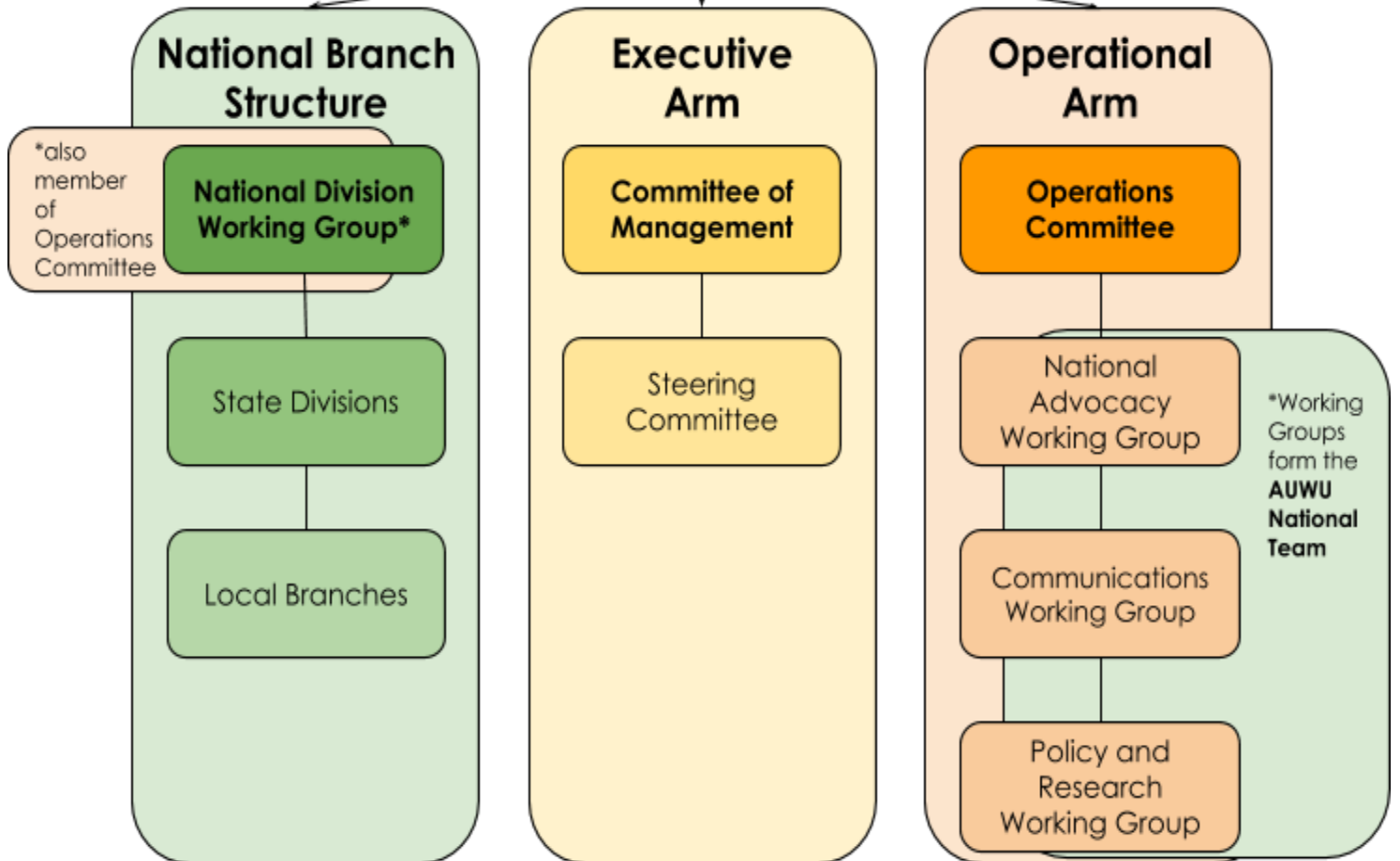


Figure 2: Structure of the AUWU

2. The Executive arm - (Committee of Management).

The body charged with the executive functions of the national union is the **Committee of Management (CoM)**. The CoM is democratically voted in by the AUWU membership every year at the Annual General Meeting (AGM), and a requirement of CoM is that its members are unemployed, underemployed, or unwaged workers' (to ensure that the AUWU is representative of its membership).

Box 1: What the CoM does.

What does the Committee of Management (CoM) do?

The CoM is charged with upholding the AUWU's legal obligations, ensuring good governance, approving financial budgets/procedures, developing strategic direction with Operations, updating union privacy policy, and approving/reviewing the progress of the Annual Plan.

Box 2: What the CoM doesn't do.

What the Committee of Management (CoM) doesn't do.

The CoM does not run the day-to-day operations of the union, they do not coordinate volunteers, and they do not carry out the actions/logistics of the Annual Plan.

The CoM usually consists of senior office holders of the AUWU that have transitioned into a leadership/mentor roles. A key aspect of their CoM role is to provide guidance to the operations coordinators in the Operations Committee (see section 1.2).

The positions of the CoM include the following:

- President
- Vice-President
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- National Coordinator
- Ordinary Committee Member
- Ordinary Committee Member

The **Steering Committee** is a sub-group of the Executive, that meets more frequently than the broader CoM to discuss pressing executive matters and reports to the CoM.

Additionally, the CoM builds relationships with other stakeholders, provides advice to operations on the strategic vision of the union, and represents the executive face of the union.

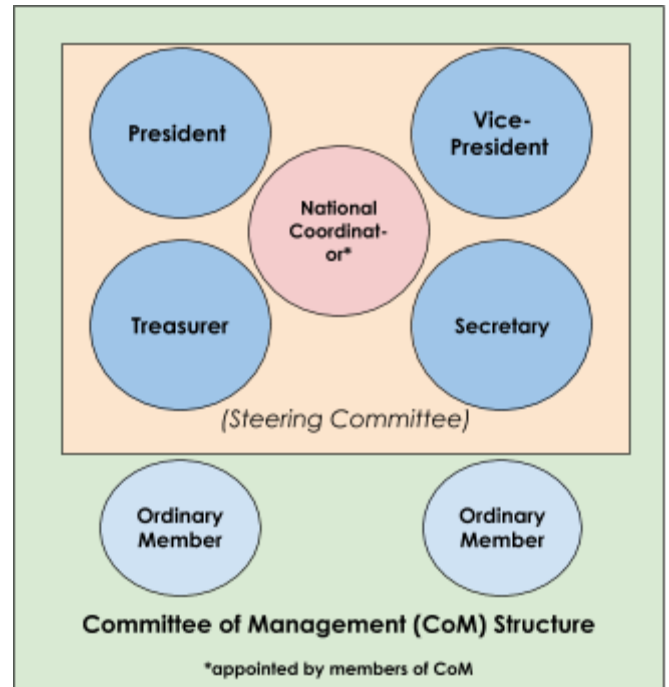


Figure 3: CoM Structure

3. The Operations Arm - (Operations Committee)

While the Executive is charged with reviewing the Annual Plan and operations of the AUWU (see section 1.1), it is the **Operations Committee** that is responsible for carrying out the day-to-day functions of the union and ensuring the smooth running of the operational structure.

The Operations Committee (OC) consists of teams of working groups and coordinators that are voted in by the CoM (except the National Division coordinator, voted in by state divisions), and carry out the key functions of the union. The **National Operations Coordinator (or “National Coordinator”)** is responsible for managing the members of this group and reporting its activities to the membership via the CoM. However, it is important to recognise that the Operations Committee is a democratic decision-making body, with each member holding an equal vote and empowering them to lead their respective areas.

Operations Coordinators usually start from the local branch level (whether as local branch coordinator, an advocacy officer, or as a comms volunteer) and are elevated as they accept more responsibility and develop in the union.

Box 3: What the Operations Committee does.

What does the Operations Committee (OC) do?

The OC is responsible for running the day-to-day operations of the Union, carrying out the aims of the Annual Plan, organising the services/activities of the union, and the coordination of volunteers.

Box 4: What the Operations Committee doesn't do.

What the Operations Committee (OC) doesn't do.

The OC does not review the AUWU's legal obligations, it is not responsible for AUWU financial decision-making/processes, it is not in charge of governance, and it does not review the progress of the Annual Plan.

As of November 2019, the Operations Committee consists of:

- The **National Operations Coordinator** (or “**National Coordinator**”).
 - *Responsible for AUWU operations.*
 - *Chair of Operations Committee.*
- The **National Advocacy Coordinator**
 - *Responsible for coordinating AUWU advocacy services.*
 - *Chair of Advocacy Working Group.*
- The **Online Advocacy Coordinator**
 - *Responsible for coordinating AUWU online advocacy services.*
 - *Member of Advocacy Working Group.*
- The **National Division Coordinator**
 - *Responsible for coordinating National Division Working and AUWU branch structure.*
 - *Chair of National Division Working Group.*
- The **Campaigns Coordinator**
 - *Responsible for coordinating AUWU campaigns and developing strategy.*
 - *Member of National Division Working Group.*
- The **Communications Coordinator**
 - *Responsible for coordinating AUWU communications and media.*
 - *Chair of Communications Working Group.*
- The **Social Media Coordinator**
 - *Responsible for coordinating AUWU social media platforms.*
 - *Member of Communications Working Group.*
- The **Research Officer**
 - *Responsible for coordinating AUWU research and publications.*
 - *Member of Research and Policy Working Group.*
- The **Senior Policy Adviser**
 - *Responsible for advising AUWU Operations Committee, Committee of Management, National Division Working Group on policy matters, research, and reports.*
 - *Member of Research and Policy Working Group.*

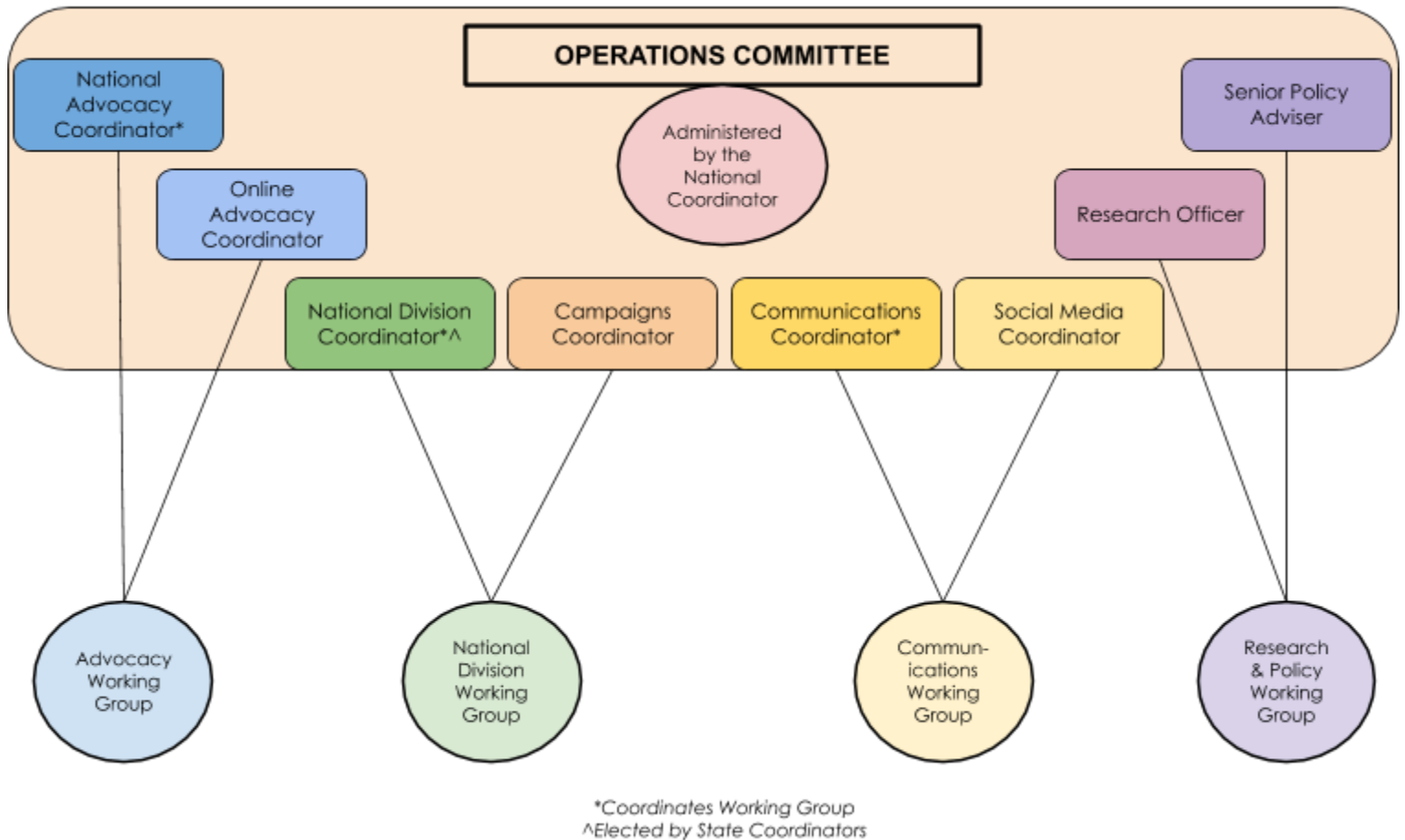
Each Operations Coordinator manages or is a member of one (or several) Working Groups.

3.1 What is a “Working Group”?

A “**Working Group**” is a team of AUWU office holders charged to carry out a set of specific activities delegated by Operations Committee. With the notable exception of the National Division Working Group (see section 4.4), Working Groups are created by the Operations Committee to carry out specific AUWU actions or activities (often

outlined by a terms of reference) on behalf of the union². Naturally, some working groups dissolve after their allotted task is completed. As such, those groups that emerge and dissolve are not included in this Structure Document. We have only included here the Working Groups that are permanent bodies in the union.

Figure 4: Operations Committee Structure



For a list of the current OC members, or any questions of how to get involved with operations, please contact the national coordinator, alex.north@auwu.org.au.

² However, the Committee of Management, the National Division Working Group, and other AUWU bodies may create their own Working Groups to carry out some specific action that is decided in a meeting.

4. National Branch Structure (local/state/national)

As essentially a grass-roots movement, the AUWU would be nothing without its National Branch Structure. The AUWU has local branches in every state/territory in Australia, from Perth to Cairns, and each branch is concerned with organising AUWU activities to suit their local conditions and contradictions.

Examples of different AUWU branch priorities

Regional and metropolitan branches tend to have different focuses. For example, the Ceduna Branch in regional South Australia is chiefly concerned with the Cashless Welfare Card "trials" devastating their community. Whilst a more metropolitan city like the Brisbane Branch is more focused on the issue of labour underutilisation and the high cost of living (and difficulties of surviving on the low rate of Newstart) in the Greater Brisbane area.

Box 5: Examples of different AUWU branch priorities

In order for members to connect, organise, and collectively struggle in their area, the AUWU is organised into local branches to carry out union activities in their community.

4.1. Overview of National Branch Structure

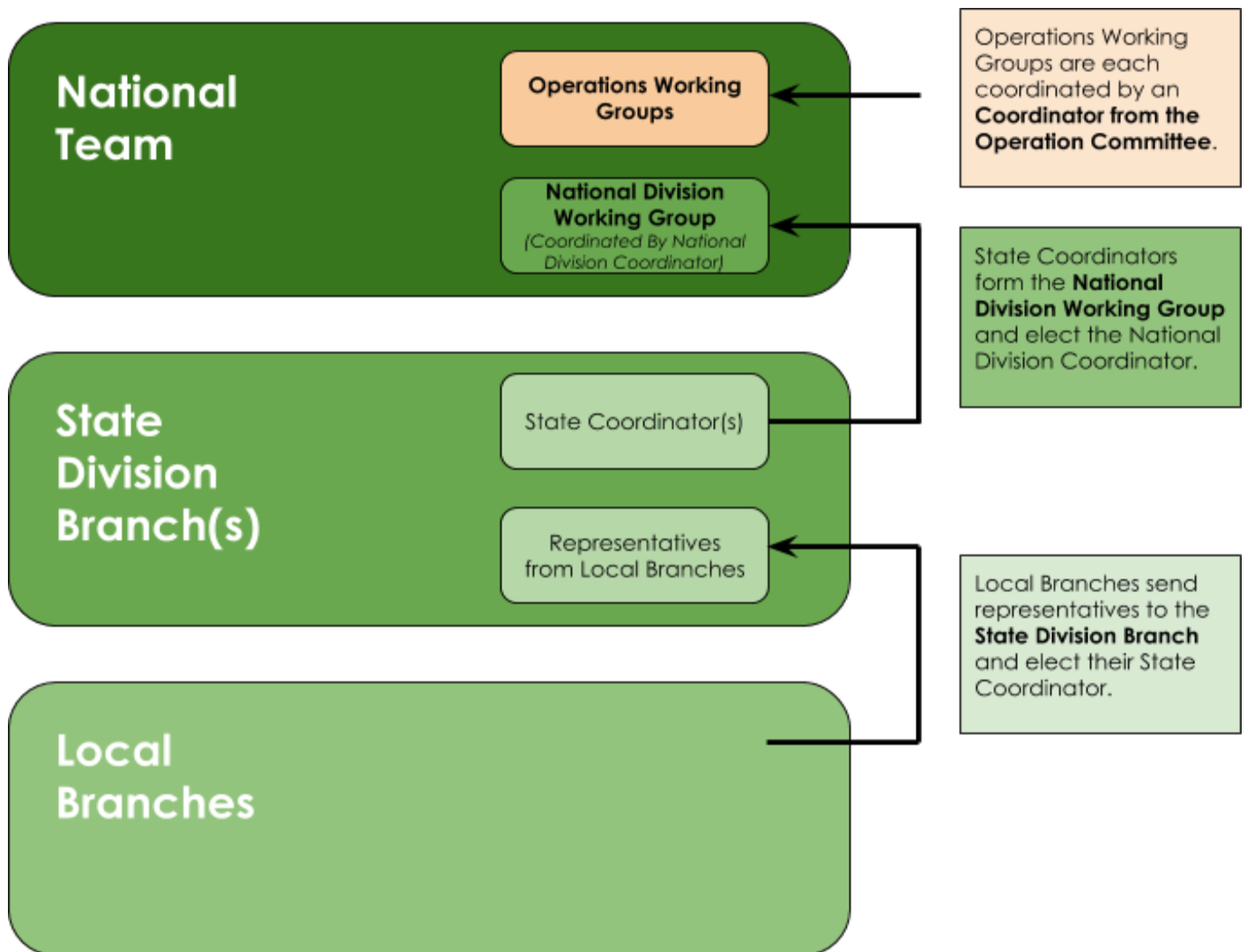
The National Branch structure of the union is divided into three key divisions: **National**, **State**, and **Local**.

Each Australian state/territory has local branches that send a representative to the state branch division (members of which are representatives from local branches), which

then elects the State Coordinator for that state³. The elected State Coordinator then attends National Division Working Group meetings; members of which include the other state/territory coordinators, the National Division Coordinator, and other representatives as required. The National Division Coordinator is elected by the State Coordinators to represent them and act as their representative in the Operations Committee.

The “**National Team**” describes the members of the Operations Committee Working Groups and the National Division Working Group tasked to carry out specific functions of the union nationally. They work closely with the members of the National Division Working Group meetings to carry out the union's operations.

OVERVIEW OF AUWU NATIONAL BRANCH STRUCTURE



³ In the case where there isn't sufficient local branch coordination to form a state branch, the state coordinator is appointed by the National Division Coordinator until an election can be held.

Figure 5: Overview of AUWU National Branch Structure

4.2. Local

Although the AUWU has evolved into a national organisation, local branches remain the first point of contact for our members and how their relationship with their union is developed.

4.2.1. What is a local branch?

A local branch is simply a collective of AUWU members living in (living in a reasonable travel distance vicinity)⁴, that come together to organise activities and discuss ideas in their community. AUWU's local branches are very organic and form/operate semi-autonomously to allow local members to tailor their branch structure/activities to their local conditions. The AUWU prides itself on its semi-autonomous and independent branches, as it allows members to take on the mantle of the AUWU and empower themselves.

What do Local Branches do?

Local Branches represent the AUWU in their local community and carry out local campaigns, actions, events, support meetings, and decide on how they would like to organise in their area.

Box 6: What do Local Branches do?

⁴ What defines a “reasonable travel distance vicinity” depends on the local members travel capabilities and local geography. For example, public transport in South Australia is far less extensive than Victoria, so it is much more difficult for Greater Adelaide members to attend the Adelaide CBD branch meetings than it would be for Greater Melbourne members to attend the Melbourne CBD branch meetings.

A few examples of innovative AUWU local branch organising in 2019:

- Inner-West Sydney branch's Art shows and community murals project grant.
- Adelaide branch's series of prominent experts and speakers lecturing on economics, history, and public sector job creation proposals .
- Brisbane branch's snap-action protests and media stunts against the roll-out of the cashless welfare card.
- Ceduna branch's coordinator assisting over 100 involuntary trial participants getting off the cashless welfare card trial.
- Frankston branch's "Jams for Jobs" music events.
- Perth branch's annual May Day march participation and engagement with local trade/labour unions.

Box 7: Local branch organising examples

4.2.2. Forming a local branch.

Local branches can form in two ways: organically or with help from existing AUWU office holders.

- (1) *Organic formation*: A branch can be formed by local AUWU members getting into contact with each other and deciding to form a branch. They may or may not get into contact with existing branches in their state or the state coordinator to get started, but what marks an organic formation is if the *members* take the initiative to start the branch.
- (2) *Office Holder formation*: An AUWU representative (commonly the state coordinator) will connect existing AUWU members from a local area and recruit to form a new branch.

Additionally, a central role of the State Coordinator is to mentor and assist local branches in forming, as well as provide training and resources.

To become an "**official AUWU branch**" requires the State Coordinator to verify the following:

- That the branch has a democratic operating structure;
- Upholds the AUWU's guiding principles and list of demands;
- That they have elected an official to attend the state branch meetings.
- Has at least 3 AUWU members in attendance.

For more information on forming local branches, please contact your local State Division Coordinator or the National Division Coordinator at national@auwu.org.au.

4.2.3. Typical structure of a local branch

Every local branch is a little different depending on its local circumstances (whether it be demographic, geographic, or socio-economic). However, there is a core AUWU local branch operating structure that each branch must adopt.

An AUWU branch must allow every AUWU member to have 1 vote and equal say for branch decisions, and must freely elect a local branch coordinator and secretary to coordinate the branches basic activities⁵. As long as they are a AUWU member - whether unemployed, underemployed, unwaged, or employed - they have a right to vote.

A common local branch structure consists of three elected positions (Coordinator, Secretary, Treasurer), and may contain two types other types of trained volunteers (Organisers and Advocates). In some cases, local branches with higher levels of political consciousness (like the ACT branch) might adopt a more progressive and dynamic branch structure to share leadership roles.

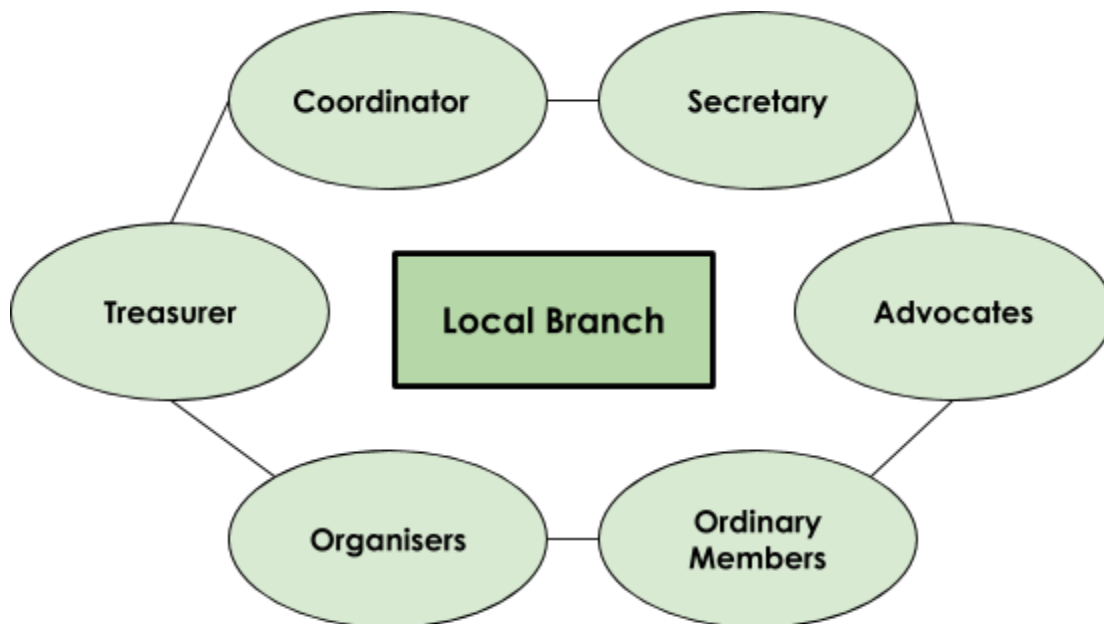


Figure 6: Common Local Branch structure

⁵ The duties of these are found in the "position descriptions" document.

4.3 State

In order to coordinate the activities of the AUWU in each state/territory, the AUWU has state branches⁶ organised by the State Coordinators. The purpose of State branches is to allow local branches to strategise, plan, and collaborate AUWU activities across their state and assist local membership and growth.

State Branches elect a "State Coordinator" to organise the State Branch meetings and represent them in the National Division Working Group.

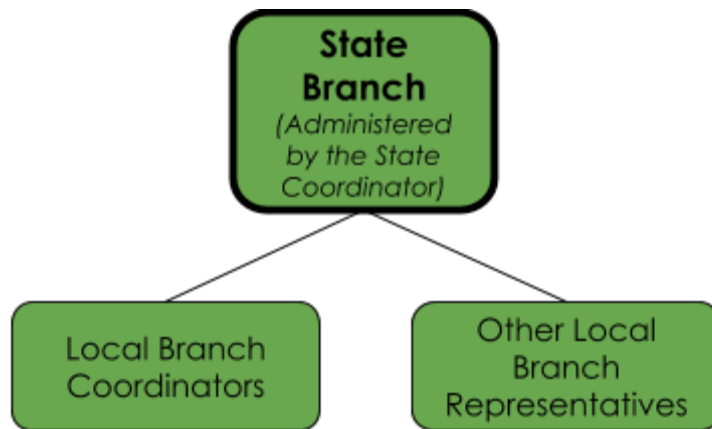


Figure 7: Overview of State Branch structure

4.4 National

The "AUWU national team" refers to the members and coordinators of the Operations Working Groups. The size and membership of each Working Group varies depending on its needs, and it is important to remember that many AUWU office holders and volunteers work within this National working groups (particularly graphic designers working within the Communications Working Group.)

⁶ Or simply a caretaker State Coordinator, appointed by the National Division Working Group, depending on the level of development.

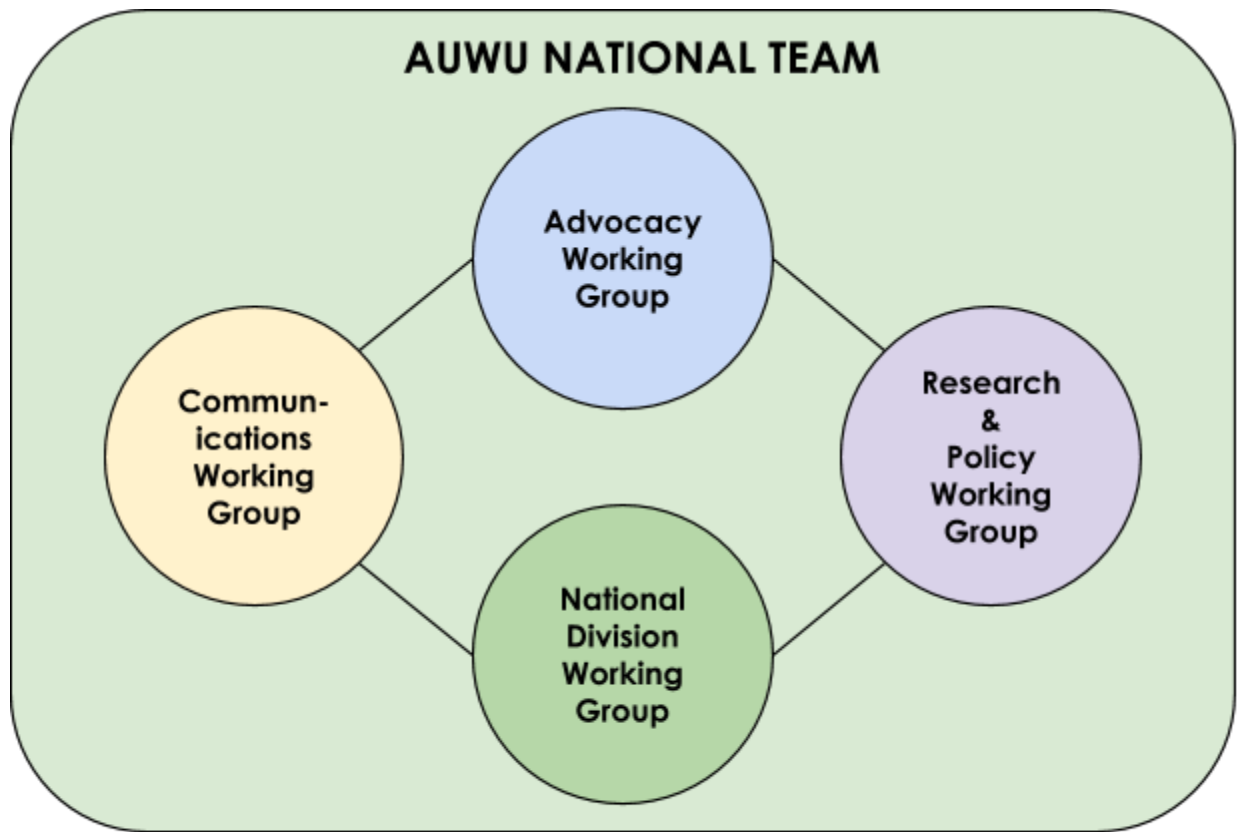


Figure 8: Overview of National Team