

Equality Rights Alliance Working Methods

1. Introduction

This paper outlines the working methods and decision-making roles of the:

- Annual Members Face-to-Face Meeting
- ERA Steering Group
- ERA secretariat (staff)
- Young Women's Advisory Group

A memorandum of understanding between ERA and YWCA Australia is attached in Appendix 1.

This document is to be read in conjunction with the *Equality Rights Alliance Principles & Membership Processes (ERA Document 1.0)* and the ERA Annual Activity Work Plan.

In keeping with the ERA Principles, where possible all ERA documents, website materials and functions, will be provided in accessible formats (including captioning on Youtube videos). Where teleconferences are proposed, alternative voice equivalent methods will be used to enable participation of member representatives.

2. ERA Deliverables for 2013-2016

From its application for a National Women's Alliance funding agreement with the Australian Government Office for Women, ERA proposed to:

- Host at least one **face-to-face meeting for ERA members** per year.
- Elect a **five member Executive (to be known as the ERA Steering Group)** to provide decision making in the period between annual meetings. In addition to the elected members, the steering group will also include the executive officer of YWCA Australia as a standing member or such other person as is nominated by the executive director of the YWCA Australia.
- Employ an **ERA staff team** to deliver on Alliance contract obligations.

2.1. ERA member meetings

The annual Members' Face-to-Face Meeting will be the forum for general policy and framework setting for the Alliance. It will:

- provide final approval of the ERA Annual Activity Work Plan where the approval time frames set by Office for Women permit;
- receive the annual update from the contract holder (YWCA Australia); and
- receive the annual report on the implementation and evaluation of the previous year's work plan (ERA secretariat).

Member representatives will also meet at a members' gathering in the second half of the financial year, in conjunction with a priority ERA project or consultation.

As described in *Equality Rights Alliance Guiding Principles and Membership Processes (ERA Document 1.0)*, attendance at these meetings will be on a cost share basis.

2.2. ERA Voting Processes

ERA will implement comprehensive mechanisms for member engagement and consultation throughout all ERA projects. While ERA will strive for consensus in decision-making, particularly for the ERA Annual Work Plan, there may be times when consensus cannot be reached.

On the rare occasion that consensus is not possible, decisions may move to a vote. Decisions may also be made by a vote where it is difficult to determine whether consensus exists (for example, when a decision needs to be made by e-mail due to timeframe or quorum issues).

- Voting will generally take place during a teleconference or face-to-face meeting. If a vote is anticipated to take place at a face-to-face meeting (for example, adoption of the ERA Annual Activity Work Plan), arrangements will be made for members not present at the meeting to participate via teleconference. Where it is not possible for a Member's Representative to use voice participation in a teleconference, where possible an alternative method of enabling participation may be used, e.g. via the Video Relay Service.
- Voting may also take place via e-mail or an electronic voting system, such as Survey Monkey, where quorum cannot be obtained at a teleconference or other meeting, or where a decision needs to be made quickly and it is not possible to arrange a teleconference or meeting in the time available (for example, in relation to a project funding application with a short application timeframe).
- A quorum of at least 25% of member organisations¹ is required for a vote to take place.
- One vote only per member organisation.

¹ As at May 2014 ERA has 60 members. Quorum would therefore be representatives from at least 15 organisations. Arrangement of quorum would be confirmed prior to meetings.

- Member organisations must nominate an individual as the holder of the member organisation's vote. The individual holding the member's vote may appoint a proxy from within the member organisation if s/he is unable to attend a meeting or vote in person. An ERA member organisation may not appoint another organisation as its proxy.
- If the vote is for adoption of the ERA Annual Activity Work Plan, in addition to achieving quorum, two thirds of the members present must agree to adoption of the Work Plan.
- For matters other than the ERA Annual Activity Work Plan, a simple majority of a quorum of members will be required.

2.3. ERA Steering Group

2.3.1 Responsibilities of the ERA Steering Group

The Steering Group is authorised to act and represent the Alliance within the parameters established by the ERA Guiding Principles. The ERA Steering Group will be responsible for:

- Working with ERA staff to develop the ERA work program by:
 - Assisting ERA staff to conduct a member-focused consultation on the strategic direction of ERA and a three year project plan in the final year of each contract cycle in preparation for the new contract;
 - Ensuring that ERA staff work with Member Working Groups to produce year-by-year draft project proposals for approval as a 12 month work plan at the annual ERA Members Meeting (see 3.4 below for ERA Working Groups).
- Overseeing the implementation of ERA's work program from the Annual Activity Work Plan.
- Appointing the ERA Young Women's Advisory Group.
- Steering Group members may be required to represent ERA at meetings or events, as requested by the ERA Manager or the Steering Group.
- The Steering Group will make decisions between meetings, acting within the parameters established by the ERA guiding principles and priority issues for the year.
- Where possible, ERA staff and Steering Group will consult with ERA members on decision making. Where decisions are required urgently, such as approving project applications with very short timeframes, ERA Staff and the ERA Contract Holder may call on the Steering Group to approve documents or provide guidance on a matter for the Alliance.
- The Steering Group will act with responsibility and integrity, in keeping with the principles of ERA. At times of policy development and representation of the Alliance the Steering Group will act with necessary prudence.

2.3.2 Composition of the Steering Group:

- YWCA Australia to be a standing, voting member.
- Six members will be elected from the ERA membership.
- Strive for 30% participation of young women (under 30).
- Strive for representation of the diversity, including geographical, of women in Australia.
- Additional members may be co-opted on a project-by-project basis if additional expertise is required.

2.3.3 ERA Steering Group working methods

- The Steering Group will meet quarterly (teleconference), one week ahead of deadline for ERA's quarterly reports to the Office for Women. Drafts of the quarterly reports will be sent to the Steering Group one week ahead of the meeting.
- Quorum for ERA Steering Group meetings is four members of the Steering Group attending.
- The ERA Steering Group will strive for consensus in decision-making. On the rare occasion that consensus is not possible, decisions may move to a vote.
- Decisions may also be made by a vote where it is difficult to determine whether consensus exists (for example, when a decision needs to be made by e-mail due to timeframe or quorum issues).
- The Steering Group will approve new member applications at each quarterly meeting. The Steering Group will reserve the right to accept or decline membership applications. See *ERA Guiding Principles and Membership Processes, ERA Document 1.0* for more information.
- The Steering Group will assist in the welcoming and induction for new members.
- Other meetings will be called on a case-by-case basis.
- For policy positions on issues beyond the a) ERA Guiding Principles and b) general statements within the ERA priority issues, the Steering Group will seek members' opt-in to statements by ERA.
- The ERA Manager will attend ERA Steering Group meetings and prepare meeting minutes. Meeting minutes will be distributed to ERA members.

2.3.4 Election of ERA Steering Group

The six elected members of the Steering Group are elected for a two-year term. No individual may serve more than two terms. Elections will be held every 12 months with three Steering Group positions filled at each election.

ERA Staff coordinate the nominations and election process. Subject to the timeframes set out below, the exact dates are to be set each year by the ERA Manager in consultation with the YWCA Australia, as contract holder and standing ERA Steering Group member.

Nominations Process

- Nominations open for the ERA Steering Group each year for a two-week period in May.
- Each ERA member organisation is eligible to nominate **one** person from their organisation as a candidate for the ERA Steering Group. It is not obligatory to nominate a candidate.
- Nominations are to be made by the primary representative of a member organisation in the form provided for this purpose by ERA Staff.
- The nomination is public (not anonymous) and the candidate must consent to being nominated.
- Following the close of nominations, there will be an online questions and answers forum with candidates for a period of one week. Nominations will be posted to the members-only part of the ERA website, along with a photo and short statement (provided as part of the nomination). ERA members can post questions on nominee pages, and nominees can answer. Questions and answers will be automatically attributed to users – no anonymous questions will be permitted.

Election Process

- Online voting opens for a one-week period in June, following the closure of the online questions and answers forum.
- Ballot papers will list the nominee's name and organisation, and will indicate which candidates are under 30 years old. Under each name there will be a link back to the candidate's biographical details.
- There is one ballot paper per ERA member organisation, which will be sent electronically to the ERA primary member representative. ERA member representatives can advise their proxy to ERA Staff before voting opens.
- Ballot papers are to be completed by selecting (ticking boxes) five candidates to make up the Steering Group. Ballot papers selecting more or less than five candidates will not be valid votes. The electronic system used for voting will prevent the ballot paper from being submitted in such cases.
- The five candidates with the highest number of votes will be elected to the Steering Group.
- In the situation that more than one candidate is ranked 5th, the contract holder (YWCA Australia) will cast a deciding vote.
- ERA Staff will check the vote results and notify all nominees within a week of the close of the voting period. ERA Staff will announce the new ERA Steering Group to the ERA membership after all nominees have been notified of the results.

- The electronic system used will mean that ERA Staff can see how many votes each nominee received, and how many ERA representatives voted, but they cannot see who voted for whom.

Mid-term vacancies

- If a Steering Group position becomes vacant mid-term, the vacant position will be offered to the seventh ranking candidate from the Steering Group election for that term. If the seventh ranking candidate has already filled a previous vacancy or does not accept the position, the vacant position will be offered to the next ranking candidate. This will be repeated until the position is filled or no candidates remain.
- If there are no candidates from the previous election available to fill the vacant position ERA Staff will run an election process to fill the position. The Steering Group has discretion to suggest a shorter election process than that run for the annual election process. Factors that might influence this decision may include the period remaining in the Steering Group's Term.
- If a vacancy arises in the last three months of the Steering Group's term, the remaining Steering Group members may decide to leave that position vacant for the remainder of the term.

2.4. Role of the ERA Staff

- ERA staff will be employed by YWCA Australia. YWCA Australia carries legal responsibility for the ERA employees.
- The ERA Steering Group will provide governance-type direction for ERA. The YWCA Australia Executive Director will provide operational direction and supervision for the ERA Manager. The ERA Manager will provide supervision of the ERA staff team.
- ERA staff will work with ERA members and the Steering Group to implement the ERA Annual Activity Work Plan.
- ERA staff will provide secretariat support to the Steering Group including through the ERA Manager participating in Steering Group meetings. The Manager will have a non-voting role.
- ERA staff will organise the annual Members' Face-to-Face Meeting and annual parliamentary visits in Canberra, and a member gathering.
- ERA staff will make the Annual Activity Work Plan and ERA's budgets available to members on request.

2.5 Role of ERA Young Women's Advisory Group

- The Young Women's Advisory Group consists of up to ten young women (16-30 years inclusive). We will strive to achieve a diversity of age, experience, geography and identity within the group.
- Members of the Advisory Group are recruited by an open application and nomination process. The final selection is approved by the ERA Steering Group. Advisory Group members are appointed on merit in their individual capacity and do not represent any organisation or group.

- Members of the Advisory Group are appointed for a three year term, operating on a financial year with a maximum of two terms. This is to provide the Advisory Group with 'overlap' across ERA's work plans which operate on a financial year basis. Terms are staggered so that half the positions in the Advisory Group are open for re-appointment each July.
- The Advisory Group provides feedback, advice and suggestions to ERA on issues of concern for young women in Australia, particularly but not exclusively in regards to the ERA annual work plan projects.
- The Advisory Group also supports ERA to engage proactively and sustainably with young women in Australia.
- ERA Staff will support and provide secretariat assistance to the Advisory Group.
- ERA will fund teleconferences (up to four per year) and travel costs associated with at least one annual face-to-face meeting of the Advisory Group.
- The Advisory Group will be represented at all ERA Members gatherings. Subject to available funding, this may involve all or part of the Group.
- In the event of a vacancy in the group during a term, the ERA secretariat may seek applicants to fill the role.

3. ERA Policy and project work processes

3.1. Submissions to government

- ERA will encourage and support members to make their own submissions to government inquiries and hearings:
 - ERA Secretariat will distribute alerts regarding upcoming inquiries, and on priority issues will prepare briefings with key points for members to consider in their submissions.
 - Members will be encouraged to also share information about upcoming inquiries.
 - Members will be encouraged to share their submissions through ERA and seek endorsements from other members to their submissions.
- On priority issues as per the ERA Annual Activity Work Plan ERA will prepare submissions for government inquiries and hearings:

- o Preparing such submissions will draw on the expertise and knowledge of member organisations. ERA may call for interested members to join an ad hoc drafting group. Joining the drafting group will be the opportunity for members to provide input.
- o Content will be considered and approved by the ad hoc drafting group in conjunction with the ERA Steering Group. Members can opt-out their endorsement of the submission.
- Preparing ERA submissions on issues beyond the ERA Work Plan's five priority areas will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
 - o Preparing such submissions will draw on the expertise and knowledge of member organisations. ERA will call for interested members to join an ad hoc drafting group. Joining the drafting group will be the opportunity for members to provide input.
 - o Content will be considered and approved by the ad hoc drafting group in conjunction with the ERA Steering Group. Members can opt-in their endorsement of the submission through the ad hoc drafting group.
- ERA statements will include the statement that 'members of ERA endorse all, or part, of this submission'. If required, endorsing members will be listed.

3.2. Representation of ERA at meetings and events

ERA Manager to manage representation of ERA, with the support of ERA Steering Group when required and members as appropriate.

Where ERA is invited to send a number of representatives to a forum, such as the Joint Alliance Forum, it will aim to send a representative from each of the following groups:

- YWCA Australia (as contract holder)
- ERA Steering Group
- ERA Young Women's Advisory Group
- ERA membership
- ERA Staff

3.3. Media representation

- ERA branding (logo and tagline) will be used on ERA media statements.
- For the priority areas in the ERA Work Plan, ERA Manager to develop appropriate general policy statements for use in ERA media statements, on the basis of the ERA Guiding Principles.
- For ERA media statements with substantive policy recommendations, ERA members will need to opt-in their endorsement. ERA statements will include the statement that 'members of ERA endorse all, or part of this statement'. If required, endorsing members will be listed.

- The policy of the YWCA Australia is that the media spokesperson is delegated to the YWCA Australia Executive Officer. As the ERA secretariat is employed by the YWCA Australia, ERA staff work with the delegation of the YWCA Australia Executive Officer on media spokesperson work. The ERA Manager will be the ERA public spokesperson. ERA will make governance-type decisions on media delegations and the YWCA Australia Executive officer will provide operational support and supervision.

3.4. ERA Working Groups & Watching Briefs

3.4.1. ERA Working Groups

On the basis of sufficient interest, an ERA Working Group will be formed for each priority issue in the ERA Annual Activity Work Plan:

- The Working Groups will be open to all ERA members. The Working Group may also collaborate with other Alliances and stakeholders.
- ERA staff will draw on the knowledge, contacts, and expertise of the Working Group members to contribute to its Work Plan projects.
- Participation in ERA Working Groups will enable member organisations to have greater input into ERA projects in areas where they have a keen interest.
- Working Group membership also entails responsibility to actively participate in project activities. Working Group membership is optional and will depend on a member's interest in specific issues and their ability to contribute to the project or activities.
- ERA understands that most member organisations are run by volunteers, and will strive to enable Working Group members to contribute within their time and resource constraints.
- As part of the budget allocation, ERA will allocate appropriate resources to assist Working Groups to meet via teleconference (frequency of teleconferences to be determined on a case-by-case basis).
- The Working Groups may develop proposals for new projects or for the continuation of current projects during the work plan development process.

3.4.2. Member led Activities: ERA Members' Watching Briefs

- ERA will encourage member organisations to develop 'watching briefs' on issues that lie outside the ERA Annual Activity Work Plan.
- Watching briefs will be an opportunity to apprise other ERA members of emerging issues, or new, strategic advocacy opportunities.
- This process would draw directly on the expertise and interest of ERA members. Our diverse and large membership means ERA will be able to source insight into a wide range of emerging issues.
- The development of the members-only component of the ERA website will provide a space and forum for further discussion on watching briefs.

- Identification of issues from watching briefs may give rise to applications for additional project-related funding from OFW.

3.5. Use of new technology

ERA will implement online resources to enable ERA members, particularly Working Group members, to participate in knowledge sharing. These may include file sharing, email lists and forums, group calendars, and other online tools.

Teleconferences will also be used to enable members around Australia to discuss projects and other issues.

In its engagement with the wider public, ERA will make use of online videos and audio, discussion, public email lists, and other tools as appropriate to the target audience and the message to be conveyed.

Any use of social media to represent the views of ERA will be considered within ERA's Media Representation, and therefore need to be discussed with the ERA Manager (and ERA Steering Group if required) in advance of use of social media. This includes establishing an ERA YouTube channel, Facebook or MySpace page, Twitter account, or ERA representation on online discussion forums.

Appendix One:

Memorandum of Understanding Equality Rights Alliance and YWCA Australia

1	Basis of agreement	The Equality Rights Alliance [ERA] and YWCA Australia have entered into an arrangement to deliver the Gender Equality for Women/Women's Leadership and Development Strategy/National Women's Alliances/ ERA Contract for the Australian Government Office for Women. The Agreement with the Australian Government Office for Women commences 1 May 2010 and completes on 29 November 2013 (funding for the ERA ends on 29 April 2013). The YWCA has been recognised as the lead agency for the purposes of the arrangement and has entered into the contract on behalf of the members of ERA.
2	Time period of auspice	1 May 2010 to 29 April 2013.
3	Contract activity	The contract deliverables are set out in the Schedule to the contract, primarily at Item B, Activity 1. ERA, through its members and staff, are responsible for the delivery of the activities set out in the contract.
4	Contract funding and payment	Funding and payment are set out in the Schedule to the contract, at Item C. Funds for the contract are to be received by YWCA Australia, on behalf of ERA. ERA will approve an annual budget to expend the funds. YWCA Australia will be responsible for the book-keeping and will provide monthly management reports to ERA staff and quarterly management reports to the ERA Steering Group. YWCA Australia will be responsible for procuring the annual independent audited financial acquittal report.
5	Contract reports	At Item E of the Schedule a regular reporting schedule is established. YWCA Australia is responsible for the submission of these reports. ERA is responsible for the preparation and approval of these reports.
6	Terms and conditions Standard Funding Agreement	It is the responsibility of YWCA Australia to ensure that the terms and conditions set out in the Standard Funding Agreement are met.
7	Employment of ERA Staff	ERA staff will be employed by YWCA Australia. YWCA Australia carries legal responsibility for the ERA employees. ERA staff will work with ERA members and Steering Group E to implement the Annual Activity Work Plan (Item E, Contract Schedule). YWCA Australia will provide day-to-day supervision for ERA staff.
8	Relationship of YWCA Executive Director with ERA Executive/Interim Executive	The YWCA Australia Executive Director will be an un-elected but voting member of the ERA Steering Group.

Signed on behalf of ERA

Signed on behalf of YWCA Australia

Date

Date