

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, CAMPAIGNS, AND ELECTIONS POLICY

General

BRCA has approved a Code of Conduct to identify, among other things, that BRCA believes in transparency, that it respects the right of free speech, that it promotes inclusion, that it respects fundamental freedoms and human rights, and that it understands the difference between speaking for ourselves and speaking for BRCA.

BRCA's Code of Conduct and its other policies (*e.g.* the Conflict of Interest Policy) are largely already capable of answering questions that might be asked about how politics and BRCA mix (or, rather, do not mix), but BRCA nevertheless considers it appropriate in this Policy to make a few separate and specific policy statements to avoid problems and confusion in future.

Political Participation

Any BRCA Member including a Director is, of course, free to run for political office or to voice any political view at any time at all whether through words or actions, but always there is a key distinction to be observed between stating a fact as one's position at BRCA, on the one hand, and implying any BRCA support for the related political expression or posturing, on the other. BRCA's operations are non-partisan. No individual should claim an association with BRCA as a means of directly or indirectly implying BRCA support for an individual opinion.

BRCA Communications

When communicating on behalf of BRCA, Directors and other delegates must uphold and respect the non-partisan position of the Society. For example, the BRCA Board and the Society itself should not use the Society's resources or platforms to "like" or retweet campaign statements online nor to support the activities of politicians and candidates in interviews or published statements.

Of course BRCA may, from time to time, be involved in civic discourse which is, by its nature, "political". All matters of public policy are inherently political, and in some of BRCA's activities—most obviously, those topics related to City Planning—BRCA inevitably becomes enmeshed in discourse which is political. However, in such cases, BRCA has already established procedures and protocols to ensure that whatever it may be communicating, it is doing so only within the context of a transparent process to ensure that BRCA is simply part of some broader engagement. Furthermore these activities—when they occur at all—are structured by specific terms of reference or other Board-approved frameworks. Therefore, again, no Member or Director of BRCA should confuse the important difference that exists between an opinion or belief that is personally held, and an opinion or belief that is held by BRCA.

Communications tend to be especially sensitive during an election period (once the “writ drops”). No exceptions will be made during this period for communications involving incumbents or previously elected representatives (e.g. MPs, MLAs, Mayors and City Councillors). In communication terms, any election period is strictly a “blackout period” during which the greatest possible effort should be made to ensure that all BRCA communications (website, social media, newsletter) are kept entirely free of political content that is, or that could reasonably be construed as being, in the nature of political campaigning, advocacy, or support (this includes paid advertisements as well).

Attendance at Meetings

Consistent with BRCA practices about Board meetings being public, members of the public and representatives of groups are welcome to attend Board meetings to listen to discussions, to learn about work the Board is doing, or to ask questions about BRCA generally. However, as a matter of policy there will be no special time allotted on agendas to the platforms of any candidate or to any party or any political special interest group. BRCA’s meetings are not a venue for political lobbying or campaigning. Meeting agendas will be set ahead of time and the Board’s work at meetings will be conducted on that basis, apolitically.

Volunteering

Consistent with the right of free expression, any BRCA Member or volunteer may directly or indirectly incidentally express political views at a BRCA function. BRCA does not police speech. So, for example, it is none of BRCA’s business whether a volunteer incidentally wears a campaign T-shirt at a BRCA function, or incidentally chooses to strike up a private conversation about politics while attending such a function. But BRCA must be careful to notice the distinction that exists between private actions and coordinated group actions the latter of which have—as a dominant or important part of their apparent motivation—the desire to communicate at a BRCA event. Many groups would probably like to benefit from association with the “BRCA brand”. Therefore efforts by political groups to engage with BRCA in circumstances where it is reasonably apparent that such engagement is perhaps motivated by a desire to communicate or campaign by way of association with BRCA should be discouraged.

For example, suppose that during an election year, and especially during the “blackout period” of an election campaign, a group of volunteers for a political party proposes to take part in a community clean up wearing campaign T-shirts. This should be discouraged. If cleaning up is the real motivation, then why not leave the T-shirts at home? But note that the outcome is “discourage” not “prohibit”. BRCA cannot police political speech, but if coordinated group speech is introduced to a BRCA function, BRCA may probably then find itself needing to communicate to confirm that it takes no position. Especially in a social-media world, BRCA will not invite upon itself this need to communicate (whether before or after the fact) for the purpose of distancing itself from the otherwise apparent or implicit meaning of photographs or video or publicity that could otherwise imply a connection between a BRCA gathering and political views expressed at the gathering.

Hosting Debates and Other Political Discussions

Any candidate or political party or group may elect to rent BRCA facilities at any time. When that happens, BRCA is simply acting as landlord. BRCA itself has no other role to play in such cases, and, if any policies apply to such circumstances, those should be located and expressed in a document related to hall management.

Sometimes, however, a question may arise whether BRCA itself might host a debate or other gathering at which a variety of viewpoints might be expressed. There is no policy for or against doing so, and the topic might arise for consideration either at the behest of some partisan or within BRCA itself. When this topic arises, however, BRCA's Board should by resolution structure its involvement, and consideration should be given to points such as the following:

1. Are appropriate arrangements possible to ensure that the event can be moderated neutrally?
2. How will equal access be managed? Typically one envisions political debates being attended by all serious candidates, especially serious candidates from established political parties. But most elections involve crank candidates and fringe parties, too. Does BRCA have the time and resources and expertise it will take to distinguish one from the other? Will it host a free for all?
3. Is there enough time to do the job right in scheduling terms? Often by the time an election is called, the schedules of parties and candidates become very complicated. If it is not possible to settle a plan quickly enough to identify dates upon which all appropriate participants who may want to participate are available, then perhaps it may not be appropriate to proceed at all.
4. Is there a particular reason why BRCA would become involved as host? Is there a political issue specific to the mandate of BRCA or the community at stake and that should be a focus? Or is BRCA simply trying to encourage political participation more generally? If the latter, then the motivation may be legitimate, but it should perhaps be weighed against other opportunities for citizens to become informed. If the former, then perhaps the event should be tailored to the narrow topic of interest.