

Guidelines and Policy for BCRA's Special Interest Groups

BCRA has supported the existence of 'special interest groups' of its members for over 25 years. From time to time it is helpful to take a fresh look at the guidelines we give to the SIGs and this document represents BCRA Council's latest views, for 2017.

What are the SIGs?

BCRA's Special Interest Groups are a means of enabling our members to associate and communicate in a more detailed way than would be possible amongst the general membership. They are sources of expertise and information, and valued as a resource both for BCRA members and the general public.

Typical SIG activities might include issuing newsletters and publications, the organisation of training sessions and field meetings, and the organisation of workshops and symposiums, including sessions at the annual BCRA Cave Science symposium and Hidden Earth.

Clearly, some SIG activities involve wider networks of individuals than are to be found within the membership of BCRA. Thus, a key role of SIGs is to engage with a broad constituency of academic, professional and recreational cave users who have a shared interest in the advancement of cave science and technology, even if these people are not members of BCRA.

Relationship with BCRA

BCRA's trustees (i.e. the members of BCRA Council) are responsible for all activities carried out in the name of BCRA. It is therefore essential that each group's activities fall within the remit of BCRA's constitutional objects and any new SIG must demonstrate this by submitting their objectives to Council. It is also essential that Council is kept regularly informed of each group's activities.

Although a key factor in the success of any group will be its ability to engage with people outside BCRA, the fact that it is a part of the charity BCRA means that, for legal reasons, all actual 'members' of a SIG must be individual members of BCRA. However, BCRA Council recognises that colloquially a Group's supporters – including non-members of BCRA – may be referred to as 'members'. However non-members of BCRA should not be offered membership benefits.

Since the first SIGs were set up in 1987, there have been a number of formal and less formally-constituted groups, some of which have their own committees and constitutions. BCRA Council's current view is that groups do not require a formal constitution, but should be free to organise their affairs in the most appropriate manner – more or less formal depending on the size of the group.

Essentially, Council gives each SIG permission to use BCRA's name in its title, and it offers some administrative support. In exchange Council expects each Group to act publicly, to promote BCRA and its activities, and to seek to bring a breadth of expertise to the organisation. In general, the activities of a Group are expected to be similar in scope and organisation to activities organised centrally by BCRA Council and shall be covered by the same insurance and rules that Council may make from time to time.

Funding and Support for Activities

SIGs are, in general, expected to be cost-neutral in operation. For example, if a SIG hires a room for a meeting, BCRA may pay the fee in advance, but would expect to be reimbursed from entry fees or donations collected at the meeting. BCRA Council expects SIGs to give discounts to BCRA members at its events.

BCRA aims to offer, where possible, administrative assistance to groups including the handling of their finances and publications sales, the provision of free web and Internet services and the coverage of their activities in our publications (this may extend to free 'advertising' where space is available.)

Summary of Rules

Definition of a Special Interest Group

- 1 SIGs are defined as groups of Individual Members of BCRA. For legal reasons no person may be described as a 'member' of a SIG unless they are a member of BCRA.
- 2 SIGs may encourage non-member 'supporters' or 'subscribers' and Council encourages groups to look for supporters outside BCRA. However, a Group must not offer 'membership benefits' to non-members of BCRA.
- 3 SIGs must comprise at least two individual members of BCRA.
- 4 Prospective Groups must submit a brief constitution or statement of aims for approval by BCRA Council. A Group's aims must be in accordance with BCRA's constitution.

Use of BCRA's name

- 5 The name BCRA can only be used by a SIG by permission of Council and this permission may be rescinded at any time.
- 6 Any contract for goods or services entered into by a SIG must mention BCRA, and Council must be provided with all relevant information to allow it to service the contract.

Administration

- 7 SIGs may seek basic administrative assistance from BCRA, but the day-to-day running and funding is each Group's own responsibility.
- 8 Council shall retain an overall control of the SIGs, and a right of access to all information held by a group. Any decision Council may make regarding a group shall be final, subject to the right of appeal to the next General Meeting of the Association.
- 9 Groups shall be entitled to send a representative to Council meetings, but that representative will not have voting rights unless co-opted or otherwise appointed in accordance with BCRA's constitution.

Bank Accounts

- 10 The finances of each SIG will normally be administered by the BCRA's treasurer and the funds kept in BCRA's bank account.
- 11 A SIG may, by permission of Council, operate its own bank account but all such accounts must have the word BCRA in the account name and must require two signatures to authorise account transactions, one of whom must be a BCRA Council member.

Reporting to Council

- 12 Groups must report regularly to Council. In addition, a simple sheet of accounts, and an inventory of equipment & stock of publications etc. shall be presented to Council annually. Each Group shall comply with instructions from BCRA's treasurer regarding the keeping of accounts.

Publishing

- 13 Each Group shall ensure that one copy of all the material it publishes is deposited in the British Caving Library.
- 14 BCRA shall be regarded as the publisher and shall hold copyright in the typographical layout of all Group publications.

Dissolution of a Group

- 15 BCRA Council reserves the right to dissolve a Group at any time should its activities be deemed not to be in the interests of BCRA. In the event of the dissolution of a Group, its realised assets after discharge of all liabilities shall belong to BCRA.

Document History

This document approved by BCRA Council at Meeting 166 on Sunday 26 June 2016. Text re-confirmed and lodged with Council minutes on 26-Mar-2018.