

OMAA Handbook: 2022-24 version

The OMAA Handbook consists of 3 parts. It is linked for review alongside the 3 year strategic goals. This version is due for review to be presented at the 2024 AGM. Regular review is to ensure this document represents the current context of OMAA and it is also reviewed in conjunction with the foundation document (version 6) logged on OMAA document register as “Foundation document TOR200915 Terms of Reference Draft_6”, and available on request.

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Terms of Reference 2023-24

This 3 part document outlines the purpose, scope, membership, governance structure, roles and responsibilities of the Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia (OMAA). It is a living document that is informed by the foundation OMAA Handbook version 6 (available on request). The OMAA roles defined, and information provided in this Handbook are supported by foundation documents including the OMAA Constitution, current mission and strategic statements, procedures, scope of practice, and code of ethics, located on the OMAA Document Register. Please access foundation documents from the OMAA website, or by email request to OMAA info@omaaaustralasia.com

The latest OMAA Handbook is available and recommended to all members and accessible via the OMAA website. All committee and executive members of OMAA should be familiar with its content as well as able to inform the next version (3 yearly review) content as OMAA moves forward.

The 3 parts of this TOR document are:

Part 1: Overview and membership

Part 2: Current Executive and Committee Overview and purpose

Part 3: Documentation management (under development)

This version requires Executive approval prior to external distribution.

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Acronyms and Definitions

ACVREP	Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals, (USA), administering the COMS program
AER	Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, (USA).
AGM	Annual General Meeting
CC	OMAA Communications Committee
COMS	Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists
GDMI	Guide Dog Mobility Instructor
ICEVI	International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment
MEC	Membership engagement committee
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
O&M	Orientation and Mobility
OMAA	Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia
OMSAV	Orientation and Mobility Specialists' Association Victoria
PD	Professional Development
PDC	OMAA Professional Development Committee
PSC	OMAA Professional Standards Committee
RPPEL	Registered Provider of Professional Learning and Education, part of the ACVREP COMS quality framework.
ROMSA	Registered Orientation and Mobility Specialist (Australasia)
SPEVI	South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment

1. OMAA Overview

OMAA Purpose

The Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia (OMAA) is the peak professional body representing the interests of its membership of Orientation and Mobility (O&M) professionals living and/or working in Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island nations.

The OMAA supports and promotes the O&M profession as a vital component of the human services sector in Australasia serving the needs of people with low vision or blindness. The O&M profession works in collaboration with other vision, education, allied health, disability, and access services to achieve this purpose.

The OMAA strives to offer neutrality and stability to the O&M profession, to consult and communicate transparently with members and stakeholders including O&M employers and consumers, and to steward limited resources wisely.

The OMAA **advocates** for standards for entry to the profession and ongoing professional practice in the Australasian region. Accordingly, the OMAA endeavors to: support the recruitment and nurturing of new O&M professionals, support and promote O&M personnel preparation programs, source and create professional development opportunities, protect professional knowledge, treasure subject matter expertise, manage membership grievances and disciplinary issues, and expand career pathways for O&M professionals.

OMAA Scope

Australasia encompasses, in order of population, Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island nations including Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Solomon Islands, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Tonga, Kiribati, American Samoa, Marshall Islands, Palau, Cook Islands, Nauru, Tuvalu, and Niue (NZ).



During the 1960s, reciprocal visits took place to explore the feasibility of expanding the O&M profession from the USA and UK to Australia and New Zealand. The first O&M Instructors

were trained in Melbourne in 1971 and the first professional body was established that year – the Orientation and Mobility Instructors Association of Australasia (1971-1995).

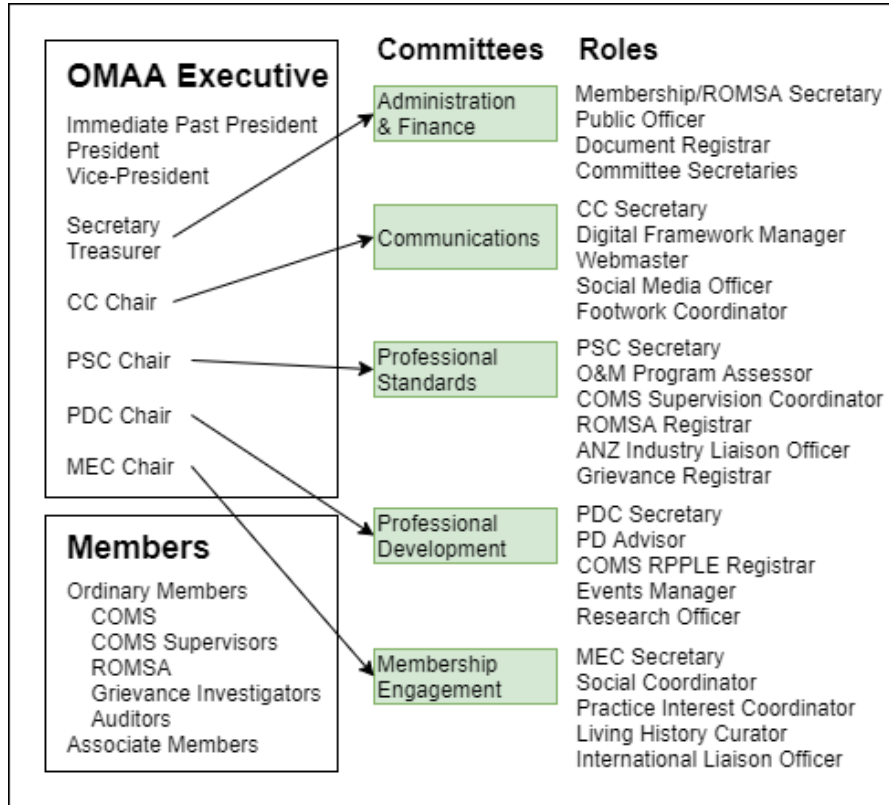
After a gap in professional cohesion, the Orientation and Mobility Specialists' Association of Victoria (OMSAV) was incorporated in 2000, expanding its scope to become the OMAA in 2008.

A 2002 census conducted by OMSAV indicated there were 186 O&M professionals working in Australia and New Zealand, including 40 guide dog mobility instructors (GDMI)s. A 2011 census conducted by OMAA indicated there were 248 O&M professionals, including 63 GDMI)s.¹ In 2014 numbers of O&M professionals are estimated at 200-230, with an increasing number of independent service providers. As of May 2023, OMAA has around 120 members, including specialist O&Ms and Associate members

¹ Deverell, Lil, and Bronwen Scott. (2014). Orientation and mobility in Australia and New Zealand: Situational analysis and census. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 108 (1):77-82.

OMAA Structure

In representing the interests of its members, the OMAA is governed by an Executive informed by committees. Below is a diagram that represents the aspirational OMAA structure (source: foundation OMAA Handbook version 6).



The above structure was voted for at the OMAA AGM in 2020. As of this 2023-4 document version, due to committee capacities, this structure has not evolved to include the range of the roles included in the diagram. However, OMAA remains committed to the agreed structure and roles and as capacity allows will continue to refine and develop the governing body, with reference to the above structure. The 2022-24 structure is currently best represented as:

<p>OMAA Executive: -President -Immediate Past President (1 year) -Vice President -Secretary -Treasurer</p> <p>-Communications Chair</p> <p>-Professional Standards Chair</p> <p>-Professional Development Chair</p> <p>-Member Engagement Chair</p>	<p>secretary/treasurer: (committee not yet formed)</p> <p>Committees:</p> <p>Communications:</p> <p>Professional Standards:</p> <p>Professional Development:</p> <p>Member Engagement:</p>	<p>Overview each teams roles: as of 2022-24 (see detail in later section) -manage finances and OMAA reporting CAV -lead membership management, including induction for committee members -meeting and document management/distribution for Exec -reporting including <u>MyCav</u></p> <p>-<u>Webmastery</u> and communication management- including online platforms -blog production and distribution -<u>facebook</u> management -ongoing development of online platforms</p> <p>-document management and development -leading connections and communications with core stakeholder <u>agencys</u>, such as NDIS; training providers; service providers; certification providers -management of professional registration-COMS; ROMSA; ACVREP</p> <p>-Management of Professional Development OMAA Provider account with ACVREP -Management and communication of OMAA endorsed PD events - Scoping the PD needs of O&Ms in the Australasia region - Ongoing support to the O&Ms in their COMS re-certification process</p> <p>-<u>facebook</u> co-management -management and communication of PD -Museum management -event management and organization -development and refinement of systems and documentation related to PD/ME</p>
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The above structure was provided in 2022, over time the structure will flex, in terms of priorities and capacities of OMAA. For example, in late 2022 it was acknowledged by the executive that further support across key priority tasks was required due to capacity and skill base, in the form of an Administration Co-ordinator to focus on Web and G suite refinement and management. This was agreed as a paid contract position on a reviewable basis. The above structure will be reviewed in line with the next version of this document.

Documents

This 3 part handbook primarily describes the roles and responsibilities of OMAA members and officers. Relevant supporting documents are identified with each role and then listed in the Document Log in part 3 (under development). These include:

- foundation documents – formally ratified regulations and policies
- procedures – work instructions developed by committees for internal use
- factsheets/lists – published by the OMAA

General procedures for document development, approval, storage, access, internal review, external audit and retention are detailed in the OMAA Document Management Procedure.

2. OMAA Members

Purpose

OMAA membership provides a network of relationships and opportunities to support practice standards, wellbeing, and professional development. Membership also expresses a personal commitment to the wider O&M profession, not just the employer. This solidarity gives the O&M profession a unified voice in community, industry, and government and a neutral platform to tackle professional issues that affect the industry.

Scope

NB: as of 2023 discussions on membership categories are ongoing to reflect the changing context of O&M Specialist service provision in Australasia. Collaborative professional discussions are current within OMAA membership, and with other stakeholders. No change to membership can occur without membership agreement at an AGM. It is expected that membership categories will be raised at the 2023 AGM in November

There are currently (as per foundation TOR drafted 2020) two OMAA membership categories for Orientation and Mobility Specialists: ordinary (includes ROMSA) and associate members. An application for OMAA membership is made through the OMAA website, where there is information about current fees and the facility to pay online.

An ordinary OMAA member is expected to adhere to ethical and professional standards, undertake continuous professional development, and aspire to exemplary person-centred practice. The OMAA Quality Framework includes foundation documents that guide O&M professional practice in Australasia (see OMAA website).

Ordinary members can apply for professional certification (COMS) and registration (ROMSA), become a COMS supervisor and serve as an OMAA officer.

Associate members are not eligible for COMS or ROMSA but can serve as a grievance investigator or auditor (see definition below).

Meetings

OMAA members meet formally at the OMAA Annual General Meeting in November each year. This is the anchor point for election of new officers, adoption of the annual budget, and ratification of major OMAA decisions and policies.

During the year, members network through activities such as OMAA facebook, professional development and community of practice events. These may be online and/or face to face, such as Australasian O&M conferences, online symposia, and professional practice meetings via zoom. OMAA strives to facilitate knowledge sharing by working to offer benefits to members for attending events, such as COMs points and fee discounts. Members also connect through emails, social media, blogs and newsletter posts. These forums enable

members to identify subject matter experts and mentors. Regular meetings and service with others as an OMAA officer also builds productive and mutually rewarding relationships.

Roles and Responsibilities

Ordinary Members are fully qualified O&M specialists, and Associate Members are not (see constitution for further information on membership).

Ordinary Member Definition:

Ordinary OMAA members include O&M specialists and Guide Dog Mobility Instructors (GDIMs) who²:

- have successfully completed a comprehensive O&M qualification and able to apply/in process for international certification (COMS) and Australasian registration (ROMSA), or equivalent, even if they have not done so.
- have minimum 80 hours experience undertaking community travel and activities of daily living with simulated low vision or blindness/peer teaching.*
- have practised at least three months full time equivalent in the past 5 years.*
- renew membership annually.*
- uphold the OMAA Code of Ethics in professional practice.*
- comply with local laws and requirements (e.g., Working with Children check).*
- have not been, and are not currently, the subject of conduct, performance, legal or health proceedings whilst practising in a professional capacity.*
- maintain or are covered by professional indemnity insurance.*
- undertake continuous professional development.

Supporting documents

- OMAA Handbook
- OMAA O&M Scope of Practice
- OMAA Standards of Exemplary Practice
- OMAA Code of Ethics
- OMAA Grievance Policy
- COMS Handbook
- Factsheet: OMAA Membership and Benefits

² Asterisks* indicate mandatory declarations included in an OMAA Ordinary Membership application.

- Factsheet: O&M Career Pathways

Ordinary Members who are also Certified O&M Specialists (COMS) with ACVREP are termed “ROMSA” – Registered O&M Specialist in Australasia

An ordinary OMAA member with COMS is immediately eligible to apply for OMAA Registration. After submitting evidence of COMS, a Registered O&M Specialist in Australasia is listed on the OMAA public register on the website and receives an OMAA registration certificate. OMAA advocates for members to become ROMSA because:

Professional certification and registration are important processes to:

- **assess and establish parity between diverse O&M training pathways.**
- **declare publicly who is fit to practice as a fully qualified O&M specialist.**
- **provide summary information, contact details and choices to O&M consumers.**

Supporting documents

- Factsheet: Applying for COMS and ROMSA in ANZ

About COMS and ACVREP

In 2013, the OMAA adopted the USA-based COMS program which provides:

- an independent certification program to examine who is eligible to practise as an O&M specialist
- an internationally recognized industry benchmark for entry level O&M professionals
- a minimum standard for professional qualifications
- the COMS body of knowledge – essential content to be included in any comprehensive O&M personnel preparation program
- a process for evaluating applied skills in a COMS-supervised placement/internship
- an international online exam
- a framework to account for continuous professional development towards recertification every five years.

The COMS program is administered by the Academy for the Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) in the USA. The ACVREP Board is committed to making the COMS program internationally accessible. The OMAA has worked, and continues to work, with ACVREP to interpret the COMS Handbook and clarify eligibility requirements for applicants outside the USA and Canada, including applicants from Australia and New Zealand.

A COMS application is a three-stage process, with fees for each stage.

1. A COMS Eligibility Application requires evidence of O&M qualifications and COMS-supervised workplace experience (or equivalent).
2. The COMS Exam is completed online at a local exam centre.
3. The COMS Certificate arrives in the mail.

Supporting documents

- ACVREP COMS Handbook
- OMAA Factsheet: Applying for COMS and ROMSA in ANZ
- OMAA-branded Core Domain Area Charts for O&M programs in ANZ

Associate Member

Associate OMAA members might have undertaken some O&M training, offer limited or supervised O&M services, or simply wish to stay abreast of developments in the O&M profession. Associate members can include:

- trainee/student O&M specialists and GDMLs.
- dog guide trainers.
- community-based rehabilitation fieldworkers.
- O&M assistants (voluntary or paid).
- O&M employers, managers or co-workers.
- allied health, education or access professionals.
- O&M clients, parents and friends.

Supporting documents

- Factsheet: OMAA Membership and Benefits