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**PCB- A Peer Network for All Who Are Impacted by Vision Loss**

**Getting to Know Us**

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# Introduction

Welcome to the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind (PCB)! We are a peer network for all who are impacted by vision loss. This packet was developed to provide you with information about the mission, goals, and opportunities of PCB. We invite you to participate in all that PCB has to offer.

Founded in 1936, PCB is one of the oldest organizations of people with a disability in the United States. PCB’s mission is to promote independence and opportunity for people with vision loss. It enables individuals to be part of a network of those working together to find solutions to social, vocational, educational, rehabilitative, transportation and public safety issues. PCB is the largest Pennsylvania-based consumer-driven organization of people with vision loss. PCB peers are of differing ages, interests, and ethnic groups and represent a wide variety of occupations, political persuasions, and religious affiliations. Since all peers are an integral part of this organization, PCB connects us all together to create a network where each person's experience and know-how are valued and integrated into the overall vitality of the organization. When you get involved with PCB, you automatically discover a sense of belonging to a group of people who truly understand and welcome you to a wonderful family of caring friends.

# Getting Involved

While PCB was originally founded as a membership-based organization, today we are an open network of peers where all with vision loss may participate in our efforts and offerings. We encourage you to get involved when and as you can. We offer an array of peer sharing programs, volunteer opportunities, and personal development activities that do not require peership (i.e., membership). If you wish to have a voice in the business and leadership of PCB though, we do ask that you become a peer.

Formal peership in PCB is open to any individual or organization that supports the PCB mission. The four categories of peership are: Individual Adult, Individual Junior (under 18), Non-Profit, and Corporate. Individual Adult peers, including those who belong to a specific chapter and those who are peers-at-large may vote, present motions, speak on the floor of the state convention, and hold a leadership position. Peership also entitles individuals to discounts offered at our annual conference. All PCB peers receive our quarterly newsletter, The PCB Advocate in their preferred format.

Currently, there are two ways to become a peer in PCB. When you join one of our local chapters or special interest affiliates, you automatically become a peer in PCB. If you do not wish to participate in a chapter or special interest affiliate, you can join PCB as an At-large peer by paying your annual peership dues directly to the PCB office.

Whether you decide to become a formal peer or just join our network on your terms, you are strongly encouraged to complete our “Getting to Know You Peer Survey.” The questionnaire helps us learn about your interests and which PCB opportunities you would like to explore. The form is online at pcb1.org/getinvolved or it can be completed by calling the PCB office at 717-920-9999 or 877-617-7407.

PCB is a state affiliate of the American Council of the Blind (ACB), a national network of 67 state and special interest affiliates. As such, both adult and junior peers in PCB are also members of ACB. These ACB members receive a free accessible subscription to ACB’s monthly magazine: The Braille Forum. Adult ACB members may also exercise their right to vote at the annual ACB Conference and Convention. For additional information about all that ACB has to offer, visit acb.org or call 800-424-8666.

# Peer Opportunities

## Advocacy and Education

PCB peers recognize that the cornerstones to making improvements in the lives of people with vision loss are advocating and educating for change. Peers participate in change efforts at varying levels, including engaging with their legislators and elected officials, developing best-practice standards, serving on advisory committees, exercising self-advocacy in every-day situations, and actively participating in life. Collectively and individually, PCB peers have improved accessibility in communities across Pennsylvania. Successful efforts have included: utilization of accessible voting machines, improvements to shared ride and public transportation services, audio described productions of theatrical performances and museum exhibits, availability of talking prescriptions at major pharmacies, installation of accessible pedestrian signals, and more.

## Awareness & Outreach

Some of our peers actively participate in awareness and outreach efforts that demonstrate the abilities of people with vision loss. These efforts may include hosting vision loss expos, participating in white cane events, speaking to scouts and schools about braille and adaptive devices, presenting to community organizations such as Lions, staffing a table at an information fair, or being a role model for children with vision loss. Upon request, PCB can provide outreach volunteers with an array of materials including an awareness activity sheet designed for sighted youth.

## TheReImage

PCB’s on-going, online awareness effort is TheReImage.net where we strive to recreate the image of people with vision loss. All impacted by blindness or vision loss are invited to participate in TheReImage.net, an innovative online format that shares stories focusing on all aspects of life. Each story features individuals with different degrees of vision loss, but rather than concentrating on that one aspect, we are examining the emotions, feelings and experiences we share as humans. To learn more and find out how you can share your story, go to thereimage.net.

## Discussion Calls

The interests of PCB peers regarding vision loss range from student life and technological advances on the one hand to the concerns of parents and senior citizens on the other. Throughout the year, PCB hosts many discussion calls; presenting such topics as: adjustment to blindness and the family, home management techniques, accessible apps and devices, traveling with a guide dog, and tips for health and exercise. You are welcome to suggest future topics and take a turn at hosting one of these friendly and informative sessions. Join any of our discussion calls by dialing 605-475-4715 if you have unlimited long-distance. If not, call toll-free to 844-844-0414. Once your call is answered, enter passcode 815419#.

## Peer Mentoring

Individuals experiencing vision loss have access to a data base of mentors with various backgrounds, experiences, interests, skills, and areas of expertise, who are willing to share their time, knowledge, and individual perspectives on vision loss. Mentors can give both advice and assistance in problem-solving or as someone who has gone through what you might be going through and who will just listen to you with an understanding heart. Our mentors are not professional counselors and as such, are not a substitute for professional rehabilitation or psychological support.

## Chapters and Special Interest Affiliates

PCB consists of more than a dozen chapters and special interest affiliates throughout the state. Most meet virtually on a conference call once a month, but in ordinary circumstances, meet in-person. These groups provide an opportunity to develop friendships, participate in social activities, and organize relevant education and advocacy efforts. Each group governs itself and sets guidelines for its annual peership fee. A listing of chapters and affiliates is provided at the end of this packet.

## Conference and Convention

Once a year, the Annual PCB Conference and Convention provides a weekend packed with information, fellowship, and accessibility. In past years, the event has featured educational presentations, hands-on workshops, accessible tours, adapted games and recreation, a live auction, award ceremonies, talent-filled banquet performances, exhibits of blindness product vendors, and much more. Best of all, it is a chance to eat, drink, and be merry with your peers in a warm, accepting environment. Amidst this slew of offerings, the business of the organization is conducted through resolutions, elections, and annual reports. In 2020, most of these activities were held through Zoom meetings and other such virtual platforms.

## Conference Stipends

Attending a PCB Conference and Convention has been a life-changing event for many individuals with vision loss. It is for that reason that PCB has established several stipends to enable those who have never attended before to do so. The student category is open to college and high school students who are blind or visually impaired and college students who are sighted but majoring in a blindness field. Individuals who have lost vision within the last five years may qualify for the adjusting to vision loss category. In these first two categories, applicants could be, but do not need to be a peer in PCB. The final category, the 1st-Timer stipend, is designated to sponsor a PCB peer who has played an active role within the organization but who has not yet had the opportunity to attend the conference. For more information about these opportunities, email stipends@pcb1.org.

## Annual Awards

Each year, as part of our conference banquet, PCB honors individuals and businesses for their dedication to improve life for people who are blind or visually impaired. The John A. Horst Champion of Independence is bestowed on a person who has worked tirelessly for more than 20 years on behalf of people with vision loss. Through TheReImage Leadership Award, PCB honors an individual who truly embodies the spirit of TheReImage campaign through his or her actions, lifestyle, and leadership. The Anthony B. Swartz PCB Peer Excellence Award is given to a long-time PCB peer who, in addition to having been a steady volunteer for PCB events, projects, and chapters, has demonstrated distinguished service to PCB and its peers by taking on leadership roles or continually surpassing volunteer service expectations. Our Community Impact Award recognizes a company, agency, or foundation for the impact its products, services, or contributions have made in the vision loss community. Let us know if you would like to make a nomination by emailing awards@pcb1.org.

## Vision Loss Resources

PCB maintains a vision loss resource list. We can provide information about rehabilitation providers, vocational assistance, technology solutions, product vendors, and more. Additionally, our peers have created and compiled written material to provide guidance on adapting to vision loss. Currently, PCB also offers a virtual support group by phone each month led by a professionally licensed psychologist who is also a peer with vision loss. Simply give the PCB office a call to inquire about our vision loss resources, and either a staff person or a peer liaison will help.

## AccessiDocs

PCB peers strive to overcome barriers to accessible information by offering a DAISY document conversion service. The peers who work on the AccessiDocs project take print documents and inaccessible electronic files and turn them into fully navigable talking documents. Peers have experience converting newsletters, resource guides, instruction manuals, event programs, medical documentation, conference handouts, technology tutorials, and more. This is a fee-based service. We hope you will refer businesses seeking accessible document services to PCB. You can learn more about this project by visiting AccessiDocs.com.

# Communication Channels

## The PCB Advocate

PCB publishes a quarterly magazine entitled The PCB Advocate. The publication is available to all peers via email, through the PCB Information Line, and on our website. For paid peers, the magazine is sent in their preferred reading format: Braille, large print, or NLS audio cartridge. Do you like to write? You are encouraged to submit articles, stories, poems, and other writings of interest to people with vision loss for publication in our award-winning magazine. Submissions must be received by the following deadlines: March 1, June 1, September 1, and November 20. Email items to: advocate@pcb1.org.

## Listservs

For peers who are online, PCB offers two listservs to connect and inform. PCB-L is a resource list for sharing fact-based information and announcements relevant to blindness or vision loss such as: assistive product info, legislative and regulatory efforts, meeting/training/webinar announcements, survey/research postings, Council news and updates, reposting of fact-based articles of interest, employment opportunities, business or service provider resources, and the like. PCB uses this listserv to post its monthly calendar, calls for action, and organization news. This list is open to all who want to stay informed on vision loss news. You can subscribe to this list by sending a blank email to: pcb-l+subscribe@groups.io.

The second listserv PCB offers provides a forum for peers to exchange ideas, opinions, and questions on all matters vision loss related. Aptly named, PCB-Chat allows for online conversation on topics important to peers. This is the place, for example, where someone new to vision loss could ask for advice on kitchen techniques or where a long-time peer might express bewilderment at the latest invention to “help the blind.” Join this listserv by sending a blank email to: pcb-chat+subscribe@groups.io.

## E-Blast List

All who provide PCB with an email address will be added to PCB’s e-blast distribution list. No more than twice a month, PCB sends out an announcement-only email to keep peers up to date on PCB-specific news and events. Anyone who could benefit from our announcements either personally or professionally is encouraged to sign up to receive these e-blasts. Send an email to pcboffice@pcb1.org to be added to our distribution list.

## PCB Information Line

If you are not online, you are only a telephone call away from having the latest news and happenings with PCB. The PCB Information Line at 773-572-6314 offers a menu of options to read our newsletter, learn about upcoming events, listen to podcasts, read the articles posted to the PCB-L listserv, and more. We now offer a toll-free number for those without long-distance. Contact the office toll-free to get this number.

## Digital Media

PCB offers several ways to stay informed and engaged with what is happening in the vision loss community generally, and PCB specifically. On our website, [pcb1.org](http://www.pcb1.org), you will find various forms and applications, conference archives, back issues of our newsletter, and tools that PCB has created for people with vision loss. Follow us with our Twitter handle pcb\_advocate and through Facebook keyword PACouncilofheBlind to interact with us via social media.

# Fundraising Activities

## Calendar Raffle

Each year PCB supporters fundraise for the state organization and local chapters by selling raffle tickets for our Six-month Calendar Raffle. The raffle begins on May 1 and runs through October 31. When a person’s ticket number matches the PA Pick 3 Number, they win cash prizes. With each ticket purchased, a person has 184 chances to win including up to 18 bonus payouts. PCB and its chapters then share in the profits based on how many tickets each chapter sold.

## Live Auction

In conjunction with PCB’s annual conference, our peers organize a live auction. We collect donated prizes throughout the months leading up to the conference and convention. Prize lists are circulated on the PCB-L in the weeks leading up to the auction. Even individuals who are unable to make it to the conference can join in the fun by bidding over the phone via a conference telephone line. All kinds of items make popular prizes including assistive technology, gift cards, baskets of cheer, and homemade baked goods.

## Loving Touch Connection

PCB has established a fundraising relationship with Loving Touch Connection. This company offers hand-painted glassware items including mugs, wine and beer glasses, salt and pepper shakers, spice jars, canasters, and more. All designs are outlined in raised paint so people with vision loss can enjoy the art. Even more unique, each item has a raised braille message that accents each piece. PCB receives a percentage of all sales generated through ltc@pcb1.org.

## Room-Rate Raffle

In the months leading up to the annual conference and convention, PCB runs a 50/50 raffle to raise funds for our Room-Rate Fund. The winning tickets are drawn at our annual conference. Since winners need not be present, ticket chances which are just $5 each, are sold by peers to friends, relatives, and the public. Winners split 50% of the pot as follows: First place receives 25%, Second place gets 15% and Third place wins 10%. The remaining 50% of the pot is allocated to PCB’s Room-Rate Fund. Once the balance in the fund builds up, PCB typically subsidizes overnight hotel costs at the annual conference.

## Amazon Smile

PCB supporters use their purchases from Amazon to benefit PCB. You, too, can help. Simply go to smile.amazon.com and select the PA Council of the Blind as your designated charity. Then, always begin your Amazon shopping at smile.amazon.com and you will be raising funds for PCB.

## Monthly Monetary Support

Peers and friends who are interested in supporting the work of both PCB and our national affiliate, the American Council of the Blind, can enroll to make monthly contributions through this program. It is easy to set up this recurring gift either through an electronic withdrawal from a bank account or charge to a credit card. If you would like to get started in this donation program, give the ACB accountants a call at 612-332-3242 and let them know you want to donate to PCB and ACB.

# Administration

## Volunteering

Active, involved peers are the heartbeat that keeps PCB alive and thriving. Together, our ideas, energy, hard-work, and dedication pulse through every aspect of the organization. Each of us is valued for whatever gifts and talents we bring and encouraged to find our niche where we can be of the most service. Volunteer opportunities are available in every PCB offering we describe in this document. You can volunteer on a team or solo; doing something you are familiar with or taking on a new challenge; on one-time projects or on an on-going effort; whatever your preferences, we welcome your service. Please send an email to leadership@pcb1.org or call the PCB office to begin the conversation about volunteering.

## Our Work

With our peers spread across Pennsylvania and beyond, we use the telephone and email to plan and execute our PCB work. For example, a project team will hold a touch-base meeting via conference call once a month to discuss goals and plans. Then, our peers will kick around ideas, gather and give feedback, share draft documents, and such via the group’s exclusive listserv. We work from the comfort of home on our customized technology when it is convenient for us.

## Virtual Office

PCB currently operates a remote office which is staffed by an administrative secretary and Director of Outreach and Engagement. The part-time administrative secretary supports the work of our volunteers. For example, she might assist with formatting a document, mailing out materials, getting quotes for a printing job, or conducting relevant research for the organization. The administrative secretary handles day-to-day matters such as answering telephone and email inquiries about PCB, paying bills, collecting the mail, processing peership info, etc. The full-time Director of Outreach and Engagement focuses on increasing PCB’s community impact and involvement. For example, she Establishes collaborations with various entities across Pennsylvania to strengthen support networks for those with vision loss, develops workshops and toolkits on self-advocacy, empowerment, and life skills for PCB peers, represents PCB’s mission through legislative efforts, meetings with stakeholders, and awareness materials for the public, and addresses individual requests for advocacy, peer support, or vision loss resources. The office can be reached by calling 717-920-9999 or toll-free 877-617-7407 and by emailing pcboffice@pcb1.org. The Director of Outreach and Engagement, Melissa Carney, can be reached directly at 717-884-8584 or mcarney@pcb1.org. Peers are encouraged to contact the office during normal business hours with any questions.

## Leadership

PCB is led by a fourteen-person Board of Directors, all of whom are peers in the organization. Directors and officers are elected at annual conventions to two-year terms. The board meets quarterly with at least three meetings held via teleconference and one held in person prior to the opening of the annual conference. These meetings are open to the public and are posted on the monthly PCB calendar. Board members are integral to the various team and project work of PCB. A list of current board members with contact information is available both on our website and in the back pages of The PCB Advocate newsletter. The organization’s current President can always be contacted by emailing leadership@pcb1.org.

PCB takes leadership development seriously and strives to empower all peers to explore their leadership potential. The PCB website includes an ever-growing section of resources for enhancing individual, chapter, and community leadership. These materials are available at pcb1.org/leadershipdevelopment.

## Governance

Guidelines for the organization’s structure and operations are outlined in its Bylaws. Specifically, the PCB Bylaws detail: the organization’s purpose, election procedures and eligibility, peership options, officer responsibilities, chapter/affiliate requirements, and more. Any peer is eligible to suggest amendments to the Bylaws according to a prescribed process. The Bylaws can be made available in your preferred reading format upon request to the PCB office and are also available on our pcb1.org website.

## Contributions

PCB is a 501c3 public charity. Contributions of money, stocks, bonds, goods, and services are vital to the future success of our organization. Donations are accepted on a year-round basis via our Harrisburg office and are tax deductible. PCB also receives contributions through several alternative methods. Online contributions can be made through the PayPal button on the pcb1.org website. Used cars, trucks, and the like can be donated on behalf of PCB’s benefit by calling 800-269-6814. Employees, whose companies generate workplace contributions through Benevity.org, can designate their gift for PCB. Individuals making estate plans can designate the PCB Endowment Fund as a beneficiary in their will as well as on their insurance policies and investment holdings. PCB peers are appreciative of all contributions that support our work.

# Quick Reference Guide

## Pennsylvania Council of the Blind

Main Contact-

Mailing Address: Pennsylvania Council of the Blind

PO Box 68

Volant, PA 16156

Phone: 717-920-9999 or Toll-free 877-617-7407.

E-mail: pcboffice@pcb1.org

Website: pcb1.org

Facebook: PACounciloftheBlind

Twitter: pcb\_advocate

### Director of Outreach and Engagement:

Melissa Carney

717-884-8584

mcarney@pcb1.org

### Telephone Numbers-

PCB Information Line: 773-572-6314

PCB Director of Outreach and Engagement: 717-884-8584

PCB Discussion Calls: 605-475-4715 or toll-free

844-844-0414, Passcode: 815419#

PCB Work Meetings: 515-604-9995, or call toll-free 844-801-6666, Passcode:: 479593#

American Council of the Blind: 800-424-8666

ACB Radio: 518-906-1820

### Websites-

Getting Involved: pcb1.org/getinvolved

TheReImage: thereimage.net

AccessiDocs: accessidocs.com

Loving Touch connection: lovingtouchconnection.com

American Council of the Blind: acb.org

### Email Addresses-

PCB President/Leadership: leadership@pcb1.org

Newsletter Submissions: advocate@pcb1.org

Award Nominations: awards@pcb1.org

Conference Stipends: stipends@pcb1.org

Nominate Board Candidates:

nominations@pcb1.org

Submit Stories to TheReImage:

content@thereimage.net

Loving Touch Connection Inquiries:

ltc@pcb1.org.

Director of Outreach and Engagement: mcarney@pcb1.org

### Email Lists-

E-Blast List: pcboffice@pcb1.org

PCB-L for vision loss information posting only:

pcb-l+subscribe@groups.io

PCB-Chat for discussions & idea exchange:

pcb-chat+subscribe@groups.io

# PCB Chapters & Special Interest Affiliates

Please contact the PCB office for additional details on any of these groups. Additional groups may be coming soon so please inquire.

Cumberland County Chapter

Golden Triangle Chapter (Allegheny)

Hank Bloomberg Chapter (Clearfield/Jefferson)

JFK Chapter (Philadelphia Area)

Keystone Chapter (Virtual)

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Oil Valley Chapter

PA Guide Dog Users and Supporters (Virtual special interest affiliate)

Philadelphia Metro Chapter

Philadelphia Regional Chapter

Washington County Chapter

York County Chapter