

Leadership at Inclusion International
Background Paper for the General Assembly

What is a background paper?

A “background paper” is a document that people read to prepare for a meeting.

This background paper will help you prepare for Inclusion International’s General Assembly.

Why do we need a background paper for the General Assembly?

At the General Assembly, everyone will talk together about how we can make sure more people get a chance to be leaders.

This background paper will give you information about:

- How leadership works at Inclusion International now
- Some barriers to becoming a leader in our network
- Things to think about when we plan for new leaders

This information will help you take part in the discussion.

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Summary of Background Paper

The General Assembly is having a discussion about leadership.

This is important because we know there are some things that make it difficult for people to take on leadership roles, and we want to make it easier for everyone to be a leader.

It is a good time to talk about this because we will look for a new President Elect (future President) in 2026.

The General Assembly will talk together about three big questions.

1. *How can we make sure there are no barriers to being a leader in our network?*

We know there are some things that make it hard to be a leader.

For example, some of the roles take up a lot of time, which are hard to do when you have a job or if you care for someone at home.



We will talk together about how we can remove these barriers, so everyone can take part.

2. How are we supporting future leaders? What can we do to help people in our network prepare to take on positions of leadership?

Usually the people who take on leadership roles at Inclusion International are already leaders in their organisation - not very many people who are early in their career are part of the international work.

We will talk together about how we can support future leaders to build leadership skills.

3. Does our current leadership structure reflect who we are?

There are some rules in our Constitution about different leadership roles - like which roles should be self-advocates, and how we keep a balance of self-advocates and families.

We will talk about if these are the right rules, or if anything needs to change.



Everyone should come prepared with their ideas for things we can do to solve these problems.

This General Assembly is just about sharing ideas and hearing from members about what should change - we do not need to find every solution during this meeting.

This is the first step to a bigger piece of work on making sure we have strong and inclusive leadership at Inclusion International.

Introduction

Inclusion International is made up of organisations of self-advocates and families from around the world.

We are also *led by* self-advocates and families.

Our members are our leaders, and our members come from different parts of the world and have different experiences.

Our network is very diverse - this means that we include many different types of people with different experiences. This is one of the things that makes our network strong.

We want our decision-makers to be a diverse group too. We want the people who take on leadership roles to come from every different part of our network.

For example, we want the leaders of our network to come from every region, be different genders, come from different cultures, and to be a mix of self-advocates and families.

Right now, it is difficult for some people to become leaders because of some barriers that are in place. This means that the people who become leaders in our network are not as diverse as they could be.

The General Assembly will talk about ways to change this, so we can make sure that all people with intellectual disabilities and their families in our network feel like they can be a decision-maker in Inclusion International.

It is a good time to think about how we find and support new leaders, because we will look for a new President Elect in 2026. A President Elect is the person who will be the future President for the network.

The President is just one leadership role at Inclusion International - there are many different ways to be a leader that we want to think about. You can read more about these in the section below about what leadership opportunities we have now.

Together, the General Assembly will think about:

- whose voices are missing from our leadership, and how we can make it easier for them to take part
- how we can support people who want to become leaders in the future
- if there are big changes we need to make to how we work to make sure everyone has the chance to be a leader

The General Assembly will talk about these big questions, and think about how we can make changes to include everyone in leadership.

We don't need to find the perfect solution together in Sharjah - the General Assembly workshop is just the first chance to come up with ideas together. This is the first step in a bigger process of making our leadership more inclusive.

Everyone should come to the discussion with an open mind, creativity, and ready to share their ideas.

Inclusion International's Leadership Principles

“Principles” are big ideas that help guide everything you do.

Inclusion International has some principles about leadership.

These are the big ideas we have about what leadership means, and everything we do matches up with these big ideas.

We have three main principles about leadership:

1. Our members are our leaders

Our network is a movement - this means we are many organisations working together with the same big goals.

Together, our members make up the movement. And together, our members are our leaders.

Our members come together at the General Assembly to make decisions, and our members guide all of our work. Having engaged members who are an active part of our decision-making is what makes us a strong network.

In our work to make our leadership stronger, members will always be in the lead.

2. Leadership is for everyone

A movement can't have only one leader - everyone needs to have a voice.

We want to be a network with many leaders who work together - we don't want just one person or just a few people to be in charge.

Leadership is not just about one person being the President of an organisation - we support leadership at all levels and there are different ways to be a leader in our movement.

For leadership at all levels to happen, everyone needs to understand that they *can* be a leader. Inclusion International believes that everyone has different strengths, skills, and ideas that can help them be a leader.

Everyone has something different to bring to leadership roles and different ways of sharing those skills. All types of contributions are valued!

3. Leadership is about listening

Leaders at Inclusion International represent self-advocates and families around the world.

It is their job to listen to what people in the network think, and make decisions based on what our members want.

Making our leadership more inclusive isn't just about thinking about who is in big decision-making roles, it is about how we make sure we have a network where everyone can raise their voice.

We need to always make sure that people in leadership understand that their role is to listen to members, not tell them what to do. When our leaders make decisions, they only decide after listening carefully to what our members want.

Listening also isn't only about what our members have to say - it is also important for our leaders to be listening to what is going on in the world around us. Right now, lots of things are changing in the world. Our leaders need to pay attention to these changes, and lead our network in conversations about how we move forward as a movement to respond to some of these big changes in the world.

We need to make sure that during our conversation, we are always respecting these principles.



How does our leadership structure work now?

At Inclusion International, we have many different ways to be a leader.

Some of these ways of being a leader are part of our “governance” - these are the roles that are part of helping to run our organisation.

There are three main parts of our governance:

1. Our General Assembly

The General Assembly is our most important body at Inclusion International. Every full member is part of the General Assembly - full members are our members whose organisations are run by people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

At the General Assembly, every full member has an equal voice and an equal vote. Anyone can suggest something for a vote.

It is the General Assembly's job to agree on our advocacy

positions on different topics, to choose who has specific leadership roles, and to talk about big issues - like how we make sure our leadership is inclusive.

2. Our Council

Our Council makes big decisions about how we work as a network.

For example, they do things like:

- helping to make Inclusion International's big strategy
- helping to make position papers about topics that are important to members
- making big decisions about things like membership and governance
- Coordinating the members in their region to connect and work together

They also make sure that our members are having a say, by speaking up for what members in different regions want and need. Members can always ask their Council member to bring an issue for discussion.

We have 10 regional representatives on Council - two people who represent each region. They are voted into those roles by the full members in their region.

One of the regional representatives for each region is always a self-advocate. The other can be a family member, another self-advocate, or someone else.

3. Our Officers

The Officers are in charge of making sure Inclusion International is running smoothly.

They check our budget, make sure we are following our rules and the law, and make sure the staff are doing their jobs.

The Officers are the people who the General Assembly elects to do specific jobs. For example, the President, the Vice-President, the Treasurer, and the Secretary General. These are people that our members elect as leaders to represent our movement.

Because this group's job is to help make sure Inclusion

International is running well, it is also important that the people in this group have the skills needed to help run an organisation. It can sometimes be difficult to find a group of people who both represent who we are as a movement (for example, being family members and self-advocates from different parts of the world) and have the special skills to run an organisation.

Sometimes the President, the Vice-President, the Treasurer, and the Secretary General might also ask some other people with special skills to be on the Officers group with them. They are called “Co-opted Officers.” For example, they could ask someone who knows a lot about finance or charity laws to join. This helps make sure the Officers have the skills to run the organisation well. Right now, we have two Co-opted Officers.

The Officers need to follow the direction from the General Assembly and the Council.

These three groups are all connected.

The General Assembly and the Council decide *what* we should do - for example, what advocacy position we should take, what

programmes we should create, and what we should do to support members. When the Inclusion International staff help coordinate projects or advocacy work, it is always based on the positions and priorities that the General Assembly and Council have set.

And the Officers decide *how* we do the things that are important to members - for example, making sure there is a budget to do the work the members want, making sure the staff are facilitating decision-making by the members, and making sure the way we do things follows our rules and the law.

We also have other leadership roles that aren't part of our governance. For example:

- Member Group Co-Chairs - in teams of two, people from our member organisations lead discussion groups and working groups made up of our members
- Empower Us Team - A team of self-advocate leaders from different countries give self-advocacy training, and help people with intellectual disabilities to become new self-advocates

- Reference group roles - Members can be part of reference groups to help guide work we do, like projects or new resources we are creating.

Inclusion International is always looking for new ways to give people a chance to be a leader - our Council would welcome your ideas for other ways to do this!

At the General Assembly, what are we asking the network to do?

During the General Assembly discussion, members will talk about three big questions about leadership at Inclusion International.

We will use these three questions to talk about how to make sure that our leadership reflects who we are as a movement:

1. How can we make sure there are no barriers to being a leader in our network?
2. How are we supporting future leaders?

3. Does our current leadership structure reflect who we are?

Together, we will think about things we can do to make sure that we remove barriers and make our leadership as strong and inclusive as it can be.

We will talk about these questions in small groups, and everyone can share ideas and things we could do to make our leadership stronger.

We will need to make sure that all of the ideas we talk about are:

- **Allowed under charity law** - Inclusion International is registered in the United Kingdom, and we need to follow the charity laws here. That might mean that some of the ideas people suggest would not be possible. For example, one way to make it easier for people to be leaders at Inclusion International would be paying a salary to people who take the role of President - but this is not legal in the United Kingdom, so it would not be an option for us.
- **Financially possible** - the ideas in this conversation should be possible for Inclusion International to do with the

resources we have. For example, a suggestion to have more in-person meetings every year would not be possible because of the cost. Ideas should be about changes we can make to how we work or how our governance runs - most of these ideas are things we can do for free by changing roles, our Constitution, or ways of working.

- **Based on self-advocates and families together being our representatives** - Inclusion International is unique because we represent people with intellectual disabilities and their families together. Self-advocates and families standing and speaking together is part of what makes us strong. Any ideas people bring for how we can make our leaders stronger and more representative must protect the equal, meaningful voice and leadership of both self-advocates and family members together.

Question 1: How can we make sure there are no barriers to being a leader in our network?

We want to make sure that anyone has the opportunity to be a leader.

This could be running to be a member of Council or an Officer, or taking on a different role in a different part of our work.

Here are some barriers that we know exist right now:

- Roles like the President, Vice-President, Secretary-General, and Treasurer are big jobs. They are volunteer jobs (people are not paid), but sometimes they take many hours of work each week. It is difficult to be an Officer if you are someone with a full time job. This means that it is hard for people who need to work and earn money to do these jobs - and that people who don't need to work (for example, because they are retired or they have a good pension) are the ones who volunteer.
- The leadership roles being big jobs also makes it difficult for people with other responsibilities in their life - like someone at home they need to care for - to find enough time to do the job. This is especially a problem for women, who are more likely to have caring roles at home that take up their time.
- People who are leaders in our programme usually do their work in English. This means that for people who do not speak English, there are not as many opportunities to be a

leader. This is not a problem for our Council, where people can get translation into the language they need.

- Inclusion International's leaders, especially Officers and Council members, sometimes need to travel to do their jobs. For example, they might go to meetings to represent our network, or conferences to share our work. Inclusion International pays for this travel, but for people who have responsibilities at home (like a job or a family to take care of) it can still be difficult to travel. For people who are not as able to travel, it might mean they are less likely to want to take on a leadership role.
- Our Council and Officers mostly do their work together online, using emails and Zoom. While this has meant that more people can take part without travelling, it has created some new problems - like making it difficult to be a Council member or an Officer if you live in a place that does not have a good internet connection, or making it difficult to be a Council member or an Officer if your time zone has a big time difference from the rest of the group. Time zones are particularly challenging for leaders and members from Asia-Pacific. The move to working online has also created some skills barriers, and now people need to be able to

use technology or have good support to use technology to be able to take part.

- Some of the big issues that Officers and Council deal with can be complicated - like budgets or legal issues. While Inclusion International works to make these difficult topics easy to understand, people with intellectual disabilities also need good support to be able to prepare for meetings and take part. Inclusion International works to provide this support to help people prepare virtually, but the leader's organisation also needs to have the time to invest in giving good in-person support at home, which not all organisations have time to do.

These barriers mean that usually the same type of person volunteers for the Officer roles - people from the Global North who do not have to work (usually because they are retired). There are lots of people who represent other parts of our network who are not becoming Officers because of these barriers.

At the General Assembly, members will talk about some ideas for how we can remove these barriers. We want to find ways to make sure that everyone can take part, and to spread the

workload of leadership in a way that makes it easier to take on a role as a leader. Be creative - any idea is worth sharing.

Some of the ideas might be things that it would be quick and easy for Inclusion International to do. Others might be bigger changes, where we would need to make a change to our Constitution in the future.

For example, if the General Assembly proposed changing the job descriptions of the Officers to make the jobs smaller and require less hours, that would be a change that could be done quickly. This is because the job descriptions for Officers are not part of the Constitution.

But if the General Assembly proposed changing the number of Officers we have, or changing the roles we have, or allowing for certain leadership roles to be shared, then the Constitution would need to be changed.

Constitution changes are something that the General Assembly would vote on in 2026 if it was proposed.

Question 2: How are we supporting future leaders?

We want to think about what we can do to help people in our network prepare to take on positions of leadership.

Usually, people who take on leadership roles in Inclusion International are older people who are the leaders of their own organisation in their country. We do not have as many people who are earlier in their career or in lower positions within an organisation getting involved in international work.

This is also true for family leaders in our movement. Usually, the family leaders who get involved in our international work are parents. Siblings and other family members who are not parents are not included as often in leadership roles.

We want people of all ages, from all levels of our member organisations, and from all parts of the family to feel like they can be part of the international work and be a leader.

We also want people from all types of organisations to think about how they can be a leader in our movement. While there are some things at Inclusion International that only organisations run by people with intellectual disabilities and

their families (OPDs) can do - like voting - there are many leadership roles that are open to everyone in our network. This includes people from affiliate members and individual members, who also have an important role to play in making inclusion happen.

One way we could help make it easier for people to find and take on leadership roles is by finding new ways to support and involve people who could be future leaders. If they get support to get engaged and grow their leadership skills, we could have more people becoming global leaders who represent different parts of our movement.

Some of the ways we already support future leaders are through things like:

- **Our Fellowship Programme** - When funding is available, we support two young leaders from our member organisations to come and work with Inclusion International for a three month placement. This is a paid job, and they do work on a topic that is important to them. We aim to host this programme annually.

- **Group Co-Chairs** - Any member from any country can apply to lead one of our member groups - for example, the Deinstitutionalisation Working Group or the Siblings Working Group. Leaders from different regions work together in groups of two and support and lead groups on topics they are interested in. They get support and mentorship from other leaders to help them do the job.

These are just two ways that we can get people involved in global work and support them to build their skills as leaders.

Members should come ready to share what you do to help people build leadership skills in your organisation, and what Inclusion International should do at the global level to help more people grow into future leaders.

Question 3 - Does our leadership structure reflect who we are?

Using what we discussed about how we can remove barriers and how we can support future leaders, we will finish our discussion by talking about if there is anything we need to change about our structures to make sure our leadership represents our movement.

When we say “structures,” these are the things that our constitution sets out about how our governance works.

For example, our Council, our General Assembly, and our Officers group are all some of the leadership “structures” we have. We want to make sure that they are as representative as they can be.

Here are some of the rules that our constitution has for our leadership structures now:

- In our Officers group (President, Vice-President, Secretary General, Treasurer, and other invited Officers), we need to make sure that at least half (50%) of the group is made up of self-advocates and families. The other half can be people with specific skills we need to run the organisation, like people who know about the law, budgets, fundraising, or safeguarding.
- Since 2018, our Vice-President has always been a self-advocate and our President has always been a family member. There are no rules that say it needs to be like this.

- There are 10 “regional representative” roles on our Council. Half of them (50%) are saved specifically for self-advocates. The other half can be anyone - self-advocates, families, or professionals. There are no reserved roles for families on the Council.
- If the Council ever becomes less than 50% self-advocates and families, then it is the Council’s job to appoint new Council members until it is 50% self-advocates and families again.

We will discuss:

1. If there are changes that we should make to our structures (like our Officers group or Council) to make sure that people can become leaders
2. If we have the right leadership roles, or if there might be other roles that would make it easier for more people to become leaders
3. If we have the right rules to make sure our leaders represent who we are

It is important to remember that any ideas that are suggested for changes we can make should still make sure that self-advocates and families have an equal voice.

Outcomes from the General Assembly Workshop

The General Assembly workshop is a first step for our work to strengthen our leadership at Inclusion International.

The big goal of this meeting is to hear ideas from members about how we solve some of these problems.

We don't need to come to the final answer during the meeting.

There will not be a specific proposal for members to vote on - we want to hear everyone's ideas.

If during the meeting there is an idea to solve one of these issues that everyone is excited about, then any member can bring it to a vote by proposing a "resolution."

A resolution is something you ask everyone to vote on.

Because any idea that is suggested will need to be checked to make sure it lines up with UK charity law, we will not be able to vote to make big changes at this General Assembly.

Instead, members could propose a resolution that asks the Officers or the Council to look into how to implement a certain solution and report back to the General Assembly.

Resolutions are usually two lines - one line that gives some information about why the General Assembly wants to make a change, and then one line that says what the General Assembly is agreeing to.

The second line of the resolution always starts with the words “Be it resolved” - this is just a formal way of saying what action the General Assembly is asking for. There can also be more than one “be it resolved” sentence if there are two things the resolution asks Inclusion International.

Here is an example of what a past resolution has looked like at a previous General Assembly:

Organised and knowledgeable family leadership working for inclusion is needed to work with self-advocacy leadership globally.

Be it resolved that Inclusion International explore options around family leadership that supports and strengthens advocacy for inclusion.

In this example, it asks Inclusion International to “explore options.” This is also the type of action we will ask for if there are any proposed leadership changes.

The General Assembly can create a resolution asking the Officers and Council to look into a specific change they want to make, to explore a new stream of work that supports leadership, or any other action that will support our leadership.

If a resolution is approved, the Officers will work on making a plan for how to do that in a way that fits the laws of the United Kingdom. This might include making a plan for how we change our Constitution to do what the members have suggested.

Inclusion International staff team members will be available on the workshop day to support members who are interested in proposing a resolution.