

SELF-ADVOCACY IN ACTION

A guide to member-led leadership,
choice, and action

THEIR VOICES • THEIR CHOICES • THEIR GROUP



This group belongs to its members

A self-advocacy group is led by self-advocates.

Members set the direction, elect leaders, identify priorities, build agendas, make decisions, plan activities, and choose what action the group will take.

Supporters help members with these:

SPEAK UP

LEARN

DECIDE

LEAD

ADVOCATE

ACT

Supporters help make participation accessible. They do not take over the group.

Self-advocacy turns voice into authority

01

SPEAK

Share what matters

02

CHOOSE

Set the direction

03

DECIDEMake group
decisions

04

LEAD

Take responsibility

05

ACT

Work for change

Members do not simply attend. They hold real authority and real responsibility.

Four principles keep power with members

01

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

People with disabilities have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect their lives.

02

SELF-DIRECTION

Members decide what matters, what to accomplish, and how to work together.

03

LEADERSHIP

Members lead meetings, projects, committees, advocacy, and community activities.

04

CHOICE + AUTONOMY

Participation is voluntary. Members may speak, listen, ask for support, pass, or disagree.

Authority stays with the people whose lives are affected.

Access makes equal participation possible

ACCESS = POWER

1

EQUAL VALUE

Every idea, experience, communication style, and contribution has value.

2

COMMUNICATION ACCESS

Provide the time, tools, information, accommodations, and supports members need.

3

DIGNITY OF RISK

Members may choose, take reasonable risks, try, make mistakes, learn, and change their minds.

Support should strengthen—not replace—decisions

SUPPORTED DECISION-MAKING

Give people the information and support they want...

...so they can make their own decisions.

PEER SUPPORT + ADULT RESPECT

Members learn from, encourage, and support one another.

Self-advocates are adults. Speak to them, include them, and treat them as adults.

SUPPORT THE PERSON'S DECISION • DO NOT MAKE THE DECISION FOR THEM

Leadership is a responsibility, not a title

MEANINGFUL LEADERSHIP

A member leader carries out the real work of the role.

A title is not leadership if a facilitator performs the responsibilities.

**Leaders may request support.
Support someone to lead—do not lead for them.**



Members choose the roles their group needs

01 **PRESIDENT**

02 **VICE PRESIDENT**

03 **SECRETARY**

04 **TREASURER**

05 **SERGEANT-AT-ARMS**

06 **COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

07 **REPRESENTATIVES**

08 **ROLES MEMBERS CREATE**

The group decides which positions it needs—and what each position is responsible for.

The group decides who, when, and where

WHO?

The group sets its membership.
There is no required number.
Supporters participate when
requested or needed for access.

WHEN?

Choose a schedule members can
use. Consistency helps. Around 60
minutes may work—but members
decide.

WHERE?

Meet in an accessible,
comfortable setting. Consider
remote or hybrid participation
when it improves access.

The right meeting setup is the one that works for the members.

Accessibility starts before the meeting

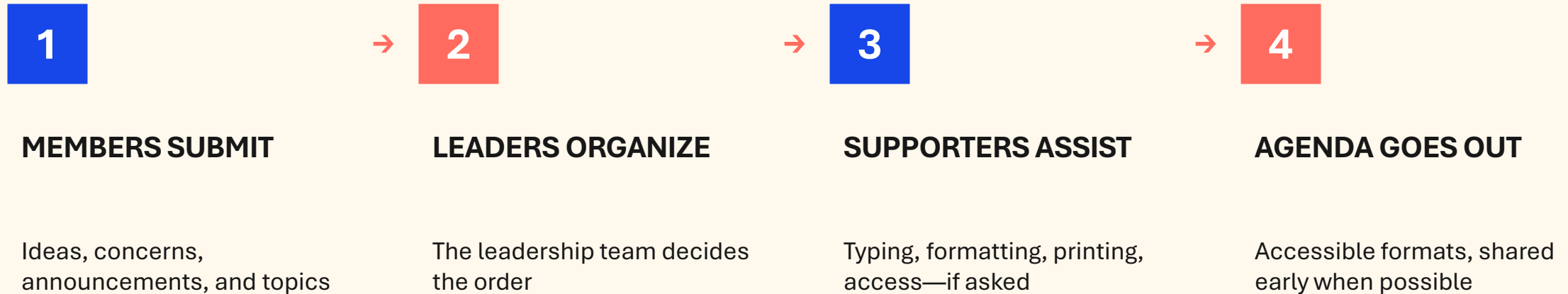
ASK MEMBERS WHAT THEY NEED. DO NOT ASSUME.

- Plain language + visual supports
- Large print + written information
- Sign language or language interpretation
- AAC + communication devices
- **Extra processing and response time**
- Information before meetings
- Breaks, quieter spaces, remote access

Access is part of planning—not an add-on afterward.



The agenda should reflect member priorities



The agenda follows self-advocates' priorities—not the facilitator's priorities.

Members open the meeting and reconnect the work

01**WELCOME**

A self-advocate opens. Members name any support they need.

02**CALL TO ORDER**

The President or designated leader officially begins.

03**LEADERSHIP REPORTS**

Officers carry out the responsibilities members assigned.

04**PREVIOUS BUSINESS**

Ask: What did we decide to do—and what happened?

LEADERSHIP IS VISIBLE FROM THE FIRST MINUTE.

Good decisions start with understandable choices

The group chooses its process.

DISCUSSION +
AGREEMENT

CONSENSUS

VOTING

ANOTHER
MEMBER-CHOSEN
WAY

Before an important decision, members receive clear, unbiased, understandable information about their choices.

The process belongs to the group. The decision belongs to the members.

Members discuss, decide, act, and close

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------|---|
| 05 | NEW BUSINESS | Members raise topics, ask questions, disagree respectfully, and hear different views. |
| 06 | MAKE DECISIONS | Use the member-selected process and understandable information. |
| 07 | TAKE ACTION | Name the task, owner, support, due date, and check-in. |
| 08 | CLOSE | Review decisions and action items; confirm the next meeting; adjourn. |

A MEETING MOVES FROM VOICE → CHOICE → ACTION.

Every discussion should end with a clear action

1

WHAT?

What are we going to do?

2

WHO?

Who wants to do it?

3

SUPPORT?

What support is needed?

4

WHEN?

When will it be completed?

5

CHECK?

When will we review progress?

SELF-ADVOCACY IS MORE THAN TALKING ABOUT AN ISSUE.

The group names the next move—and follows through together.

Facilitators provide access, not authority

DO

- Ask before helping
- Find out what support is wanted
- Make information understandable
- Allow time to process and communicate
- Support elected leaders
- Direct decisions back to members
- Respect privacy, boundaries, and consent

DO NOT

- Take over leadership responsibilities
- Push a preferred decision
- Automatically answer for members
- Make every conversation go through you
- Speak for someone without permission
- Treat adults like children
- Provide more support than requested

“

**Is my help needed for access,
or am I doing something
self-advocates could do themselves?**

**Provide the amount of support requested or needed—
not the greatest amount of support possible.**

Use questions that return authority to members

“

What does the group think?

“

What would you like to do?

“

What options do you see?

“

Who would like to take the lead?

“

What support would be helpful?

“

How would the group like to decide?

“

Who else would like to share?

“

What information would help?

“

This is your group's decision.

Questions open space. Directions take space.

Members write and revise their own Code of Conduct

01 WE TREAT ONE ANOTHER WITH RESPECT.

02 DIFFERENT OPINIONS + COMMUNICATION STYLES ARE WELCOME.

03 EVERYONE HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE.

04 IT IS OKAY TO DISAGREE—or to pass.

05 WE ASK BEFORE GIVING PERSONAL ASSISTANCE.

06 WE RESPECT PRIVACY + PERSONAL BOUNDARIES.

07 WE ADDRESS PROBLEMS WITHOUT ATTACKING PEOPLE.

08 WE MAKE DECISIONS USING OUR CHOSEN PROCESS.

These are examples only. Members decide—and can change—their agreements.

Challenges are cues to ask—not commands to take over

THE GROUP IS QUIET

Offer time, other ways to communicate, or the choice to pass.

EVERYONE LOOKS TO THE FACILITATOR

Return it: “That’s a decision for the group. What do you think?”

ONE PERSON IS TALKING MUCH MORE

Ask members how they want to handle turn-taking—without shaming anyone.

SOMEONE SAYS IT IS BORING OR WANTS TO LEAVE

Listen. Ask what would make the group meaningful. Participation is a choice.

Silence, frustration, and uneven participation are information. Ask what members need.

Adult leadership includes conflict, choice, and consequences

WHEN MEMBERS DISAGREE

- 1 Identify the issue
- 2 Understand each viewpoint
- 3 Ask questions
- 4 Listen to one another
- 5 Name possible solutions
- 6 Use the group's process

WHEN A DECISION HAS RISK

Share clear, unbiased information about:

**BENEFITS
RISKS
CONSEQUENCES
ALTERNATIVES**

Support informed choice. Do not replace the person's choice.

A disability does not erase the right to choose, learn, or change one's mind.

Leadership grows through practice

START TOGETHER

Know one another
Name communication preferences
Create group agreements
Learn the roles
Choose leaders
Decide how meetings work

THEN TAKE ON MORE

Lead meetings • plan events • manage funds
contact organizations • speak in public
advocate for policy change • mentor new leaders

As member leadership grows, the facilitator becomes less visible.



Members choose the issues that matter

RIGHTS + DIRECTION

- Disability rights
- Self-determination
- Supported decision-making
- Speaking up in planning
- Consent + privacy

DAILY LIFE

- Employment
- Education
- Transportation
- Housing
- Health care
- Money management

RELATIONSHIPS + SAFETY

- Friendships
- Personal boundaries
- Community inclusion
- Accessibility
- Safety

VOICE + CHANGE

- Voting + civic life
- Public speaking
- Community service
- Changing unfair policies
- Connecting with advocates

The list is never the agenda. Members' priorities are the agenda.

Measure member leadership—not facilitator performance

MEMBERS ASK

- ? Are we discussing what matters to us?
- ? Are self-advocates making important decisions?
- ? Can everyone participate in a way that works?
- ? Are our elected leaders actually leading?
- ? Are we taking action—and building new skills?

FACILITATORS ASK

- ? Did self-advocates lead and decide?
- ? Did I ask before helping?
- ? Did I provide access without taking control?
- ? Did I allow enough communication time?
- ? What can I do less of next time?

DO LESS FOR MEMBERS → MAKE MORE SPACE FOR MEMBERS TO LEAD

THEIR VOICES. THEIR CHOICES.



SELF-ADVOCACY MEANS ACTION

THEIR LEADERSHIP. THEIR GROUP.