

Boo-lieve In Your Voice

Self Advocacy and Leadership

A practical guide for self-advocates,
allies, and community partners

voices • choices • leadership



Icebreaker: Your Strength

Choose what fits for you. You can speak, point, raise your hand, or tell a partner.

Speaking Up

share your needs
and ideas

Listening

make space for
other voices

Helping Others

encourage and
include people

Solving Problems

find fair next
steps

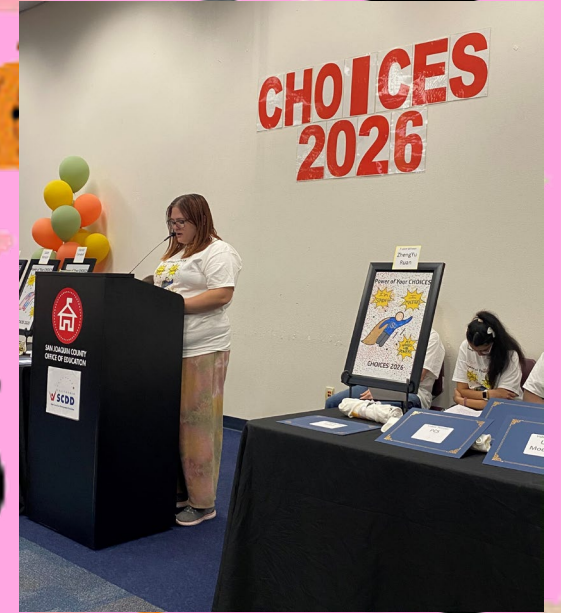
**Which leadership strength feels
most like you?**

**Why did you choose it? There is no
wrong answer. Leadership can be
quiet, shared, and practiced.**

Leadership has more than one shape



Introduction



Today's Spooky Adventure

By the end, participants can name the steps to launch and keep a council strong.

1

Understand why self-advocacy matters for adults with disabilities.

2

Plan your first council: members, roles, meetings, and supports.

3

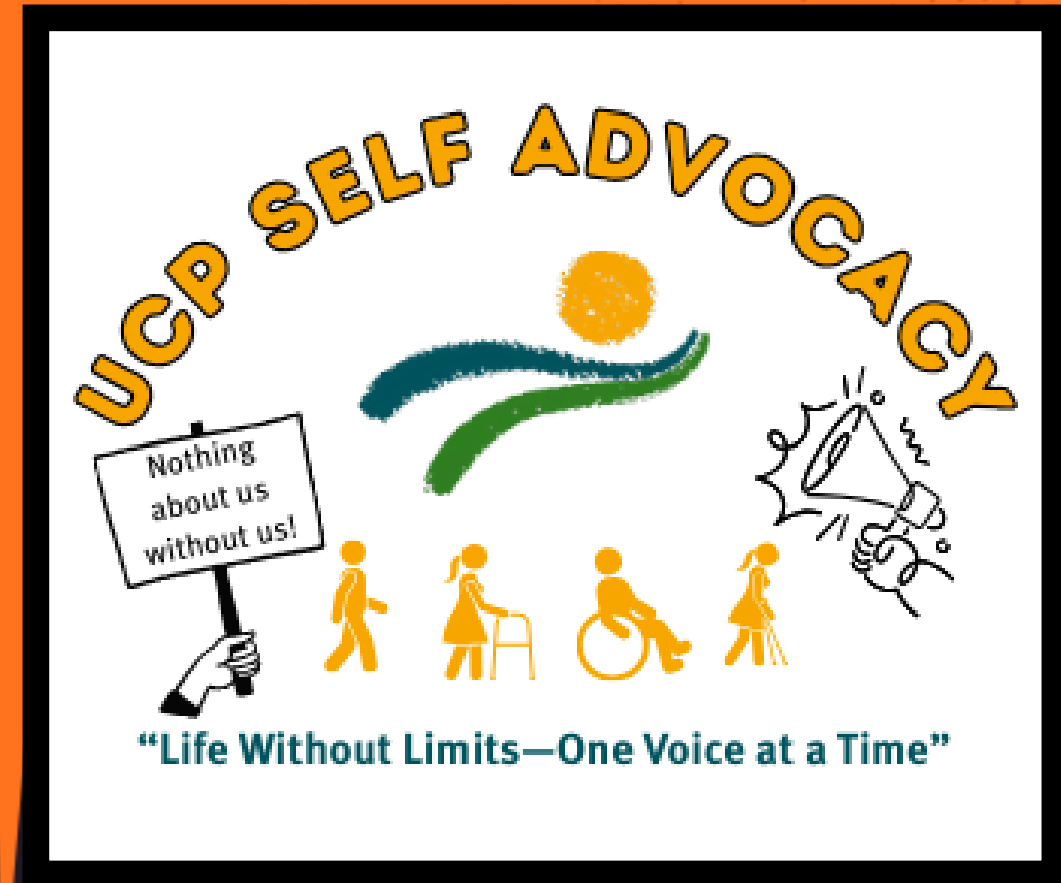
Find local resources through regional groups and partners.

4

Run monthly meetings that lead to real action.

5

Hold annual elections and grow new leaders.



What Is Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy means knowing yourself, knowing your rights, and speaking up for what you need.

- 01 Know Yourself**
strengths, goals, preferences
- 02 Know Your Rights**
services, choices, protections
- 03 Speak Up**
share ideas and ask questions
- 04 Take Action**
vote, plan, lead, follow through

Lead your life — with support

Self-advocacy does not mean doing everything alone. It means choosing the support you need.

Practice together

A council is a safe place to listen, solve problems, vote, and build confidence.

Council = a safe place to practice leadership

Why It Matters in California

Adults with disabilities need spaces where their voices shape services, communities, and systems.

Choice & control

People should help decide their goals, services, schedules, and supports.

Rights & access

Self-advocates can spot barriers and ask for accessible options.

Safety & respect

Councils can teach people how to report concerns and ask for help.

Community inclusion

Adults with disabilities belong in work, recreation, civic life, and leadership.

**When people speak up,
services get better.**

California's developmental services system includes regional centers and statewide advocacy organizations.

Self-advocates are needed in those conversations.

Council Blueprint

Start simple. Make it clear who leads, what the council does, and how decisions happen.



Purpose

Why we meet

Officers

Who leads

Rules

Respect + access

Members

Who participates

Facilitator

Support, not control,
waits to be asked

Action

What we do next

**A good council is member-led
and advisor-supported.**

The Facilitator's Role

Facilitators support access. Members lead the group.

Ask First

Find out what support members want.

Make access easier

Use plain language and allow enough time.

Support leaders

Help officers carry out their own responsibilities.

Return decisions

Ask : “What does the group think?”

**Help only when asked.
Let members lead.**

**Do not answer for members, push a
decision, or take over officer roles.**

**Before stepping in, ask:
Is my help needed for access?**

How to Start: Brew up a Great Group

A launch plan keeps the council from feeling overwhelming.



Tip: Do not wait for perfect. Start with a small group, a clear agenda, and one goal.

Monthly Council Meetings

A strong meeting has rhythm, respect, and clear next steps.

Welcome + Access Check

Do we need breaks, plain language, visuals, or extra time?

Old Business

What did we promise last month? What happened?

New Issues

Members share concerns, ideas, and questions.

Resource Spotlight

Invite a local group or learn about one resource.

Action + Vote

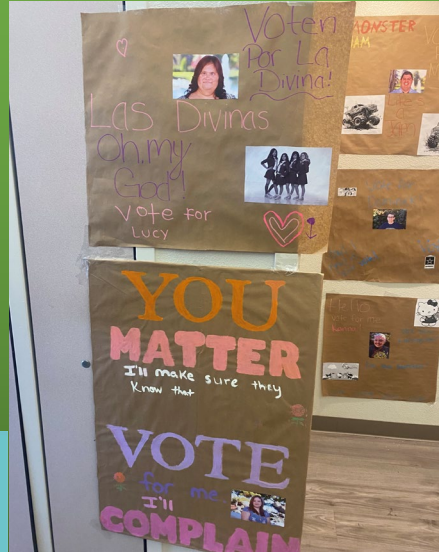
Choose what to do, who will do it, and when to report back.

Meeting Toolkit

- ✓ agenda
- ✓ ground rules
- ✓ accessible materials
- ✓ minutes
- ✓ action list
- ✓ next meeting date
- ✓ facilitator information

Annual Elections Grow Leaders

Elections give members practice with choice, responsibility, and respectful transitions.



Before elections

Explain roles, nominations, eligibility, and accessible ballots.

During elections

Use fair voting, privacy, and support for all communication styles.

After elections

Announce results kindly, train officers, and thank every candidate.

Possible officer roles:
President • Vice President •
Secretary • Treasurer •
Sergeant in Arms

Finding Local Resources

A council becomes stronger when members know who can help.



Regional Center

Service coordinator, IPP team, vendor list, local service information.

SCDD Regional Office

Training, leadership opportunities, regional advocacy and systems-change support.

Disability Rights California / OCRA

Rights information, trainings, and advocacy support for regional center clients.

Community Partners

Independent living centers, People First groups, libraries, transit agencies, colleges, parks, employers.

Invite the Community In

Resource-building is relationship-building.

Ask

What do members need to learn?

Invite

Bring in speakers and resource tables.

Visit

Tour agencies, city offices, workplaces, and community events.

Share

Create a resource board, flyer, or monthly spotlight.

Partnership ideas: regional center staff • SCDD • DRC/OCRA • transit • public library • voter registration • job programs • recreation • emergency preparedness

How to Keep the Council Strong

Maintenance is the magic: habits, follow-through, and belonging.

Make it accessible

Plain language, visuals, breaks, choices in communication.

Train leaders

Practice agendas, speaking, listening, and respectful disagreement.

Keep records

Minutes, attendance, votes, resource contacts, action items.

Celebrate wins

Recognize members, speakers, projects, and new skills.

Check impact

Ask: What changed because we met? What should we improve?

Common Questions

There is no single perfect council. Build what works for your members.

Members

No set minimum. Start with a small, committed group.

Officer roles

Start with a chair, vice chair, and secretary. Add roles as needed.

Money

Begin low-cost. Budget for access, supplies, and projects.

Connections

Connect through SCDD, People First, OCRA, and local partners.

The best rule: member-led

Members choose the purpose, size, roles, priorities, and supports. Write decisions down, then revisit them as the council grows.

Your Voice Is the Magic

Start with one meeting. Listen to one concern.
Take one action. Then keep going.

Council Pledge

I will use my voice.

I will listen to others.

I will ask questions.

I will help make my community more inclusive.



Questions + Ideas

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