



## **A4AI National Coalitions & Working Groups**

### **Membership and General Rules of Engagement**

**November 2017**

This brief provides an overview of the objectives and work methods of the **A4AI National Coalitions and their thematic Working Groups**. It aims to clarify the framework and rules for National Coalitions, Coalitions Working Groups and their respective leaders.

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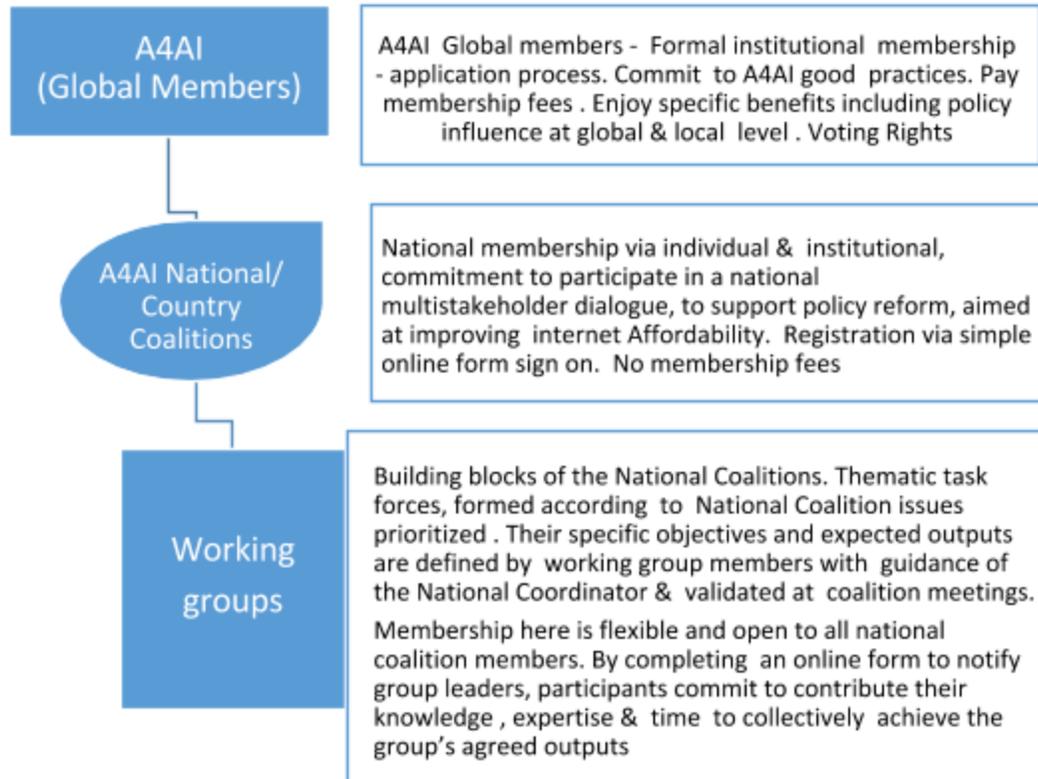
## I. A4AI National Coalitions and Working Groups

Launched in 2013, the Alliance for Affordable Internet ([A4AI](#)) is the world's broadest technology sector coalition, with member organisations from across the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors committed to using policy and regulatory reform to lower the cost of internet access. A4AI currently has [82 institutional global members](#), all of which have met the membership criteria, have gone through a [formal application process](#), have committed to the [A4AI good policy and regulatory practices](#) and to supporting the Alliance's work through membership donations, fees and active partnership. (See more information on **A4AI Global Membership** [here](#).)

A4AI is active in a number of ways, including through its policy focused [research](#), on-going policy [advocacy](#) at the global, regional and national levels, and most importantly, through its direct country engagements in selected [countries](#). In each selected country, A4AI signs an MOU with the Government agreeing to jointly collaborate towards policy reform in the sector and establishes a multi-stakeholder **National Coalition**, which serves as a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue and action aimed at designing and supporting the implementation of policy and regulatory reforms.

Once formed, the National Coalitions **define policy and regulatory priorities** to focus their work toward improving broadband affordability and access in the country. Priority areas in member countries have included: infrastructure sharing regulations, open access policies, ICT fiscal policies, Universal Service and Access Fund efficiency, taxation review, effective broadband plans, research and data, gender and social Inclusion, among other areas.

Once National Coalitions have been formed and have selected priority work areas, **working groups are formed to tackle each area**; a working group leader or champion is identified to steer and coordinate activities to achieve the group's work plans.



**Figure 1: A4AI Membership: Summary of membership grouping**

## II. Objectives of the A4AI National Coalition Working Groups

- **Provide an open and trustworthy platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue and informed discussions on priority areas of the National Coalition.** Through working group activities, including workshops and seminars, coalition support and coordination, develop customized policy solutions supported by robust research, good practice cases, and informed by insights from all stakeholders inputs.
- **Develop and implement clear workplans, with defined objectives, outputs, and outcomes, collectively validated by the group and the overall coalition.** Workplans should address and outline how the groups intend to develop policy proposals, as well as identify research needs and strategies to building consensus on collective positions and proposals to be submitted for consideration. Plans should be agreed to at the beginning of the year, regularly assessed for progress and made available via the country page on [A4AI website](#).
- **Disseminate specific thematic knowledge and good practices in support of the Coalition's work.** Group members are encouraged to participate and generate discussions via agreed online chat platforms and face-to-face meetings. Thematic experts are often employed for knowledge-sharing sessions to support the Coalition



and help them make informed choices around policy options or to solve relevant issues that arise.

### III. Working Group Guiding Values

- **Mutual trust and respect** are the basic foundations in a multi-stakeholder based working group or community. Discussions should respect the theme or objectives of the group, and stay focused on these issues.
- **Equal voice** for all members in all matters. The equal participation of all members is crucially important; views must be heard from all, no matter how dissenting. No contributor should be made to feel inferior to the rest.
- **Proactive participation** from all stakeholders is strongly encouraged. We praise and encourage contributions of knowledge and expertise from the diverse community. Coalition Working Group Leads/Champions play a key role to ensure full participation from all individuals.

### IV. Membership in A4AI National Coalitions and Working Groups

- **A4AI National Coalitions are open platforms.** Anyone who is an active or interested player in the wider ICT/internet space can join the National Coalition and request membership in one or several of its working groups. Members may also leave should they choose to. However, we encourage members to notify the Working Group Champion if they wish to leave.
- National Coalition **membership can be both individual and institutional.** In the case of the latter, we encourage institutions to nominate a representative. We encourage members to indicate when they are presenting their institutional perspective versus their individual ones during discussions, so that the views may be captured accurately.
- **You may choose to be a member of the National Coalition but not be part of any Working Groups.** However, we encourage all members to ensure their contributions and inputs are heard via the Working Groups. In order to join a Working Group, you must be a member of the National A4AI Coalition.
- Each country page on the A4AI website ([a4ai.org](http://a4ai.org)) includes a **link to join the coalition**; stakeholders may submit their information to that form to express their interest in joining your National Coalition. If you already are a member of the National A4AI Coalition and wish to join a (new or existing) group, you may use the same form found on the country pages via the A4AI website.
- A4AI strives to ensure all stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute to coalition activities. Financial support for travel and accommodation is occasionally available to representatives of civil society organisations that are active members of



the National Coalition. As funds are limited, support will be awarded in a competitive process. Support is institutional and representatives are required to be a member of the invited civil society organisation and must meet certain outlined criteria. You may find details of the [guidelines for travel support](#) and please **note that the team can only reimburse pre-approved expenses.**

## V. Working Group Member Responsibilities

Working Group members are expected to:

- **Introduce themselves to the group.** Once added to the Working Group, new members must introduce themselves to other members, by sending out a few lines to the working group email list (e.g., name, role, position, if representing an institution or not, reason for joining working group or vested interest, etc.).
- **Be active participants** who share information, ask questions, research, respond to requests, share viewpoints, and discuss issues and proposals. All members must agree to follow the collectively established discussion agenda.
- Respect the **email and social media etiquette** (*see VII and VIII*) and the rules outlined in this document.
- **Respect** the cultural, linguistic, political, sexual and religious **diversity** of the A4AI constituency; derogatory or offensive comments are not acceptable at any time.
- **Not** to use the group mailing lists for political, religious, or commercial agendas, nor for advertising or **propaganda**. Any event that would be of interest to the group should be sent to the Working Group lead/champion for vetting before circulating to the wider group.
- **Provide and maintain a functional email address.** Emails that “bounce back” or present errors would be automatically deleted by the system, and membership contact could be lost. Do alert the Working Group lead or National Coordinator of any change in email address.

## VI. Tools Available

- Working Groups communicate via a **mailing list**, enabling threaded discussions via the internet or email. The most common platform used currently is the **the Google Groups platform**. Posting contributions to the Working Group mailing list is possible by both email and the Google Group web interface.
- **Additional tools** provided for communications between working groups include Google Drive folders and shared calendars. Chat room/conference call facilities such as *GoToMeeting* or *Webex* can be set up upon request by the Working Group lead or the National Coordinator. These facilities are able to sustain webinars and



discussions among large groups. Chat/text discussions can also be saved for future reference.

## VII. Privacy, Intellectual Rights, Access, and Public-Private Space

- Posting and receiving messages within the group pages, accessing Working Group mailing lists and mail archives, resources, etc., are open to **registered members only**.
- Postings and **member contributions or views expressed in the groups should not be shared with non-members, published, or forwarded without authorisation**. It is mandatory that members seek an author's permission to publish or forward any posting or email, partially or totally, to non-group member(s) or to a public space (e.g., blog, web page, other social media, etc.). This process is particularly important to allow group members, including public officers, the right to freely express their views while knowing their opinions expressed during the group discussion won't be disseminated outside the group without their formal consent.
- Groups leaders are not authorised to erase or modify a member's archived post, profile data, or posting history without the expressed permission of the particular member(s).
- **No person is authorised to use the membership list** or email addresses for any purpose other than for A4AI Coalition business.

## VIII. The Role of the Working Group Leader/Champion

- The **National Coordinator** works in close collaboration with the A4AI regional coordinator and the A4AI team to set an overarching vision and objectives for the country/national coalition. They are often the interface between the National Coalition and the A4AI team.
- **National Coordinators provide guidance** and leadership to the working group leaders in each country ensuring work plans and objectives are adhered to.
- **The Working Group leader is a facilitator** that works toward achieving the specific objectives of the Working Group, but who also allows for ample discussions around each priority topic. If anything is unclear to any of the members of the community, it is important that all member feel comfortable and confident to reach out to the Working Group leader for clarification.
- The Working Group leader should **support new members** to join/subscribe to the platform, and should take initiative to onboard them — working to get them up-to-speed on the group objectives, progress to-date, achievements, and integrated in the ongoing activities.
- S/he can play a **moderator role**, in particular aiming to:



- Keep the group discussion focused on its theme and objectives;
- Allow and incentivise all members to express their views and inputs. S/he may moderate the pace of discussions to give all participants time to participate;
- Maintain a “clean” and safe environment and moderate discussions in a dispassionate and fair manner.
- Alert any member via private email or call should they send personal messages, inflammatory comments, insults, or disrespectful posts, and/or redirect them if they are having one-to-one discussions in public;
- Nurture the group, setting a detailed discussion agenda with members, keeping track of key milestones and deadlines, calling for inputs and facilitating specific discussions, creating and coordinating inputs on draft documents, and sharing relevant documents links, research or news items;
- Liaise with the National Coordinator, other Working Groups, and periodically inform the overall coalition membership of the Working Group’s ongoing discussions, priorities, and results.

## **IX. Decision-making, Consensus or Votes**

- Any time there is a need to prepare a collective working group document (e.g., the Terms of Reference for a white paper or a policy proposal for submission), produce a public position or an action proposal/request, and the **A4AI Working Group leader will facilitate the discussion processes to reach a consensus**, as much as possible.
- If no consensus can be reached, a **vote shall be organised** by the moderator proposing clearly the options as follows:
  - Sending in a single mail message with **"vote" in the subject line** should contain all voting instructions, options (as different texts or decision items), deadlines for votes, references and any other relevant information.
  - A "grace period" of at least **five (5) working days** should be reserved to receive comments, disapprovals, amendments, alternative proposals, etc. All silence and abstention shall be considered to be an "assent".
  - The moderator may be assisted by one or several volunteer members for vote scrutiny. **No voting quorum is required.**
  - **If there is no opposition**, amendment or counter-proposition on a decision request, then it will be considered **approved by consensus**.



## **X. Use of Social and Other Communications Platforms**

- The official and formal tool to organise and articulate the work of the Working Groups are the mailing lists. In some cases, members can also use a social media platform (e.g., WhatsApp) to alert members of important events or items. Where used, the link to the WhatsApp should be shared periodically through the formal group email, but **no one should be on the WhatsApp group without being on the Working Group email list**, as that is the formal platform for distributing invitations, discussions, statements, etc.
- Upon joining the WhatsApp group, each member will be required to introduce themselves by sharing the following information: (a) first name, (b) surname; (c) organisation (d) interest in joining group
- Members may only post relevant subject matter and should refrain from any other content such as prayers, daily inspirational messages/images, videos, jokes, political commentary, etc. (Same rules listed in previous sections apply.)
- Members should exercise discretion at all times when using any of the above mentioned platforms ensuring privacy rules are also adhered to.