



# Independent Living (IL) Philosophy

## A Discussion Guide for Councils

This document is designed to guide meaningful conversations with your SILC Members about their understanding, alignment, and lived commitment to the core values of the Independent Living (IL) Philosophy. Please use these prompts to assess whether members are embracing the foundational principles that define disability-led, consumer-driven IL work.

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## **Core IL Philosophy Awareness**

IL is a civil rights movement, not a service model.

People with disabilities are experts in their own lives.

IL values autonomy, choice, access, and equity.

IL requires a lifetime commitment to disability rights and justice.

## **Respect and Empathy**

As the only federally mandated movement that is disability-led and cross-disability, we understand the shared struggles in the fight for equity.

Therefore, we treat one another with empathy, understanding, and respect. We work to strengthen unity within the disability community and honor the many different experiences and perspectives that people bring.

### **Key Points:**

- Demonstrates empathy and understanding toward peers and community members.
- Supports unity within the disability community.
- Values diverse experiences and perspectives.

### **Discussion Prompts:**

- How can we help create a welcoming and respectful environment within the Council?
- How can we support lifting all voices, including those less often heard?

## Civil Rights and Disability Justice

The disability community includes many different kinds of people, and some face unfair treatment not only because of their disability but also because of other parts of their identity, such as race or gender identity. We understand that disability rights are connected to other civil rights. Because of this, we commit to building diversity, fairness, and access in every part of Independent Living—our leadership, policies, programs, staff, and decision-making. We work to ensure our practices include and welcome people from diverse cultural backgrounds and individuals with all types of disabilities.

### Key Points:

- Expresses commitment to equity and justice for people with disabilities.
- Understands intersectionality and its relevance to disability rights.
- Fully support accessible policies and programs for everyone.
- Recognizes disability rights as civil rights.
- Recognize there is no place for disability hierarchy.
- Disability Rights creates a pathway to disability justice.

### Discussion Prompts:

- Can you share an example of how our SILC can support disability justice in our work or community?
- How do you view the connection between disability rights and broader civil rights movements?
- Does our council's membership, policies, procedures, and the SPIL reflect our commitment to disability justice and civil rights?

## Disability Leadership

Leadership for independent living must be vested in individuals with disabilities (not non-disabled family members, service providers, or other community-adjacent representatives). We commit to being disability-led, informed, and operated.

### Key Points:

- Affirms that IL leadership must be disability-led.
- Supports maintaining a majority of disabled individuals in governance roles. We commit to filling the executive director and board president positions with individuals who proudly identify as having a disability.
- Understands why leadership by non-disabled individuals can undermine IL values.

### Discussion Prompts:

- Why is it important that IL spaces are led by people with disabilities?
- What constitutes a significant disability? Who decides?
- How do you promote or support disability leadership in groups you are part of?

## **Disability-Led Advocacy**

We support advocacy led by people with disabilities. We believe that outside groups or systems should not speak for disabled people or make decisions without disability community representation. We commit to working together to uplift grassroots efforts and community-driven advocacy that reflects lived experiences and priorities of people with disabilities.

### **Key Points:**

- Supports advocacy led by people with disabilities.
- Understands that external systems should not speak on behalf of people with disabilities.
- Our interdependence with the community is guided by us. The voices of people with disabilities must be prioritized and amplified. We appreciate and value families and allies while also recognizing that their experience is not the same as ours.
- Encourages grassroots and consumer-driven advocacy.

### **Discussion Prompts:**

- How can we (SILC) ensure that the voices of disabled advocates are centered in decision-making spaces?

## Self-Determination and Choice

We believe that people with disabilities know what is best for their own lives. We support the social model of disability, which says that society—not the individual—is responsible for removing barriers so people with disabilities can make decisions and live the way they choose. We reject the medical model, which has often separated, limited, and harmed disabled people.

### Key Points:

- Understands and supports the social model of disability.
- Promote self-advocacy and dignity of risk.
- Supports full decision-making rights for people with disabilities.

### Discussion Prompts:

- What does self-determination mean to you in the context of Independent Living?
- How do you navigate conversations around independence and choice within systems that restrict them?

## **Deinstitutionalization**

We fully support people with disabilities living in their own homes and communities with the support they choose. We strongly oppose any form of institutionalization. We recognize that segregated or isolated living situations harm people by taking away freedom, independence, and connection to their community.

### **Key Points:**

- Fully supports community-based living for all people with disabilities.
- Opposes institutionalization in all forms.
- Understands the harm caused by segregated or isolated living settings.

### **Discussion Prompts:**

- What does true community inclusion look like to you?
- How have you challenged institutional bias in your work or community?

## Philosophy Driven

We commit to staying free from conflicts of interest in Independent Living work. This means we uphold consumer choice as essential, and we actively advocate for Independent Living values in any organization that has not yet embraced them. We also commit to being open, honest, and accountable in all our work.

### Key Points:

- Understands what constitutes a conflict of interest in IL work.
- Promotes IL philosophy within broader communities and organizations.
- Commitment to transparency and accountability.

### Discussion Prompts:

- How do you identify and navigate potential conflicts of interest in disability advocacy?
- Is this reflected in our SILCs Conflict-of-Interest Statement and our operations?

## Self-Reflection

Do I feel fully committed to Independent Living (IL) values?

Do I need more information or examples about the IL philosophy and the direction we are working toward for the future?

Am I willing to identify areas where I can grow and further develop in my role?

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