

‘PARTICIPATORY WORKING GROUPS’ & THE SELECTION PROCESS OF THEIR MEMBERS

Amended version

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INTRODUCTION

Auroville is a society based on universal values, governing itself with an evolving level of integrity based on living these very values. For this proposal, the 12 qualities / powers as represented in the Mother’s symbol are chosen as basic values on which we all can agree.

Sincerity, Humility, Gratitude, Perseverance, Aspiration, Receptivity, Progress, Courage, Goodness, Generosity, Equality and Peace.

“The first eight concern the attitude towards the Divine, and the last four towards humanity.” - The Mother

In essence ... the 12 powers are the vibrations that are necessary for the complete manifestation. It is the symbol of manifestation, double perfection, in essence and in manifestation, in the creation.
Sri Aurobindo

As long as you are for some and against others, you are necessarily outside the Truth. You should constantly keep goodwill and love in your heart and let them pour out on all with tranquillity and equality. The Mother

OVERALL VISION

The ‘Participatory Working Group’ system aims towards creating an organisation of which the above mentioned values are the elements; an organisation which fosters transparency, communication and participation, aligning its actions and goals with ‘The Auroville Charter’, ‘A Dream’, ‘To Be A True Aurovilian’ and other writings by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

The aim of this approach is to reinforce the involvement of the community in its day-to-day functioning and a sense of dedicated sharing of the work, while guaranteeing full membership of Working Groups throughout the year. The objective is to move from conventional governance to a self-organizing participatory model.

The mandated members of Working Groups (here termed as **members**) are selected during the Participatory Selection Process from registered residents of Auroville chosen for their experience, expertise, integrity and commitment to the ideals of Auroville. Skills of analysis, strategy, action planning, communication and a willingness to work towards unity and harmony are required.

WORKING GROUPS INCLUDED IN THESE GUIDELINES

- Working Committee (WCom)
- Auroville Council (AVC)
- Funds and Assets Management Committee (FAMC)
- L’avenir d’Auroville (L’avenir, ATDC)
- Entry Board

INCLUSION OF A RESOURCE POOL

In order to assist the Working Group members and to ensure efficient and transparent functioning of the groups, a resource pool is maintained by each working group, from which community members are chosen as required and according to the task. These are identified as **Resource Persons** of various expertise and skills, including facilitation.

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Resource persons are drawn from the community at large as well as from outside when needed, enabling swift access to the human resource required and an efficient, prompt functioning of the Working Groups.

A separate pool of Silent Presence Keepers is maintained. Members of the pool are given training specific to this work.

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PART 1. WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

“The conditions for being an organiser (it's not "governing", it's "organizing") should be as follows: no more desires, no more preferences, no more attractions, no more repulsions - a perfect equality for all. Sincere, naturally, but that goes without saying: wherever insincerity creeps in, it acts like a poison.” The Mother

The number of persons to be selected for each working group shall be according to their respective mandates.

Members hold the responsibility to work towards agreement, taking all aspects of an issue into account and are to arrive at decisions that are well-documented, underlined with clear motivation and aligned with the aims and ideals of Auroville.

Members must be registered residents of Auroville, selected for their experience, expertise, integrity and commitment to the ideals of Auroville. They are the official, signatory members of the working group. Members cannot be simultaneously a selected member more than one working group under PWG guidelines.

Members are responsible for the coordination, implementation and fulfilment of the task according to their mandate.

Motto: “I offer to serve the work in a committed and impartial way in a spirit of equanimity, inclusiveness, efficiency and generosity. I cooperate and contribute to enable the best outcome of the task in alignment with the ideals of Auroville.”

Functioning of Members in the working groups

- Members meet to study and respond to various issues and emergencies by prioritising long, medium and short term issues, making sure that none are left unattended.
- Subjects are distributed between the members so that each subject has one responsible member. A member may form a subgroup/task force team if required, with an adequate number of facilitators and Resource Persons, and together they see how to proceed with a specific subject and set a certain time frame for completion. There might be multiple facilitators if a task is divided, but each task or part of a task has only one facilitator responsible for its completion. Ultimate responsibility stays with the members.
- The Members of the working group together ensure effective monitoring of the work progress by tracking closures or extensions of projects at hand.

For the Working Committee (WCom), FAMC and L’avenir, a number of the Members must have experience in dealing with Officials of the Indian Government on all levels, Central as well as Regional and Local Government & Administration. The WCom will collaborate with the Auroville Council (AVC) or other Working Groups on issues where such contacts are required.

Subgroups formed by Working Groups

When a subgroup is formed, it consists of a member, one or more facilitators and the relevant Resource Persons.

- A member, when assigned a task, may call on one or more facilitators from the Resource Pool from the Auroville community at large or, when needed, on expertise from outside Auroville.

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Together, they select the resource persons with the experience, skill and knowledge needed to form a subgroup or task force.

- The subgroup consisting of members, facilitator/s and Resource Persons will in a timely manner arrive at a jointly proposed solution. They evaluate their solution with regard to the ideals and values of Auroville before finalising their conclusion. Regular reporting to the concerned working group(s) is required.
- The subgroup presents its solution to all members of the respective working group, who generally will abide by the solution, arrived at by the specific subgroup created for the purpose.
- In case the solution is found to be biased or incomplete, another member will be chosen to create a new subgroup and look into the task once more. Further suitably skilled, experienced and unbiased resource persons can be sought if needed.
- If the second round still does not find agreement among the members, the subject will be brought to the Residents Assembly via the Residents Assembly Service.

Process of Decision Making within the Working Group

Depending on the respective tasks of a working group, its Members identify the various types of decisions/validations to be made in categories like: routine tasks; day to day tasks; emergency cases; long term/ strategy issues; cases needing approval from the Residents Assembly. Members hold the trust to take decisions on behalf of the Residents Assembly in any of the above-mentioned types of decisions, unless:

- The subject involves the forming of a subgroup, in which case the subgroup will give a recommendation.
- The subject is of such a nature that it has to be referred to the Residents Assembly via the Residents Assembly Service

An appeals process is available for any member of the community to appeal against decisions of the WCom, AVC and FAMC. A copy of this process can be found on Auronet.

Communication responsibility

One Member is responsible for and in charge of internal and external communication. The working group is responsible to avail of communication tools or find relevant resource persons in order to establish a well-functioning system, such as:

- Create and maintain an online forum for the working group.
- Assure that the internal communication flow within subgroups/task groups is functioning well.
- Draft and publish a team membership list along with profiles with photos and the roles/functions of respective Members.
- Determine conditions to access to mailing lists, and assure that the agreed-on ethical code of conduct and confidentiality is followed in all group email/document exchanges.
- Draft monthly work reports to be approved by the other Members. These are published through Auronet, News & Notes, RAS and, in urgent cases, via mass mail.

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Individual and Group Assessments

- The Working Groups will conduct twice annually, an internal assessment regarding group dynamics and work output. The study group on organisation or the Auroville Council if so required may arrange expert facilitation for this.

In connection with the twice annual internal assessment exercise, the Working Groups will prepare an interactive Information Meeting with the community in collaboration with RAS.

Term, mandate and turnover

- Members are selected for a period of 3 years.
- Having completed 3 years, members can be selected by nomination or self-nomination for a second term through open participation in the Selection Process. After 2 terms, there has to be a time lapse of 2 years before a Member can again nominate herself/himself or be nominated for membership in the same working group.
- There will be a yearly selection process when approximately a third of the Members of a working group will be replaced. This will ensure continuity in the Working Groups with a system of staggered turnover.
- In the beginning of the yearly selection process, the Working Group informs the community via the Residents Assembly Service through News & Notes and AuroNet which members will be replaced and which skills are needed from the new-to-be members.

Resignation of Members

When a Member wants to resign during the term, s/he is requested to stay on until November and to make a proper handover of all her/his tasks. If this is not possible, the working group can ask a suitable individual from within the Resource Pool or the community at large to join as an interim solution and fill the role as a Member, but without decision making powers.

The interim person will stay on till the yearly selection process in November and can, if so wished, nominate her/himself or be nominated for the selection process.

Removal of Members during the term

To be Member of a working group implies effective participation, conscientious presence and teamwork. Members who are not executing their work as assigned by the group and/or turn out to be ill-matched with the team can – after all attempts of integration have failed – be asked by the Working Group to step out. For specific tasks they can serve the Group as a Resource Person. In a case like this, it will be announced in the monthly working group report and through the RAS in a transparent, open way.

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Commitment of members

Members of working groups are expected to commit to their term of office, or at least until the next selection process. If they are unable to make that commitment, then they should not accept nomination for the group. The exception would be circumstances outside their control.

Training and Education

New members should be integrated into the group according to the needs of the group and the individual. Specific training may be given according to the need, and joining the group as a Silent Presence Keeper is encouraged.

The aim is to create an organisation, which fosters transparency, communication and participation, consciously aligning its actions and goals with the ideals of Auroville. In this context Members are invited to foster a spirit of learning amongst themselves, and expand/refine their abilities through training in fields such as leadership, organisational and conflict resolution workshops according to need. Such training and education may be open for all Aurovilians who wish to prepare themselves to take up organisational work.

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PART 2. RESOURCE POOL OF VOLUNTARY SUPPORT PERSONS

Aurovilians can offer their skills as Facilitators, Resource Persons or Silent Presence Keepers to the Working Groups at any time either voluntarily or at the request/invitation of the Working Groups.

1) Facilitators

Facilitators are persons with the skills and experience needed to help facilitate subgroups created for specific topics.

- A Working Group Member, when creating a subgroup for a specific task, can invite one or more facilitators to participate. Together, they select resource persons with the needed experience and expertise from the Resource Pool, the Auroville community at large, including expertise from outside Auroville when needed. The team thus created takes responsibility to complete the assigned task in a timely manner, in alignment with the ideals of Auroville, taking all views and concerns into consideration.
- The facilitator/s keeps the Member informed of the status, outcome or any occurring problem. All team members of a subgroup have access to emails relevant to the task they are involved with.
- Required features: facilitation skills, team spirit, striving for equanimity and omni-partiality, collaboration and goal setting, in alignment with the ideals of Auroville.

Motto: "I offer my capacity to lead and bring people together to facilitate a given task for the team. I cooperate and contribute what it takes for the best outcome of the task in alignment with the ideals of Auroville."

2) Resource Persons

Resource persons are individuals, chosen from the Auroville pool of resource persons or, if needed, from outside, who have the experience, skill and knowledge to help a subgroup or task force in its fulfilment of a task.

- Resource persons are needed for all relevant fields of expertise and experience, including human relations and community experience.
- The time commitment of a resource person is need-based and thus allows flexibility to help the team according to her/his availability.
- Required features: knowledge, experience, expertise, integrity, equanimity, wisdom and awareness of the values and aims of Auroville.

Motto: "I offer my expertise and experience to complete a given task for the team. I cooperate and contribute towards the best outcome of the task in alignment with the ideals of Auroville."

3) Silent Presence Keeper

A Silent Presence Keeper offers her/his service as a silent observer of the working group in the spirit of a supportive presence of the community, holding a space of unity and harmony. Training is given by the Silent Present Keepers' group linked to the Auroville Council.

- Silent Presence Keepers are Aurovilians invited to be present during the meetings without participating in the discussion or giving comments/opinions on the topics, neither during nor any time after the meetings. In exceptional cases a non-Aurovilian may act as silent listener in agreement with the Working Group.

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- Silent Presence Keepers may be invited by Members to give their observations in a manner to be determined by the Working Group. The Working Group can invite 1-2 silent listeners to sit in on their activities/meetings.
- Required features: silent presence, learning, goodwill, restraint, equanimity, confidentiality.

Motto: “I offer myself as a Silent Presence Keeper as a wisdom presence enhancing the process of the Working Group, and aspire for the success of the task in alignment with the ideals of Auroville.”

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PART 3. SELECTION PROCESS

1. Introduction

The Selection Process has been designed with a selection team chosen by a random selection from the community, using a transparent method. The team will be given skills and information to enable them to do the work but will be free to make their own judgements.

It has been agreed that Auroville’s values should be part of this process.

For the selection process, an organisational team will be created by the RAS comprising RAS members, silent observers, facilitators and other volunteers formed from an open call to the community, according to the skills required for the process. Members of this team shall have no direct link with the potential candidates or selectors.

2. The Candidates

The RAS will keep track of the mandates of all Working Groups and the terms of the members. Each working group shall notify the RAS at least 12 weeks before the end of the terms of their members, and also all vacancies due to resignations or other unexpected reasons.

The RAS and all concerned WG’s shall work together to plan the timing of the selection process. As far as possible, the RAS will organise a selection process in one event per year to maintain the interest and the motivation of the community. However, if needed, this process can be repeated and used for selection of individual or multiple groups at any time during the year.

When it is time, a public call for interest for the vacant position(s) should be shared via Auronet, N&N, and mass email to the entire community, also sharing the Selection Process, and reminding community members that they could be asked to serve on the Selection Group. The call should include an outline of skills required for specific working groups and any specialist skills and experience needed (if applicable).

Candidates can self-apply for the open positions, or may be nominated by another. When nominating another person, the approval of the nominee must be sought prior to the nomination.

Candidates will have 2 weeks to send their application to the RAS. The application must include:

- The position to apply for (a candidate cannot apply for more than one working group)
- A motivation letter: the candidate must explain the reasons and motivations that drive his/her application, and their aspirations relating to the ideals of Auroville
- A resumé of his/her experiences (work, life experiences, internships, group participation, etc.) inside and outside of Auroville. A description of teamwork experience should be provided
- Description of his/her skills, domain of expertise, specific interests etc. If applying for a specialist role they should highlight their relevant skills and experience

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- An agreement to have read the current mandate of the working group being applied for and work according to the current mandate if selected
- Candidates should clarify their availability: full time, part time, and months of the year.

All persons nominated by others must complete the application and submit their names to be entered into the selection process. They will be given an additional week to submit their applications. It is the responsibility of those nominating others to ensure that their nominees accept to be nominated and agree to submit their application.

If any application where this information is not provided or is considered incomplete, the RAS may seek clarification or additional information. If still incomplete the application may be discarded at the discretion of the RAS.

3. Feedback

Feedback will be sought from the community and Working Groups by the RAS over a 2 week period, on all persons nominated. A format will be used which requests feedback on specific areas relating to the known conduct of the nominee:

- Records of violence or sexual misconduct, financial mis-management or criminal activity
- Clear disregard of the Charter of Auroville
- Land ownership in the masterplan area excluding family land
- Conflicts of interest specific to the area of work, or more than one member of a family nominated for one working group
- Aurovilian engaged in a court case against a fellow Aurovilian / Newcomer.

The format used will automatically limit the number of characters which can be used by the feedback giver for each section to 300. The feedback giver can choose to remain anonymous to the Selection Teams, however his/her name will be recorded by the RAS.

The feedback will be provided anonymously to the nominee, who will have the opportunity to respond or withdraw their nomination. If any nominee withdraws, the feedback will be deleted.

The feedback and responses will be provided to all the Selection Teams (see section 6), who will decide if the feedback is relevant or significant. The feedback will be used only as pertinent information to inform the selection of the working group members and will not result in any person being disqualified prior to the selection process.

The feedback is shared only with the Selection Teams and is not made public. Members of the Selection Teams and the RAS are asked to maintain strict confidentiality, and will not share feedback or names of those giving feedback anonymously.

4. The Selection Group

From Aurovilians on the Master List, 40 names will be drawn completely at random. To get 40 volunteers, it is understood that it is necessary to randomly pick a larger number of names from the

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register of community members (more than 100, depending on the response). Selection will be made in a traceable and transparent fashion (eg. with an independently validated computer program) and will be done progressively until the required number are randomly selected and have agreed to volunteer for the work. The RAS will be responsible for this process, and will call independent witnesses to ensure that it is fair and transparent.

Any person selected who has put their name forward as a candidate for a working group or member of the organisation team will be excluded from the selection.

The RAS (assisted by volunteers) will contact each person that has been drawn, providing the information they need to understand the Selection Process, and check if they are willing to participate. This process will continue until sufficient members of the Selection Group have agreed to participate.

5. Preparation sessions for the Selection Group

These sessions will be facilitated by the organisation team, and will prepare the Selection Group for their work in selecting the candidates for the working groups. The time needed will depend on the groups to be selected and the needs of the Selection Group, and may be between 1 and 2 days. The following (but not exclusively) will be included in the agenda:

- Training in team work with a focus on listening skills
- Training in recognising bias, both in themselves and others
- Understanding community feedback
- Consensus building
- Introduction to the Auroville Foundation Act, working group structure and the mandates of the working groups involved in the selection process
- A reminder of the Charter, the Dream and To be a True Aurovilian
- Short presentations (max 15 minutes) from present or recent members of each working group to understand their needs, with a question and answer session for each presentation
- Short presentations, organised in consultation with the Selection Group, made by community member(s) who can offer balanced perspectives on the needs of working groups, in particular specialised information needed to ensure the selection of skilled persons for particular working groups. Inputs could be in the form of (but not limited to) brief presentations, written information, video or in person presentations
- Meetings with any other person or group requested by the Selection Group members (this may need to be in separate sessions organised for the members).

It is important that presentations are not used to influence the Selection Group in the selection of particular candidates, and this needs to be made clear by the organising team when inviting presentations.

The organisation team will provide support for those on the Selection Group who need translation or have special needs.

6. Interviews with the candidates

The Selection Group interviews (online or in person) all the candidates, in order to understand the qualities that each will bring to the work in the working group and their suitability for the work. Each candidate will be asked to present themselves and the qualities which they believe that they bring to the work. A copy of the profile of each applicant, and the feedback, will be available before and during that interview, to enable the team to have as far as possible a thorough knowledge of each

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person. Questions can be asked by any member of the team to clarify any issue. Care must be taken to ensure that each candidate is put at ease and is able to communicate without fear. Candidates may be assessed according to the criteria (according to the skills and qualities needed for each WG, including, but not limited to):

- Ability to do the work needed, and having the skills needed, including those skills needed for specific roles within the WG’s
- Ability to work harmoniously within a team
- Deep resonance with the Charter, “A Dream” and “To be a True Aurovilian”
- Understanding of the Auroville Foundation Act and the structure of the Foundation
- Ability to listen with a non-judgmental attitude
- Fairness
- Integrity
- Ability to realign oneself after having listened to stories, struggles and disagreements
- Openness to understand another human being
- Ability to empathise with discernment
- Humility to acknowledge one’s own limitations
- Experience in communication and organisational skills
- Trusted by the community and respected for their integrity
- Commitment to the work and the time needed.

Any feedback on the nominee received from the community should inform the decision of the team.

If there is a large number of applicants, then this step may take longer than one day, and could be extended into a second day. This will be decided by the Selection Group as a whole, with the help of the organisation team.

7. Independent teams

When all the information about the WG positions to fill and about the candidates is assembled, the organisation team divides the Selection Group randomly into 4 teams of equal numbers. These groups will remain separate and not interact with each other until the final outcome.

In case any member of the Selection Group resigns or for any other reason is unable to attend the entire process, the work can continue if at least 24 selectors, 6 per group and at least 3 teams remain. If this quorum is not respected, a new selection group must be constituted (see Section 4).

a. First round

The selection teams will each independently choose members for each working group, taking into account the skills needed in each group and considering the formation of an effective team within each WG, including the ongoing members. There is no compulsion at this step to select candidates for all the positions.

The teams are given the freedom to conduct their selection work according to their way of working. Tools can be provided by the organising team to aid their decision making process and facilitators can also be made available as requested by each team, to help them come to consensus. If a team fails to come to consensus on the result, they may agree to use an alternative method to come to agreement.

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When all the individual teams have communicated their results to the organisation team, the results of this first round are determined as follows:

Any candidates chosen *by all the selection teams are automatically selected* for the position in the WG concerned.

The organization team then informs each individual team of the candidates already selected.

b. Second round

Each independent team must then make a new selection *for the positions still not allocated*, using the same method as in the first round. However, the focus should rather be on reviewing the groups constituted so far and discuss what is missing to *create effective teams*, in particular ensuring the team is harmonious and that needed skills and experience are there.

Their results are communicated to the organisation team, which can compute the final results, using the method below.

c. Final outcome

The final outcome consists of:

- Candidates chosen unanimously by the selection teams in the first round
- Candidates chosen unanimously by the selection teams in the second round
- Candidates chosen in the second round by less than all groups will have their names put in a “hat” (opaque container for drawing lots, or using an equivalent computerised program): 3 nominations = 3 times in the hat, 2 nominations = twice. Any candidate with 1 or no nominations will not have their names in the hat. Thus the likelihood of them being selected is roughly proportional to the number of nominations by the selection teams
- The remaining names for the WG positions will be drawn randomly from the hat by an independent person.

The remaining names in the hat will be kept securely as a backup resource in case any of the candidates declines to take up their positions after ratification. After the positions are taken up, this resource is destroyed. Subsequent vacancies are selected in a new process.

Note 1: If there are insufficient candidates chosen during this process to fill the positions available in the WG’s, then these positions will remain vacant, and a new selection process for that group can be scheduled.

Note 2: Members of the present Selection Group can be requested to be part of any new selection process for up to one year from the date of completion of this process, without the requirement for being selected randomly (See Section 4).

8. Final Result

The final result will be presented to the RA for publication by massbulletin, email, News and Notes, including a report on the process.

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9. Notes

The time frame is flexible. It depends on the number of groups open for selections, positions, candidates, etc, and determined by the organisation team. Typically, for the selection in 4 Working Groups, the selection event would be spread over 3 days:

- Preparation sessions (section 5)
- Interviews (section 6)
- Independent teams constitution, up to the final outcome (section 7).

If the work of the independent teams cannot be finalized in a single day, the members of the selection teams are requested to maintain complete confidentiality of information outside their team until the final outcome.

Silent observers should witness the entire process, in order to provide feedback for future processes to the RAS. If any serious irregularities are identified during the process they should report these to the organising team and they can be corrected at the time.

A survey will be carried out by the RAS covering all those who participated in the selection process, including silent observers, to assess the methods used, and provide suggestions for improvement. Such feedback may be integrated into the process for future selections.