



Executive Leadership Council Meeting Minutes

September 30, 2025
9:00 AM-12:00 PM EST

In Attendance:

- **Executive Leadership Council Members:** Borhene Chakroun (Co-Chair, UNESCO), Lynette Okengo (Co-Chair, AfECN), Joan Lombardi (Early Opportunities), Mark Tomlinson (Stellenbosch University), Liana Ghent (ISSA), Sheldon Shaeffer (ARNEC),-George K. Werner (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Center), Boniface Kakhobwe (UNICEF),-Eduardo de Campos Quieroz (Bracell Foundation), Rokhaya Diawara (UNESCO), Per Ashorn (WHO), Sheila Manji (WHO), Ghassan Issa (ANECD), Kammerle Schneider (PATH), Carolina Casas (Sesame Workshop), Muhammad Musa (BRAC IED), Nuhu Yaqub (WHO)
- **ECDAN Secretariat:** Elizabeth Lule, Sarah Marjane, Emily Gilkinson, Brett Weisel, Shekufeh Zonji, Caroline Mochoge, Harper Lagares

Apologies: Joanne Raisin (SUN Movement), Rukmini Banerji (Pratham Education Foundation), Gabriel Demombynes (WBG), Lisa Bohmer (Hilton Foundation)

Welcome

The Co-Chair welcomed ELC members to the meeting and appreciated the members participating. He reinforced the importance of ECDAN as a space for collaboration and innovation and recognized the value of interacting with many members at ECDAN's United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) event. The Co-Chair also specifically welcomed Per Ashorn, from WHO, as it was his first meeting, and Carolina Casas, from Sesame Workshop, who was representing Sherrie Westin.

The ELC unanimously adopted the agenda.

The ELC unanimously approved the minutes of the last ELC meeting held on May 7, 2025.

The Co-Chair asked ELC members to declare conflicts of interest regarding the agenda.
No conflicts were shared.

Past Action Items

The Executive Director (ED) reported on matters arising from the previous meeting and their status. Action was taken on all items. The GPAAG partner statement on cuts to foreign aid was revised and turned into a call to action for the Financing for Development Conference.

Other items included the TAG partner survey, the ELC self-evaluation survey, the Nominations Committee's recommendations for member rotation, and revisions to the ECDAN Constitution that were to be discussed during the meeting.

Committee Reports

Nominations Committee

A representative for the Nominations Committee Chair shared that the Committee met twice since the last ELC meeting and expanded from four to six members. The Committee revisited the skills matrix for the ELC and identified a gap in risk management. The Committee nominated Doug Horner to join the ELC to fill this gap. The Committee also reviewed Article 6 of the ECDAN Constitution related to ELC composition and presented a proposal to the ELC that included:

- Reducing overall size of the ELC from 18 to 11 members to be more nimble, efficient, and focused on governance.
- Reducing the number of reserved voting seats to five: 1 for the UN agencies and the World Bank, 2 for regional networks (including the Latin American network), 1 for donors, and 1 for ECDAN's host organization. The agencies sharing a reserved seat will agree who will represent them as voting members and this will rotate. The non-voting members may continue to be observers of ELC meetings.
- Reducing the non-reserved seats to six and selecting these individuals based on the skills matrix and diversity principles.
- Rotating current members off after 2026 who have served since 2020 (after two, three-year terms) in a staggered manner.
- Including organizations that will share a reserved seat as part of GPAAG and/or TAG to ensure continued alignment and engagement in network activities.

The Nominations Committee also updated its terms of reference (ToR) document.

The ELC unanimously approved the election of Doug Horner as a member of the ELC.

Action: The Secretariat will onboard Doug Horner.

Global Policy and Advocacy Advisory Group

The Global Policy and Advocacy Advisory Group (GPAAG) Chair reported that two meetings were held. In addition to reviewing the partner statement and preparing the call to action for the Financing for Development Conference, advocacy priorities discussed in recent meetings included ECDAN's role in shaping the 2030 agenda, phase two of the global childcare campaign, and the work of the childcare and climate working groups. At the last meeting, the Chair announced her intention to step down from the chair role and requested nominations for a new chair. She will stay on until a new chair is selected. In light of the proposal made by the nominations committee, the GPAAG Chair recommended that all regional networks, UN agencies, and the World Bank be included in GPAAG so that it is the place where all sectors and regions coordinate and show unity for global advocacy. Currently, GPAAG's membership has focused on diverse thematic advocacy expertise and ARNEC represents the regional networks.

The GPAAG ToR was also updated to reflect its role as an advisory body in the new governance structure.

Action: GPAAG will identify and appoint a new Chair who will be approved by the ELC.

Technical Advisory Group

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Chair shared that two meetings were held. The TAG ToR was updated like others to reflect the current strategy and situation. The TAG finalized a brief survey that will go out to ECDAN members focused on the impact of funding cuts on their organizations and the responses they have seen from governments. The TAG has also been exploring opportunities and risks related to AI and ECD and the potential role for ECDAN in this space. A discussion paper was drafted that was shared with the ELC.

ELC members supported this direction as critical and timely. Members suggested that ECDAN should develop a clear position on AI and that GPAAG should be involved as there is an advocacy element. It will be necessary to determine who the advocacy should target and what actions ECDAN would seek to influence. ELC members noted that UNICEF has published an internal AI strategy and will publish a white paper on AI before the end of the year, and UNESCO has a team working on AI and has published a paper on AI from a rights perspective. Discussing with these organizations to build off their work, in addition to mapping what others are doing, is an appropriate next step.

The ELC members shared additional AI and ECD resources:

- AI and Early Education: All you need to know: <https://www.analyticssteps.com/blogs/ai-early-childhood-education-all-you-need-know>
- AI and Early Childhood: Future Directions: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666920X22000273>
- Artificial Intelligence and Methods in Early Childhood https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-29694-9_8
- Artificial Intelligence and Early Childhood: A scoping review: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666920X22000042>
- UNICEF: <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/areas-of-work/digital-technology>
- Guidance on digital tools for parents: <https://r4d.org/blog/4-ways-to-increase-the-impact-of-digital-tools-for-parents/>
- UNESCO: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/what-you-need-know-about-ai-and-right-education>

Action: The Secretariat will send out the TAG survey in the coming week, and the TAG will share the findings with the ELC.

Action: The TAG will proceed with initiating a work stream on AI and coordinate with GPAAG.

The ELC unanimously approved all three updated ToRs.

Secretariat Updates

The Secretariat's second quarter report and the ED's reflections, which included more recent activities, were shared in advance of the meeting. She shared highlights since the May ELC meeting by strategic objective.

ECDAN's Director of Finance and Operations provided an update on ECDAN's expenditure. At the end of Q2, ECDAN had spent 39% of the annual budget. She shared that cost reduction measures are in place, and the Secretariat reduced one staff since the last meeting as well as travel. She also shared that she expects cost reductions in 2026. PATH is working to

restructure given new funding realities and is working to get its overhead down to 15%, which would help ECDAN.

The ED shared that ECDAN's primary source of funding is foundations. The number of ECDAN's donors has shrunk in recent years due to foundations changing their priorities. Fortunately, most of ECDAN's current donors are funding the strategy (not specific projects) and are providing multi-year funding.

At a previous meeting in 2024, the ELC discussed the potential for ECDAN to register as an independent legal entity. This was approved pending multi-year funding being secured. Now that funding is available for the next three, even though ECDAN has a reduced overall budget, the ED proposed that ECDAN proceeds to register as a 501(c)3. She noted that ECDAN's will remain hosted by PATH at this time. The ED shared that being a 501(c)3 will require a governing board of at least three members that will have legal responsibility for fiduciary and strategic oversight. This board can be a subset of the ELC. As a 501(c)3, ECDAN will also need to file an annual 990 form with the IRS. Registering outside the US can be revisited in the future.

The ED shared risks affecting the network including staff layoffs and organizational restructuring, a heightened sense of competition for limited philanthropic resources, and donor collaboratives proposing duplicative efforts. In spite of these challenges, she shared that the network has continued to grow in terms of individual members, social media followers, and organizational partners.

ELC members expressed appreciation for all that the Secretariat is able to accomplish with a lean team and posed questions about how priorities and activities are shifting to compensate for budget reductions. Given the growing number of organizational partners, ELC members also suggested considering how partners might contribute resources and take leadership roles to support the network.

Action: The ED will proceed with registration as a 501c3 and suggest board members.

Action: The Secretariat will prepare a 2026 work plan and budget to present to the ELC to validate at the next meeting.

ELC Self-Evaluation

The self-evaluation survey agreed to at the last meeting was circulated and completed by 13 of 18 ELC members. The results were analyzed and shared with the ELC. The Co-Chair reiterated the actions recommended by self-evaluation findings, which included:

- Repeating the self-evaluation every two years.
- Adding links to relevant documents in the ELC meeting agenda. (Note: This was implemented for this meeting.)
- All ELC members preparing for meetings by reading the materials shared in advance and participating actively in discussions.
- Updating the ELC ToR and onboarding process to clarify the role of ELC members, particularly regarding how members facilitate connections with partners and conduct outreach to funders on behalf of ECDAN.
- Planning a virtual annual meeting with the ELC and other ECDAN partners.

The ELC requested that the ED share any additional reflections on the ELC's performance from her perspective. She highlighted that quicker and more consistent responses from ELC members to the Secretariat would increase efficiency.

Action: ELC members and Secretariat will implement recommended improvements from the self-evaluation and repeat the process in two years.

ECDAN Constitution

The ECDAN Constitution was revised and a draft with tracked changes was shared in advance of the meeting. The ED and Senior Program Officer reviewed the changes with the ELC page by page, and members were requested to comment if there was any question or opposition to a change.

The ELC discussed the proposed changes to Article 6: The Executive Leadership Council and incorporated the specific proposal made by the Nominations Committee related to reduction in overall size as well as allocation of reserved seats. **The ELC approved the proposal as outlined above.**

It was noted that the parameters around what it means to attend an ELC meeting as a non-voting observer needs to be clarified.

Action: The Secretariat will share a final clean version of the Constitution for ELC members to review. Approval will be done via email. Non-response by members will indicate approval.

Action: The Secretariat will use the updated version of Constitution to prepare an updated ToR for the ELC. The Secretariat will also draft a document clarifying the role of non-voting observers on the ELC

Closing and Action Items

The Co-Chair closed the meeting by expressing gratitude for ELC members' commitment to supporting ECDAN and creating a strong vision for the network's future. He proposed that the next meeting take place on March 25, 2026, and focus on the 2026 work plan and budget.

Action items that were agreed upon in the meeting include:

- The Secretariat will proceed with onboarding Doug Horner as a new ELC member.
- GPAAG will identify and approve a new Chair who will be presented to the ELC.
- The Secretariat will send out the TAG survey and the findings will be compiled and shared with the ELC.
- The TAG will proceed with initiating a work stream on AI and coordinate with GPAAG.
- The ED will proceed with registration as a 501c3 and suggest board members.
- ELC members and Secretariat will implement recommended improvements from the self-evaluation and repeat the process in two years.
- The Secretariat will share a final draft of the Constitution with track changes resolved with the ELC. Approval will be done via email.

- The Secretariat will use the updated version of Constitution to prepare an updated ToR for the ELC.
- The Secretariat will clarify the role of non-voting observer members of the ELC.
- The Secretariat will prepare a 2026 workplan and budget.