



2025 Regional Council Election Candidate

Region 6

Name: Sandra Patience Onoja

Professional Title: College and Careers Counsellor

Institution/Organization: Greensprings School, Lagos, Nigeria

Country of Residence: Nigeria

Member Group: Secondary (High School)

Applicant Questions

Explain your motivation for pursuing a leadership role with International ACAC, as well as why this position in particular. Highlight how your leadership experience and involvement with the organization make you a strong fit for the role..

Growing up in a large family of eleven children in Africa, I experienced first-hand how access to education, or the lack of it, shapes the trajectory of a life. In many African communities, talented young people with immense potential see their dreams fade, not because they lack ambition, but because they lack the guidance, resources, and pathways to turn those ambitions into reality. I have lived this reality, and it fuels my conviction that every student, regardless of their background, deserves informed, equitable, and inspiring access to quality education.

As a College and Careers Counsellor, I have dedicated my career to bridging these gaps. I have worked to simplify access to opportunities by connecting students with the right information, building partnerships with universities, and leading initiatives that expand career awareness. From organising book drives for under-resourced schools to designing data-informed counselling approaches, I have championed practical, scalable solutions that create lasting impact. My volunteer engagements and leadership roles in education advocacy have taught me how to navigate diverse cultural contexts, mobilise resources, and inspire collective action – qualities that align with the International ACAC's mission.

This position offers a platform to contribute at a strategic level, shaping policies and programmes that address regional disparities while amplifying the voices of under-represented communities. My deep understanding of the Sub-Saharan African landscape, combined with my global professional network, positions me to connect local realities with international best practice.

Leadership, to me, is not about titles but about service – listening, empowering, and creating environments where others can thrive. Serving in this role would allow me to bring both the empathy of lived experience and the rigour of professional expertise to an organisation that has already given me so much. I am committed to ensuring that International ACAC continues to be a beacon of equity and innovation, and that no student's dream is limited by where they were born.

Drawing from your previous experience in volunteering and leadership, how have these roles equipped you with the skills and insights necessary for the Founding Regional Representative position? Please highlight your leadership philosophy and strategies for effectively managing and leading a volunteer committee, with a focus on communication, collaboration, and recognition. Additionally, share specific accomplishments that demonstrate your ability to build professional communities, mentor emerging leaders, and promote inclusive and culturally responsive practices—key responsibilities of this role.

My leadership journey has been deeply rooted in service, capacity building, and the belief that access to quality guidance can transform educational outcomes. As a volunteer trainer with EducationUSA Nigeria, I have designed and delivered impactful training sessions that equip Counsellors with tools to guide students effectively through complex application processes. Similarly, as a leader within the School Counsellors and Educators Network in Nigeria, a vibrant community I have helped to strengthen, I have facilitated regular professional development programmes, fostering peer learning, mentorship, and a culture of continuous growth.

These roles have honed my ability to listen actively, communicate clearly across diverse contexts, and build consensus, even among individuals with differing priorities. I operate with a leadership philosophy centred on empowerment, ensuring every team member feels valued, equipped, and motivated to contribute meaningfully. My approach to managing a volunteer committee blends structure with empathy: establishing clear goals and processes while recognising and celebrating contributions to sustain engagement.

I have successfully led multi-stakeholder initiatives, from coordinating national training for Counsellors to creating collaborative spaces that have produced joint resource banks, peer mentoring programmes, and outreach projects that reach underrepresented communities. One achievement I am particularly proud of is spearheading an initiative that connected urban and rural school Counsellors, bridging information gaps and enhancing inclusive practices.

Promoting culturally responsive guidance is central to my work. Coming from a large African family, I have witnessed first-hand how talent can be stifled by lack of access to accurate information and resources. This perspective drives my commitment to ensuring diverse voices are heard and supported in every professional community I lead.

In the Founding Regional Representative role, I will leverage these experiences to build a dynamic, collaborative volunteer network, one that celebrates contributions, shares knowledge openly, and positions our region as a model for professional excellence, innovation, and inclusivity within International ACAC.

As a Founding Regional Representative for International ACAC, how would you outline your understanding of the role, including the priority areas you would focus on, your overall vision for the region, and the challenges you anticipate addressing? Additionally, what innovative solutions would you propose to strengthen all regional networks, enhance member engagement, and improve communication between members, the Council, and the Board, while acknowledging current practices or programs you find effective?

As a Founding Regional Representative for International ACAC, I understand the role to be both a bridge and a catalyst, representing the voices, needs, and aspirations of our region while fostering stronger links with the wider International ACAC community. It is a role requiring both advocacy and action, ensuring that members across diverse contexts feel seen, heard, and supported.

Priority Areas

My immediate priorities would be:

1. Strengthening Regional Collaboration – Creating structured platforms for peer-to-peer learning, resource sharing, and problem-solving across institutions.
2. Capacity Building – Expanding training opportunities tailored to the realities of our region, including low-cost or no-cost virtual workshops and in-person sessions in partnership with local networks.
3. Equity and Access Advocacy – Championing initiatives that increase access to guidance resources, particularly for schools in underserved communities, to ensure no talented student is left behind.

Overall Vision

I envision a region that is united, visible, and thriving, where counsellors are equipped with the skills, networks, and confidence to guide students towards global opportunities, and where the region's unique perspectives actively shape international conversations about access to higher education.

Anticipated Challenges:

Challenges include varying access to technology, funding limitations, and disparities in counsellor training standards. Another is bridging the gap between members in well-resourced urban centres and those in remote or underfunded schools.

Innovative Solutions

Regional Micro-Networks: Establish sub-groups within the region to facilitate closer collaboration and rapid support for members.

Mentorship Match Programme: Pair new or isolated counsellors with experienced members for ongoing professional guidance. This, I currently do through my leadership role in the School Counsellors and Educators Network(SCEN) community

Quarterly "State of the Region" Forums: Open, interactive sessions for members to share

wins, challenges, and feedback directly with the Council and Board.

Storytelling Campaign: Spotlight member achievements and student success stories to inspire engagement and attract more resources.

I value and will maintain current practices such as the open member forums and the sharing of global best practices via webinars, which have already fostered inclusivity and cross-regional connections.

As a Founding Regional Representative, advocacy for international students is central to International ACAC's mission. Identify a critical issue in college admissions or international education that you would prioritize addressing in your region. Explain its significance, the potential impact on students and institutions, and how you would collaborate with regional and global stakeholders to drive meaningful change.

Advocacy Priorities in College Admissions or International Education

A critical issue I would prioritise is the widening equity gap in access to international higher education for students from underrepresented and economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Africa. Despite the wealth of talent, ambition, and academic potential across the continent, many students face systemic barriers: limited access to accurate admissions information, unaffordable application and testing fees, visa restrictions, and inadequate preparation for competitive international admissions processes.

This issue is significant because it directly undermines diversity, equity, and inclusion, values central to both International ACAC and the future of global education. If left unaddressed, the gap will perpetuate cycles of educational and economic inequality, depriving global institutions of diverse perspectives that enrich academic communities. Conversely, tackling it will empower thousands of capable students to contribute meaningfully to the global knowledge economy.

The potential impact is transformative:

- For students– equitable access to life-changing educational opportunities.
- For institutions– richer cultural diversity, innovative thinking, and expanded talent pipelines.
- For the region – stronger human capital development and leadership capacity.

To address this, I would leverage my existing leadership roles within EducationUSA Nigeria, The British Council and the School Counsellors and Educators Network to create a coordinated regional mentorship and capacity-building programme for counsellors. This would include free training on navigating admissions, scholarship searches, and financial aid negotiations, alongside collaborative resource-sharing across schools and NGOs.

Globally, I would advocate with admissions offices, testing bodies, and embassies to reduce financial and procedural barriers such as waiving application fees for qualifying students, increasing access to virtual interviews, and expanding testing availability in underserved areas. I would also work with peer representatives to present compelling, data-driven cases to the International ACAC Board for policies and initiatives that specifically target inequities in

Africa.

Through a blend of policy advocacy, counsellor empowerment, and strategic partnerships, my goal is to create a more inclusive admissions ecosystem that not only opens doors but also ensures students have the preparation and support.

Explain how you would use this position to advance International ACAC's strategic plan by aligning your top three priorities with the organization's three pillars: enhancing member experience globally, clarifying the international brand, and optimizing internal operations.

In aligning my top three priorities with International ACAC's strategic pillars, I will focus on deepening regional engagement, amplifying our global voice, and streamlining operational effectiveness to deliver tangible value for members worldwide.

1. Enhancing Member Experience Globally – Building an Engaged, Supported Network. My foremost priority will be to create dynamic regional communities of practice that connect counsellors, admissions professionals, and institutional partners across diverse contexts. This will involve establishing structured peer-learning circles, thematic webinars, and a regional mentorship scheme for early-career professionals. By fostering knowledge exchange, capacity building, and a culture of mutual support, members will gain practical tools, up-to-date admissions insights, and a sense of belonging that transcends geography.

2. Clarifying the International Brand – Championing Global Access and Advocacy, I will work to position International ACAC as the definitive voice for ethical, inclusive, and student-centred international admissions in our region. This means proactively engaging with local media, educational bodies, and policymakers to communicate our mission, while showcasing impactful member-led initiatives. I will highlight success stories of cross-border collaboration, thus reinforcing the association's role as a trusted, globally minded partner committed to widening access and supporting student mobility.

3. Optimising Internal Operations – Improving Communication and Resource Flow. To ensure operational excellence, I will strengthen two-way communication between the region and the Board through quarterly regional reports, open forums, and multilingual updates. I will also advocate for digital tools that make resource-sharing seamless such as a searchable repository of regional data, templates, and best practices, ensuring that institutional knowledge is preserved and accessible to all members.

Through these priorities, I will advance the strategic plan by delivering a member experience that is inclusive and relevant, reinforcing International ACAC's brand as a globally respected leader, and ensuring our internal systems empower rather than hinder regional impact. This role is an opportunity to create a connected, informed, and inspired community that is not just part of the global conversation on education, but helping lead it.