



2025 Regional Council Election Candidate

Region 3

Name: Shikha Vij

Professional Title: College Counsellor

Institution/Organization: Step by Step School, Noida

Country of Residence: India

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..

My journey with International ACAC since 2016 has been personally transformative. I have witnessed its powerful role in shaping inclusive, collaborative, and ethical practices in the college admission landscape globally. As a long-time volunteer with the Mem Comm (with Michelle) and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committees, I have gained a deeper understanding of the organization's commitment to equity, especially across underrepresented regions like the Indian Subcontinent (which is changing!).

The opportunity to serve as a Founding Regional Representative feels like a natural next step in my ongoing commitment to this community. This role excites me because it allows me to bring visibility and voice to counsellors in our region, while also building sustainable systems for peer support, mentorship, and advocacy. I have been organically performing aspects of this role since 2016 through a peer-led WhatsApp group I initiated, which has grown into a vibrant network where counsellors across India share resources, ideas, and encouragement daily. I've also been fortunate to participate in all the regional forums in our area (Neerja Modi School in 2018 & Shriram School in 2024) and contribute presentations to both, which allowed me to elevate regional perspectives on a global stage.

My leadership is grounded in collaboration and active listening (or so I hope:)). As one of the first mentors in International ACAC's inaugural Mentor-Mentee cohort, I supported my mentee (an IEC who is now a friend) with cultural context and professional guidance, an experience that has sharpened my belief in the power of relationships and knowledge-sharing. I hope to bridge gaps—whether between institutions, geographies, or individuals—and I am ready to serve with integrity, humility, and a commitment to lifting others.

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.

I believe that meaningful change begins with inclusive collaboration and intentional community-building. A defining example of this was in 2021, when I served as the South & Central Asia Regional Facilitator for the International ACAC Virtual Forum—an experience that perfectly illustrates my leadership style and capabilities. The event, (held on my 40th birthday) during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, required meticulous virtual planning, cross-regional coordination, and a deep commitment to serving high-need student populations, which was the central theme.

Despite the challenges of a fully virtual format and the isolation many were feeling at the time, I successfully brought together a dynamic group of speakers from across the globe with help from an incredible group of people from International ACAC. Leading this event demanded not just logistical precision, but also empathy, flexibility, and an understanding of the nuanced needs of our regional counselling community.

This experience, along with my longstanding volunteer roles with the IC3, where I have trained the IC3 institute cohorts every year, has equipped me with the skills necessary for the Founding Regional Representative position. I've learned how to navigate diverse cultural contexts, lead with both structure and sensitivity, and uplift voices that may otherwise go unheard. My leadership philosophy centers on listening first, co-creating solutions, and ensuring all members feel recognized for their contributions.

Additionally, I've consistently built spaces for peer mentorship and professional development, such as the active WhatsApp community I initiated in 2016 for Indian counselors. This informal but highly engaged group continues to thrive as a trusted platform for sharing knowledge, challenges, and encouragement—proof of the power of sustained community leadership.

As Regional Representative, I hope to bring this same energy, organization, and commitment to inclusive, culturally responsive practices—helping to shape a stronger, more connected future for our region 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?

Global conversations are the need of the hour! I have been blessed to be connected with counsellors from two/three tiers of India due to my engagements as a volunteer trainer and global platforms like universities across the world due to my role as a college counsellor in a school. Bridging global and local resources is the need of the hour, while amplifying regional voices within the broader International ACAC structure. This role is essential for ensuring that the diverse realities of our region are reflected in the organization's strategic direction, resources, and advocacy.

My overall vision is to foster a more collaborative South & Central Asia region—where members feel informed, supported, and empowered to lead. Key priority areas I would focus on include:

Inclusive Access: Prioritizing support for counsellors in underserved schools and regions, ensuring they have access to resources, mentorship, and training. Drawing from the success of the 2021 Virtual Regional Forum, which focused on supporting high-need students, I would advocate for programming that continues to center equity and access.

Regional Ambassadors: A peer-led model where local ambassadors represent different countries or subregions, facilitating information flow, encouraging participation, and surfacing grassroots issues to the Regional Representative and Council.

Anticipated challenges include geographic dispersion, varying levels of access to resources, and differing institutional types and needs across the region. Many counsellors do not yet see International ACAC as accessible or relevant to their context. Addressing this requires intentional outreach, cultural sensitivity, and ongoing engagement in local conversations.

Some ideas I have are- **Quarterly Regional Newsletters or Video Updates:** Brief, engaging updates to keep members informed about events, opportunities, and regional highlights in a more accessible format.

Office Hours with Regional Reps: Scheduled virtual drop-in sessions to connect directly with members, answer questions, and gather feedback.

I also deeply value current programs like the Regional Forums and Mentor-Mentee initiative, both of which I've been actively involved in. These are impactful and scalable, and I would advocate for strengthening and localizing them further.

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.

A critical issue I would prioritize is the lack of equitable access to accurate, context-specific

information and guidance for students from under-resourced schools and communities across South & Central Asia. While international education opportunities have expanded, access to credible, culturally relevant, and language-sensitive college admission guidance remains deeply uneven across our region.

I conducted a volunteer-based workshop for one of the underprivileged schools in Uttar Pradesh, and was amazed to find a pool of immensely talented students there. I work to support the education of underprivileged students by volunteering my time with a Gurgaon based NGO, where students do not even have access to local colleges owing to their circumstances.

The knowledge gap for the students in such schools is daunting. This gap disproportionately affects high-need and first-generation students, many of whom are highly capable but lack the support systems needed to navigate complex application processes, financial aid systems, and visa procedures. It also affects institutions, which miss out on a more diverse and representative applicant pool from this region.

To address this, I would focus on three key strategies:

Creating Regional Resource Hubs: Develop open-access digital toolkits and translated resources tailored to the South & Central Asia context, focusing on financial aid, holistic admissions, standardized testing, and writing support. These can be co-created with regional counsellors and reviewed by admissions professionals for accuracy and alignment.

Expanding School Counsellor Training: Collaborate with local resources and community-based organisations to deliver basic training for school counsellors in underserved areas. Many schools in the region have no dedicated counselling staff. By partnering with organizations already working at the grassroots level, we can extend International ACAC's reach and impact.

To drive these initiatives, I would recommend we collaborate with regional stakeholders—school leaders, local counsellors and alumni, including university admissions teams and advocacy groups within International ACAC.

Everyone deserves the right to education and global platforms.

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.

As a Founding Regional Representative, I view this role as a strategic opportunity to localize International ACAC's mission while directly supporting the broader organizational goals. My top three priorities are designed to align closely with the three pillars of the strategic plan:

1. Enhancing Member Experience Globally: Building Regional Community & Support Networks

I will prioritize strengthening the member experience by fostering meaningful connections

within our region. I would work to formalize regional communication platforms, offer consistent virtual check-ins, and establish a mentorship pipeline for new or isolated counselors. These efforts will help members feel more supported, informed, and engaged, no matter their institutional type or location.

2. Clarifying the International Brand: Elevating Regional Voices & Representation

South & Central Asia have a diverse and dynamic counselling community whose contributions deserve more visibility within the global conversation. By encouraging regional representation in conference sessions, publications, and leadership roles, I aim to ensure that International ACAC is seen as a truly inclusive and globally representative organization. I will also collaborate with the Communications and DEI Committees to highlight regional success stories and challenges that reflect our local realities.

3. Optimizing Internal Operations: Strengthening Communication Channels & Local Partnerships

Effective operations require strong, two-way communication. I will advocate for creating structured communication loops between regional members, the Council, and the Board—through regular updates, office hours, and ambassador roles within subregions. Additionally, I would support collaboration with local schools, and educational bodies to expand International ACAC's footprint in meaningful, strategic ways.