

Facilitating a Productive Advisory Committee “Engaging Advisory Committees to Provide Effective and Meaningful Input and Direction”

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INTRODUCTION

Involvement of a variety of stakeholders can enhance the development of Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ARDCs). In addition, inclusion of a diverse array of stakeholders allows the project leadership to build a broad base of responsibility for the success of the project and also builds support for ADRC objectives. Discussing ideas with an advisory committee helps ADRC project leaders strengthen relationships with other government agencies and providers, coordinate existing and potential resources, and build trust among potential ADRC users. This ADRC-TAE issue brief provides:

- An overview of developing an effective advisory committee and approaches to engage members
- Key considerations when forming and facilitating a committee
- Tips to promote ongoing involvement of a committee, and
- Resources for more information.

GRANT REQUIREMENTS

As part of the ADRC grant specifications, states must establish or designate an Advisory Board or Committee (referred to as Advisory Committee in this brief) to assist in the development and implementation of their Resource Center program. The Advisory Committee will advise the lead state agency on:

- a) the design and operations of Resource Centers,
- b) stakeholder input,
- c) the state’s progress toward achieving the goal and vision described in the program announcement, and
- d) other program and policy development issues related to the state’s Resource Center program.

The lead state agency will have ultimate authority over the program and its Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee must be composed of individuals representing all populations served by the state's Resource Center program including individuals who have a disability or a chronic condition requiring long term support, representatives from organizations that provide services to the individuals served by the program, and representatives of the government and non-governmental agencies that are impacted by the program.

COORDINATING AN ADRC ADVISORY COMMITTEE WITH OTHER RELATED KEY GRANTS

Although not required, ADRCs can build upon advisory boards established under the Real Choice Systems Change Program. They may seek to have this existing advisory board serve as the ADRC Advisory Committee. An ADRC may also choose to ask the Real Choice Systems Change board to advise the ADRC Committee, rather than to be involved in routine decision-making. Utilizing the Real Choice board in conjunction with the ADRC Advisory Committee allows the state the opportunity to potentially streamline administrative support for several grants and helps ensure coordination among them.

For example, Utah's Work Incentive Initiative successfully coordinates several grants related to their systems change efforts. The effort has a 111-member oversight body, the Utah Work Incentive Coalition (UWIC), governed by a small Executive Board. UWIC is advised by a series of workgroups, including Work Incentives, Outreach and Training, and Employment Supports. Each workgroup is, in turn, advised by subgroups which consider specific issues. The central coordination of these different activities allows them to work together to meet shared goals.

HOW TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Depending on the needs of the ADRC, an Advisory Committee can be effectively used in a variety of ways – and can change direction in accordance with changing needs. Five key uses are described below.

Five key uses of Advisory Committees

1. Identify goals and assess needs
2. Develop performance measures
3. Identify, screen and rank options
4. Develop public relations message
5. Support ADRC development efforts

Identify goals and assess needs

The ADRC Advisory Committee will be composed of a cross-section of stakeholders. Experiences from similar infrastructure development projects indicate that these individuals should be engaged as early as possible in project development discussions. Empowering the group to be involved in these discussions promotes support for project goals and may help project staff to identify additional goals and potential resources that may have been overlooked. Initial tasks would likely include: assessing the needs of the Resource Centers; evaluating their usefulness to the community and; identifying a strategy for moving forward.

Develop performance measures

Second, the ADRC Advisory Committee can also be utilized to develop performance indicators

Key areas of interest

- Visibility and Awareness
- Informed Choice
- Access
- Efficiency
- Effectiveness
- Consumer Focus

to measure the success of the effort. Performance indicators should focus on the areas detailed in the program announcement including visibility and awareness, informed choice, consumer focus, access to services, efficiency, and effectiveness.¹

Within the framework provided by AoA and CMS, the Committee could develop specific measures of success related to the project goals. The input of potential ADRC users in the development of indicators could be especially valuable. As ADRCs strive to become a “trusted and reliable” source of

information and services, user impressions of services will be a critical measure of success.

Identify, Research and Rank Options

When making decisions, an Advisory Committee can help project staff identify, research and prioritize options. Other infrastructure development projects have developed tools to aid advisory panel members in the decision making process. It is critical that project staff frame the issues and choices clearly to ensure that Advisory Committee members understand the potential impacts of decisions and are prepared to provide informed advice.

For example, as part of the Alaska Work Incentives project, a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant initiative, the state developed a work prioritization tool to assist the advisory panel in ranking the priority of different work areas (see Figure 1 below).² This tool below could be used for ADRC Advisory Committees.

Figure 1. Alaska Works: Work Prioritization Tool

	LOW		MEDIUM		HIGH
	1	2	3	4	5
Positive Impact on Services					
Cost Level					
Resources available to implement					
Doable and in a reasonable amount of time					
Advances the policy framework					
Fits with what data and research tells us					

¹ For more information see the draft ADRC evaluation framework document called, “Potential Indicators by Desired Systems Change Goals” at www.adrc-tae.org.

² Work Prioritization Tool developed by Millie Ryan, Alaska Works Director.

Develop Public Relations Message

The term public relations “message” can refer to an array of activities and objectives. Depending on the message a state or project is trying to convey, one will have to decide on both the substance of the message and the most appropriate media for disseminating that message. The Advisory Committee can play a large role in crafting the message and ensuring that it is delivered in the most effective manner.

Once the target audience and appropriate media are chosen, the group can assist the ADRC staff in developing and disseminating the message. The Advisory Committee, or some subset, could also serve as a preliminary focus group to test a marketing message or public relations campaign, especially if the state has elected to contract out this function.

Support ADRC Development Efforts

The members of the Advisory Committee can also be asked to aid the development of the ADRC. For example, state staff can be asked to help maintain organizational support and funding for the project. Representatives from provider organizations can support the collection of information about providers for the ADRC database, and help gain the support of their colleagues in the provider community. Consumer board members can help the ADRC staff review outreach materials, identify service providers and help the ADRC in collaborating with other advocacy groups. As a group, the Advisory Committee can help with the design of the center, including the strategy for consumer access (walk-up, appointments, telephone and/or on-line access) and types and amount of information available.

KEY ADVISORY COMMITTEE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

When designing an Advisory Committee, there are several key considerations that must be addressed for the Committee to be most effective.

Key Considerations

- Engage Stakeholders Early
- Make Meetings and Meeting Information Accessible
- Manage Group Size and Delegation Considerations
- Identify the most appropriate format and frequency for meetings
- Facilitation is key
- Educate your members
- Offer Reimbursement

Engage Stakeholders Early

It is imperative to involve relevant stakeholders as soon as possible. The first step is to identify the types of people and groups that should be represented on the Committee. Active participation from the start ensures that members feel the highest level of responsibility for the success of the ADRC project.

It may be useful to convene a special Advisory Committee orientation for potential consumer representatives that cut across disability, age, program, and geographic location within the state. This meeting can help consumers start working collaboratively, and may make them more comfortable later when serving beside providers and representatives from key stakeholder organizations.

Make Meetings and Meeting Information Content Accessible

Accessibility means much more than physical accommodations and building codes. In addition to assuring the physical accessibility of meeting spaces, it is important to consider whether materials are needed in large print (both on paper and electronic) or if there is a need to arrange for TDD lines or telephone relay services for participants with sensory disabilities. Regardless of whether you have persons with visual or hearing disabilities on the advisory committee, it may be useful to have these accommodations available for people who are interested in learning about the committee's activities.

For people with cognitive disabilities, such as persons with mental retardation or traumatic brain injury, a different array of accommodations is needed. For example, it may be necessary to prepare and disseminate materials well in advance to allow sufficient time for people to absorb the content. It may also be useful to have a separate orientation, or a supplemental session, for consumers with cognitive disabilities to ensure that they understand the objectives of the Committee have the opportunity to ask questions and can discuss successful methods they have previously employed to help them become active participants in similar group situations. If participants with disabilities have personal assistants working with them, it is worthwhile to ensure that the assistants have appropriate information about the meetings so they may support the individual's participation – as well as offer insights themselves. Finally, it is important to have a skilled facilitator who is sensitive to the needs of this population to periodically “check-in” during the course of the meeting.

Manage Group Size and Delegation Considerations

The ADRC Advisory Committee must include individuals representing all populations served by the ADRC. This includes individuals with disabilities or chronic conditions requiring long term support, representatives from provider organizations, and others impacted by the Resource Center stakeholders. A balanced representation among these diverse populations is important to the effective functioning of the Committee.

It is also essential to balance the need for inclusion with logistical efficiency. While the broadest range of opinions may be desired, an Advisory Committee that is too large may prevent active participation from all of the members. Efficiencies might also be realized by assigning Advisory Committee work groups to focus on specific topics.

Louisiana's ADRC Advisory Board is composed of providers, consumers, advocates, legislators, and other key stakeholders, including a liaison to the state's *Olmstead* planning group. The Board is an important resource for the ADRC's continuous quality improvement and formative learning processes, and serves as a liaison to the broader community. Because of the conflicting desires to for broad representation and manageable board size, Louisiana has prioritized four areas for committee work: a) consumer relations; b) provider relations; c) evaluation; and d) marketing/ outreach.

To ensure the involvement of all constituencies, New Jersey also effectively used workgroups to define their ADRC's operating vision and design the model to be piloted. Key state agency staff were mobilized into 12 internal workgroups in the following areas: Customer Service/Training, Clinical Eligibility, Financial Eligibility, MIS, Public Awareness, Policy Alignment, Cultural Competency, Benefits Screening Tool, Website, SHIP Alignment, NJ EASE/2-1-1 Alignment and Consumer Direction. While these activities took place prior to the ADRC grant application, workgroups organized around similar areas could be useful.

When utilizing workgroups, it is important to identify the most appropriate format and frequency for meetings. Depending on the size of the group, members' proximity to one another, and availability, meetings can be structured in a variety of ways. For example, based on the goals of the meeting, decide whether the meeting should have a formal presentation format or a loose focus group format, or something in between. Meetings might need to be scheduled in the evenings or on weekends in accordance with the availability of your committee members, especially working persons with disabilities, or family members or others with special needs. In addition, convening meeting by teleconference may be an easy and efficient option.

Many ADRC states report that quarterly Advisory Committee meetings are most effective. However, during the initial implementation phase it may be useful to convene the group with higher frequency, e.g. bimonthly. Of course, for ADRCs that have organized work groups, these smaller groups may benefit from more frequent meetings, with the full Advisory Committee meeting quarterly.

Facilitation is Key

The Advisory Committee will operate more effectively if the ADRC uses a skilled facilitator. The Committee will likely be composed of a diverse group of individuals who may not have worked together in the past and who may think that they have differing agendas. It is possible that there may be difficult histories or poor past relationships. In some states, disability and aging groups may resist the idea of working together, feeling as though they might lose their own identities in the process. An effective facilitator can help members overcome these differences and understand their common interests, ideas, and goals.

To assist in finding common ground, the group should take some time at the outset to understand each other's backgrounds, systems, and experiences. It is helpful to educate all board members about the grant, the Medicaid program, AAAs, and other related pieces of the ADRC puzzle. In the process, members can learn about each other and their interests, which will help them better understand future comments or concerns that are raised in committee meetings.

It is also important for Advisory Committee members to learn one another's communication styles. All members should be particularly sensitive to the needs of other individuals with disabilities who serve on the Committee.

South Carolina began their ADRC efforts by convening a planning retreat with wide participation of stakeholders from both the aging and disability communities. The agenda for their meeting, which can easily be used for new Advisory Committees, included the topics below.

Agenda for ADRC Summit

- I. Review of National ARDC Vision and Expectations
- II. Discussion of How the System Currently Works
- III. Identification of Strengths and Weaknesses of Aging and Disability Systems (as they relate to ADRC functions)
- IV. State Vision, Values, and Principles
- V. Discussion of how the ADRC can most effectively build on existing resources

The discussion of current strengths and weaknesses proved to be a fruitful exercise, allowing stakeholders from different corners of the community to learn about each others' assets, while allowing the state to more readily leverage existing and potential resources. In addition, the collaborative discussions on vision and values promoted stakeholder ownership in a successful ADRC.

Educate your members

As the Advisory Committee begins meeting, it is important for leaders to ensure that all group members are fully aware of the objectives of the project and the role of the Committee. Your members are chosen because they represent a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. It may be useful to provide a short tutorial on federal programs and long term care, as well as specifics about the grant. This ensures that your Committee members have a similar starting point for discussions. Equally important is that they will understand each other's roles in the design, delivery or use of long term care services.

ADRCs may wish to coordinate with their Centers for Independent Living regarding advisory board participant training. For example, the West Virginia State Independent Living Council (WV SILC) has developed an effective training program for people to become effective advocates. WV SILC hosts biannual conferences focused on systems change issues. Seminars topics include basic advocacy, leadership, and the legislative process. The training program helps consumers enhance meaningful participation, learn how to build partnerships, and influence policy. In the summer of 2004, the conference will be structured as a mock state legislature, in which consumers will act as legislators, legislative aides, lobbyists, and state officials and role-play a legislative session. WVSILC leaders arrange periodic briefings from other advocacy groups to provide participants information about opportunities for ongoing involvement in advocacy efforts.

Offer Reimbursement

The ADRC may also find it necessary to cover (or offer to cover) expenses related to meeting attendance. This may include travel to and from the meeting, accommodations, meals during the meeting, and even honoraria or stipends.

Ongoing Involvement

At the outset, ADRC staff should begin thinking about ways that the Advisory Committee can remain involved after the Resource Center opens its doors. The Committee can provide

ongoing input to evaluate success and recommend changes to policies that are in place. While the group may meet several times a year as the Resource Center project is being implemented, these meetings could be pared back once the project has been established. ADRC staff should also have a system in place for replacing members when necessary.

RESOURCES

a) Alliance of Information & Referral Systems (AIRS) Standard 16: Governance

The AIRS standard on governance describes the criteria for governing bodies and advisory committees, including requirements such as mission statements and bylaws for the group. Compliance with the standard is required for AIRS accreditation. The [AIRS Standards for Professional Information and Referral](#) is part of the Community Living Exchange Collaborative toolbox and can be accessed on-line at: http://www.nashp.org/Files/AIRS_Standards.pdf. The section on governance is found on pages 22-24.

b) Description of Wisconsin ADRC Governing boards

The CLTC Toolbox also includes a contract between the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services and the ADRCs. On pages 43-47, the contract describes the requirements for ADRC governing boards. The contract is available as part of the Community Living Exchange Collaborative toolbox at http://www.nashp.org/Files/WI_Contract.pdf.

c) Making Accessibility Work: A Guide for Planning Meetings, Conferences and Gatherings

This guide, a publication of the Home and Community-Based Services Resource Network, is intended to help readers think broadly about the concept of accessibility in the context of planning meetings and conferences. The guide is available on-line at http://www.hcbs.org/files/2/73/hcbs_brochure.pdf.

d) How to Influence Policy-Makers and the Policy-Making Process

This brochure provides an “at a glance” overview of effective legislative advocacy strategies. While it is targeted to disability advocates, the tips could apply to a larger audience. The brochure is available in HTML format at: <http://www.ilru.org/ilnet/files/bookshelf/influence/brochure.html>.

e) Building an Effective Public Relations Plan in Times of Change Center for Workers with Disabilities, National Association of State Medicaid Directors

This document, developed for Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) and Medicaid Buy-In (MBI) project directors, provides an overview of developing a public relations strategy. It is available online at: <http://www.nasmd.org/disabilities/pubs/special03-1.pdf>

f) U.S. Department of Justice, American with Disabilities Act (ADA) home page <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/>

The ADA website maintained by the Department of Justice offers a wealth of information about the law, including standards for accessibility and a questions and

answers section. The site also includes information specific to state and local governments.

- g) Partners in Policymaking, <http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.com/>

Partners in Policymaking was created in Minnesota by the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities in 1987. The site offers on-line self-study courses (for a fee) to educate consumers about advocacy and finding employment as well as a comprehensive list of internet resources.

- h) National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR), www.ncddr.org

The NCDDR website includes a variety of resources in an effort for research to educate policy decisions. Of particular interest to ADRCs may be their popular media and social marketing sections.

- i) My Voice, My Choice: A Manual for Self-Advocates, Human Services Research Institute (HSRI)

My Voice, My Choice is the curriculum for a self-advocacy leadership training course designed by the Self Advocate Leadership Network. The Human Services Research Institute assists states and the federal government to enhance services for persons with mental retardation and mental illness. Information about the publication is available at: <http://www.hsri.org/leaders/>

- j) Massachusetts Systems Change website, www.massrealchoices.org

This website contains a variety of information related to Massachusetts' Real Choice and Independence Plus Systems Change grants. It includes a section on their collaborative decision making model, which engages consumers, providers, state agency officials and others.

- k) Stakeholder Involvement in Home and Community-Based Services: Roles in State Planning, Program Development, and Quality Improvement

This short paper offers tips to states on involving stakeholders in their decision-making process, for planning, program development, and quality improvement related to home and community-based services and supports. It also offers summaries of successful collaboration efforts in three states. The paper is available on the Internet at: <http://www.hcbs.org/files/7/342/Bergman.pdf>.