

## Self-Advocates say:

*"They (board members) changed in coming to understand what people with disabilities actually have to go through."*

*"At first, the group seemed afraid of me, or at least some of them did. But when others introduced me and let me tell them about myself that fear went away. There's no real difference between people, and they need to understand that."*

*"I think I have changed by being more comfortable in the group and getting them used to helping me be a part of the group."*

*"... board members need to know that everyone has important ideas and... information"*

## Board Members say:

*"We've recognized that regardless of disability, everyone has something to contribute..."*

*"(Having a self-advocate on the board) is a reminder to keep adults in mind, even though we deal with children's programs. ... keeps us honest and accountable in terms of things we think about doing."*

*"We learned to provide an advance level of organization... to insert reasonable pauses and checks in the meeting to allow the self-advocate to participate meaningfully. He raised our consciousness around these issues."*

*"I feel my skills at including self-advocates on my board have improved... as a result of this project I have a more positive attitude about the abilities of self-advocates to participate on councils and boards of directors."*

## Including People with Disabilities on Boards of Directors

Self-Advocate

Leadership Network

<http://www.hsri.org/leaders>

Kids as Self Advocates

<http://www.fvkasa.org>

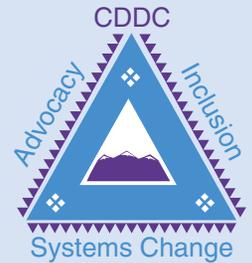
Colorado Developmental  
Disabilities Council

<http://www.coddc.org>



Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council  
3401 Quebec Street, #6009  
Denver, Colorado 80207

## Including People with Disabilities on Boards of Directors



*A Guide to the Meaningful Participation of  
Persons with Developmental Disabilities on  
Boards, Councils and Committees*



## Why Self-Advocates on Boards?

With funding from the Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council and the Colorado Department of Education, Partners in Leadership (PIL) supported people with disabilities (self-advocates) to participate actively on boards of directors. During this project, PIL learned that with the proper supports, self-advocates can contribute meaningfully on boards, councils and committees, and can bring the richness of diversity to those groups.

The Council learned through PIL efforts that a certain amount of deliberation and strategy ensure that participation is meaningful. This brochure is designed to provide practical suggestions to assist boards of directors as they work toward including self-advocates.

One fact is clear: full inclusion in the community for self-advocates must include their participation on decision-making bodies.

## Getting Started

- ▶ Use the self-advocate's Leadership Resume.
- ▶ Have an initial training for the board for orientation and team building.
- ▶ Have high expectations for the person's participation.
- ▶ Be deliberate about the role of the new person and expectations for the board to involve her/him actively.
- ▶ Designate one person to ensure the person's participation during and between meetings
- ▶ Develop a Resource Notebook of tips and relevant articles for all board members to use as needed.

## Guiding Principles

- ▶ "Nothing about me without me." Always include self-advocates when planning supports, doing board training activities, etc that involve them.
- ▶ Emphasize the strengths the individual brings to the board, not the person's disability or accommodations that the board needs to make.
- ▶ Make explicit the commitment of the group to help the person participate meaningfully and actively.
- ▶ Find roles and tasks that self-advocates can do to contribute to the board.
- ▶ Give the process time to work. People are successful and develop relationships after they have had time to share experiences and get to know each other.
- ▶ Always ask the individual before making any accommodations. Don't assume you know what the person wants or needs.
- ▶ Never give more support than the individual wants or needs.

## Making a Difference

Inviting people who are self-advocates to your board means you may need to change the way your board operates to include accommodations for that person. It doesn't mean that you need to change the scope of your work.

## Working Together

- ▶ Use a checklist to keep track of how you're doing in including the new board member.
- ▶ Run a meeting that lets everyone be successful.
- ▶ Have your agenda prepared early.
- ▶ Start on time.
- ▶ Keep minutes & notes
- ▶ Be sure the tone of your meeting is welcoming.
- ▶ Be aware of the seating arrangement. (Does it isolate or include the new board member?)
- ▶ Encourage leaders in the group to spend time with the self-advocate outside the board meeting to get to know her/him.
- ▶ LISTEN well to understand.
- ▶ Read the person's body language.
- ▶ Give time to let the person communicate.
- ▶ Learn to understand the person's speech, and don't be afraid to ask someone to repeat what they have said.
- ▶ Always begin by assuming that what the person is saying relates to what is going on and look for ways to make it meaningful to the discussion.
- ▶ Discuss and clarify voting items with board member in an impartial manner.
- ▶ Be sure that each board member understands the motion when it reaches the floor for voting.
- ▶ Fade away supports as soon as possible.