

Recruiting People with Disabilities for Boards, Councils and Public Health Programs

Boards and advisory councils are the fabric of communities that collectively pool ideas, resources and expertise to advance the needs of the citizens. Providing a voice for the diversity of the community ensures that everyone is represented in the community and its decision making. One group, disability, often is not at the table or included in decision making that could negatively affect their social, health, economic and living environment.

According to the 2010 Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, (BRFSS) nearly 20% of non-institutionalized adult respondents report having some type of a disability. Some people are born with a disability while others happen through age, illness or accident. For most disability is a normal part of the aging process.

However it can be challenging to recruit or find members to fill open council seats. The following are suggestions are how to involve people with disabilities in your community.

Recruitment strategies:

- Establish partnerships with disability related advocacy organizations and existing disability councils
 - Iowa Centers for Independent Living
 - Disability Rights Iowa
 - Vocational Rehabilitation
 - Easter Seals
 - The Arc
 - Faith based community
 - Service providers, i.e. In Home Services, Para transit
 - Professional groups, i.e. attorneys, physicians

Post on the websites of disability organizations in your area about open council seats. Provide a description of the council including the mission, vision, how often they meet and the average length of time of each meeting. But to ensure that everyone can participate, accessibility and providing reasonable accommodation is a must for true inclusion.

Physical Access:

- Determine if the meeting space is accessible using American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines

- Adequate parking, closest to the accessible entrance with van parking and an access aisle
- An entrance that is accessible, (one with a no step entrance)
- Signage directing to the accessible entrance
- Accessible elevator if the meeting space is not on the first level
- Fully accessible restrooms
- Don't assume that meeting spaces are accessible
- Survey the meeting space ahead of time to determine accessibility
 - Survey available at www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/checkweb.htm
 - Or call the Department of Justice at 1-800-949-4ADA for assistance
- The Office of Disability and Health can assist entities with the survey
- Meeting space on a bus line for people without transportation
- If you are sure that the meeting space is accessible, advertise that fact, this will encourage the public to participate also

Meeting Material Access:

- Make sure all meeting materials are available in alternate formats, i.e. large print, braille, printed material online that is compatible with screen readers for people with low to no vision
- People with cognitive disabilities may need materials that are clear and simple, at a 4th to 6th grade reading level
- Provide meeting material ahead of time, giving members enough time to review
- Materials viewed online can also benefit people with dexterity disability instead of trying to handle paper or pages
- Arrange for interpreters for people with low to no hearing
- Advanced copies of meeting materials can benefit cognitive interpreters or personal care attendants who break down concepts for people with cognitive disabilities
- Most of all ask, if someone requests accommodation discuss if/or how that can be reasonably achieved
- If meals or refreshments are provided include options for people with specific dietary needs

Including People with Disabilities in Public Health Programs

- Provide program materials in alternate formats upon request
- Ensure that websites are 508 compliant

- Include people with disabilities in program materials, websites, Power Points
- If there is direct service to the public ensure that the building is physically accessible and compliant with the ADA
- Provide program materials to disability organizations
- Add disability organizations to listserv
- Advertise that events are accessible if indeed they are

For more information visit the IDPH Disability and Health website at www.idph.state.ia.us/bh/disability_health.asp

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