



## Influencing Education and Disability Policy



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# Session Objectives

- Influencing education and disability policy
  - Who, what, why, how
- Research: body of evidence
- Building relationships with public officials.
- Strategies for influencing education and disability policy and legislation.

# Shaping an Advocacy Campaign

- Audience
- Define objectives
- Resources
- Assets
- Strategy
- Tactics
- Message
- Implement

# Local, State & Federal Officials

- Who are some of the public officials we should get to know?
  - Mayor
  - City Council
  - County Commissioner
  - State Legislators and Senators
  - State Agency Officials
  - Governor
  - U.S. Senator
  - U.S. Representative
  - Federal Agency Officials

# Define Objectives

- What is the goal of the advocacy effort?
  - more funding
  - new legislation/policy change
  - education and awareness
- What are the short term outcomes?
  - generating new/increased funding
  - legislation introduced/law enacted
- What are the mid and long term outcomes?
  - public awareness and visibility
  - additional resources
  - increased employment, community living, quality of life

# Advocacy at Local, State, & Federal Level

- Why is it important to build relationships with government officials?
  - increased visibility and awareness
  - effect public policy
  - potential funding partner
  - develop champions for your issues

# Resources

- Effective Advocacy will require:
  - expertise
  - commitment of resources
  - strategic use of resources
  - organizational support/approval
  - constituent mobilization

# Evidence

- Demonstrated need – body of evidence
  - Underserved
  - Gaps/disparities
  - Trends
- Personal stories
  - How does policy effect students/families
  - Congressional hearings
- Federal research resources
  - Congressional research service
  - GAO



# Tactics

- Message development
  - Locate and include data
- Conduct meetings
- Secure a champion for your program
- Mobilize stakeholders
- Join a coalition of organizations

# Message Development

- Shape the message to the audience
- Define the funding/legislative request
- Establish your credibility
- Use supporting research to demonstrate need
  - What is the predictable future if nothing is done
- What are the benefits
  - Cost savings
  - Opportunity costs
- Provide real life examples/stories

# Meetings with Public Officials

- Keep it local
  - “All politics is local”
- Keep it personal
  - Put a face and personal story on the request
- Keep it concise
  - Time with public officials is short
  - Prepare ahead
  - Be brief and to the point
- Keep it written
  - Prepare a one-page document outlining request and justification
  - Bring program materials like photos, testimonials, list of partners
- Follow-up meetings with thank you notes

# Secure a Champion

- Determine where there may be an existing personal relationship
- Determine where the public official may have a personal connection to your issue
- Engage Champion in your organization's activities:
  - Invite Champion to visit/tour program/facilities
  - Create media opportunities around visit or related story

# Keep the Momentum

- Make the investment in establishing relationships
- Maintain new and existing relationships
- Acknowledge Champions
- Treat public officials like partners
- Keep them informed and engaged
- Thank them publicly

# How a Bill Becomes Law

- Each Session of Congress is two years in length. If a bill does not make it through the process it dies and must be reintroduced.
- Introduced in House and Senate
- Considered by Committees of Jurisdiction
- Committee hearings may be held
- Passed out of Committee
- Considered and passed by Full House and Senate
- Considered in Conference Committee (House and Senate come together)
- Passed by Full House and Senate
- Sent to the President for his signature



# Disability Awareness Training Resources



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# Advocacy Training Overview

Conducting training within your organizations –

- Training self advocates
- Disability Awareness
- Disability Etiquette
  - Person First language
  - Myths and Facts



# Disability Related Definitions

**Impairment:** Used to characterize a physical, mental or physiological loss or injury that causes a limitation in one or more major life functions. For example, “The loss of her right leg impaired her ability to walk long distances.”

**Disability:** Refers to a limitation that affects an individual’s ability to perform certain functions. For example, it is correct to say, “Blindness is a disability that prevents one from driving a car.”

**Handicap:** Describes a barrier or problem created by society or the environment. For example, “People with disabilities are sometimes handicapped by the assumption that their abilities are somehow limited.”

# Disability Related Definitions

**Accessible:** Easy to approach, enter, operate, participate in, and/or use safely and with dignity by a person with a disability (i.e., site, facility, work environment, service, or program).

**Assistive/Adaptive Equipment:** Devices that assist in activities or mobility, including wheelchairs, prostheses, ramps, bars, changes in furniture (table) heights, and environmental control units.

# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

## Things to Remember When You Meet -

Persons who use wheelchairs:

- Do not grab or push a person's wheelchair unless asked to do so.
- If possible, place yourself on the same eye level with the person in a wheelchair.
- Remember that it is uncomfortable for a person who is seated to look straight up for a long period.

# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

## Things to Remember When You Meet -

Persons who use wheelchairs:

- It is not necessary to be sensitive to words like “running” and “walking”.
- Always keep accessibility in mind. Ask yourself, for example, “Is the hallway blocked?” “Is the path to the restroom clear?” “Can this person perform a weight shift?”

# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

## Things to Remember When You Meet -

Persons who are visually impaired:

- Use the person's name when starting conversation so they know who is speaking.
- Speak directly to the person using a normal tone of voice. Let the person know when you need to end a conversation.
- When offering a handshake, say something like, "Shall we shake hands?" If the person extends a hand first, be sure to take it or to explain why if you can't.

# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

## Things to Remember When You Meet -

Persons who are visually impaired:

- Ask if the person if he or she wants help.
- When providing assistance, allow the person to take your arm or elbow, enabling you to guide.
- When offering seating, ask if you can place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat.
- Do not pet or distract a guide dog unless the owner has given permission.

# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

## Things to Remember When You Meet -

Persons who are hearing impaired:

- If necessary, get the person's attention with a tap on the shoulder or a wave of the hand.
- When using speech to communicate, always face the person and speak clearly and slowly.
- Be flexible in your language.
- As a last resort, write messages on paper.

# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

## Things to Remember When You Meet -

Persons who are hearing impaired:

- Keep hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when talking.
- When an interpreter accompanies a person, direct your remark to the person rather than to the interpreter.



# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

## Things to Remember When You Meet -

Persons with speech differences:

- Give whole, unhurried attention to the person who has difficulty speaking.
- Keep your manner encouraging as opposed to correcting.
- Rather than speak for the person, allow extra time and give help when needed.
- If necessary, ask questions that require short answers or a nod of the head.

# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

## Things to Remember When You Meet -

### Persons who have Cerebral Palsy:

- If an individual's speech is difficult to understand, do not be afraid to ask that a statement be repeated.
- Do not use the terms "lame", "spastic" or "spaz" when describing someone who has Cerebral Palsy.

# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

## Things to Remember When You Meet -

Persons who are mobility impaired:

- When accompanying a person with mobility impairment, try to walk alongside the person rather than in front.
- Assume people who use artificial legs, canes, and crutches can use the stairs in addition to elevators, unless they inform you otherwise.
- Be aware of distances. Even a two to three block walk for lunch could be tiresome to some individuals with mobility impairment.

# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

## Things to Remember When You Meet -

Persons who are short statured:

- If possible, place yourself on the same eye level when speaking with the person who is a short statured.
- Do not provide assistance unless asked to do so.
- Do not equate size with intellectual ability.
- Do not pat a person of short stature on the head.

# Person First Language

**What are some common terms used when speaking about persons with disability?**

# Person First Language

Person First Language refers to the way we use language to describe people. The basic tenet of Person First Language is that we refer to the person first and the descriptive feature such as the disability second.

Following are some examples:

- athlete who is blind; person who is visually impaired instead of “the blind”
- person who is deaf; person who is hearing impaired instead of “suffers a hearing loss”
- person who has multiple sclerosis instead of “afflicted by MS”

# Person First Language

- athlete who has cerebral palsy instead of “CP victim”
- person who has muscular dystrophy instead of “stricken by MD”
- person with mental impairment or learning disability instead of “retarded or mentally defective”
- person with epilepsy; person with a seizure disorder instead of “epileptic”
- person who uses a wheelchair instead of “confined or restricted to a wheelchair”
- person without disabilities; non-disabled person instead of “able bodied” or “normal person”

(The President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Reprinted from LDA Newsletter, Winter 1993)



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# Role Play: Myths and Facts

The following “Myths and Facts” provide examples of common misconceptions about persons with disabilities.

Use the examples provided to guide role play scenarios used in advocacy training:

Ask participants to determine the best way to address or respond to each situation.



# Role Play: Myths and Facts

**Myth:** People with disabilities are inspirational and courageous.

**Fact:** Adjusting to a disability is challenging and requires adapting to a lifestyle, not bravery and courage.

# Role Play: Myths and Facts

**Myth:** Individuals with a disability cannot compete or participate in sports with individuals without a disability.

**Truth:** There are many activities in which individuals with disabilities can participate in sports and physical fitness with people without disabilities. Sporting activities like tennis, swimming, road racing, track and field, yoga, tai chi, aerobics classes, spin classes, walking, and biking.

# Role Play: Myths and Facts

**Myth:** Wheelchair use is confining; people who use wheelchairs are "wheelchair-bound."

**Fact:** A wheelchair, like a bicycle or an automobile, is a personal assistive device that enables someone to get around.

# Role Play: Myths and Facts

**Myth:** All persons with hearing disabilities can read lips.

**Fact:** Lip-reading skills vary among people who use them and are never entirely reliable.

**Myth:** People who are blind acquire a "sixth sense."

**Fact:** Although most people who are blind develop their remaining senses more fully, they do not have a "sixth sense."

# Role Play: Myths and Facts

**Myth:** Physical exertion is harmful to people with disabilities.

**Truth:** People with disabilities should consult their physician before beginning a physical activity regime particularly if they have been sedentary for a period of time. Activities of daily living require some degree of physical exertion and adding a physical activity regime to this daily activity will increase strength and stamina.

# Role Play: Myths and Facts

**Myth:** Curious children should never ask people about their disabilities.

**Fact:** Many children have a natural, uninhibited curiosity and may ask questions that some adults consider embarrassing.

But scolding curious children may make them think having a disability is "wrong" or "bad." Most people with disabilities won't mind answering a child's question.

# Role Play: Myths and Facts

**Myth:** It is all right for people without disabilities to park in accessible parking spaces, if only for a few minutes.

**Fact:** Because accessible parking spaces are designed and situated to meet the needs of people who have disabilities, these spaces should only be used by people who need them.

# Cultivating a Disability Friendly Environment

**Everyone can contribute to cultivating a disability friendly community. You can help remove barriers by:**

- Advocating a barrier-free environment
- Speaking up when negative words or phrases are used about disability
- Don't overlook barriers such as program policies or obstacles in the physical environment.



**Thank You**

**Questions??**



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# Thank You

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