

Promising Practice Brief



Promising Practice Briefs are produced by the Association of University Centers on Disabilities through the UCEDD Resource Center (URC) in conjunction with its network members.

July 2010

Consumer Advisory Council Support

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (DD Act) requires the establishment of a consumer advisory committee, the majority of whose members include people with developmental and related disabilities and their family members. The committee's role is to consult with and advise the UCEDD director in the development of the Center's 5-year plan, the annual review of the plan, and any proposed revisions to the plan. Members of consumer advisory committees across the country often require support to carry out their duties.

This committee at NDCPD is called the Consumer Advisory Council (CAC). NDCPD has developed a significant number of practices to support their CAC members in meaningfully fulfilling their roles. Some of these practices are common in Centers across the country, while others are more innovative.

1. NDCPD has involved their CAC in every aspect of defining and developing the support provided to the CAC membership. The NDCPD CAC developed bylaws to guide the purpose, function, membership, officers, operations, parliamentary authority, and dissolution of Council. The bylaws were developed in 1998, and revised in 2001.
2. A Reference Manual for CAC members was developed in 2008, providing members with information about the CAC; the DD Act; NDCPD; types of boards, committees and councils; participation in CAC meetings; advocacy activities; CAC membership and responsibilities; recruitment of CAC members; and identifying and obtaining the necessary support to participate in the CAC. This manual is provided to every member of the CAC, is reviewed extensively with new members during their orientation, and is revisited periodically by the CAC as the need arises.
3. Two topics within the Manual have been expanded into stand-alone trainings: (1) Making Sense of Boards and Committees, and (2) Getting Support to Serve on Boards and Committees. These trainings are provided to CAC members and other self-advocates, helping them succeed in serving on any of a number of boards and committees across the state.
4. CAC members at NDCPD have the opportunity to gain key knowledge and understanding of the Center's activities through job shadowing. This is one of the

more innovative supports provided by NDCPD. Through job shadowing, CAC members can gain a better understanding of a Center project that is of interest. The member selects the project of interest, as well as the best day and time to shadow the project and its staff, and NDCPD supports the visit by covering travel and hotel costs. Both CAC members and Center staff have reported that it helps tremendously with improving the members' understanding of what the UCEDD is involved in, enables the development of relationships and partnerships between members and staff, and in the words of CAC Chair Deb Unruh, has been "a tremendously positive experience." The cost for supporting the CAC members' travel for job shadowing is written into the NDCPD budget, and is prioritized by the Center director and CAC liaison.

Approximately one dozen of the 14 CAC members have participated in this job shadowing opportunity. Several members have selected a shadowing day that coincides with NDCPD's weekly staff meeting, providing them with the opportunity to join the meeting and gain an overview of all the Center projects in addition to shadowing the one project that interests them the most. In at least one instance, the job shadowing experience has prompted a CAC member to pursue employment opportunities with the Center. During the next CAC meeting, the member provides a report of his or her experience.

5. Another more innovative support provided by NDCPD is the opportunity for CAC members to provide feedback on potential grant opportunities the Center is pursuing. The Center develops a pre-proposal narrative to CAC members for their review and feedback. Typically, the feedback provides a practical perspective on what improvements could be made to the proposal to ensure it has a more positive impact on people and families with disabilities. This practice also provides the Center with a review by an uninformed reader, whose feedback helps ensure the staff who develops the proposal has clarified as much information as possible prior to final submission.

CAC members are notified when a pre-proposal narrative is ready for review, and are also alerted to the time frame for the review. Interested members are sent the narrative in whatever format they require (email, postal mail, large print, recording, etc.). For grant opportunities that have a very short turn-around time for submission, NDCPD acknowledges that it is a challenge to develop accessible formats of the materials for review. During their review, CAC members have the opportunity to contact the grant writer at any time with questions. Some CAC members may be intimidated by this process, but are assured that all input is valued.

This grant proposal review provides CAC members with another view into how the Center works, its need to leverage funding, and how it balances funding sources with the issues identified by the disability community across the state. Additionally, this review process provides CAC members preliminary experience with the grant review process, which enables them to more successfully participate on other review panels at the local and state level, as well as better prepare them for potential grant writing collaborations. Finally, this practice further strengthens relationships and partnerships between NDCPD staff and CAC members.

6. NDCPD requested, in collaboration with its network partners, a joint Technical Assistance (TA) Visit from the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) and the Information and Technical Assistance Center for Councils on Developmental Disabilities (iTACC) following its MTARS visit. AUCD and iTACC staff served as consultants on this visit and reviewed current orientation materials; provided trainings to UCEDD, CAC, DD Council, and P&A members to introduce them to the DD Act, and DD Network, and their respective programs; explained the roles and responsibilities of each partner; and provided tools to assist the partners in fulfilling their roles.

Following the visit, NDCPD and the CAC worked together to revise the CAC member orientation. A letter and phone call to new CAC members welcomes them to their new role. New members are sent a package including the Bylaws and Reference Manual, and a video conference is held to allow new members the opportunity to discuss all the material received and ask any necessary questions prior to participation in their first CAC meeting.

The CAC also formed an executive committee following the TA Visit. This committee fulfills two roles: (a) maintain ongoing communication between the CAC and NDCPD, and (b) provide continuity in CAC activities between meetings.

A third development following the TA Visit was the creation of a member support committee of the CAC. This committee ensures each CAC member receives materials in the required accessible format for meetings. It also recommended that NDCPD holds a phone conference prior to CAC meetings to review the agenda items of the upcoming meeting and ensure CAC members are aware of what will be discussed during the meeting and how they can best participate; the Center instituted these recommendations. The member support committee also leads a discussion after each CAC meeting to allow members the opportunity to discuss the meeting itself, and ask any outstanding questions about the process of the meeting.

The CAC liaison and chair acknowledge that they are busier with these changes instituted, but that the increased communication has become the best part of their jobs. They feel very supported by NDCPD Director, Brent Askvig, PhD, and have noticed an increased commitment to the Center and to the CAC itself by CAC members.

Why is CAC Support a Promising Practice?

Consumer Advisory Council (CAC) Support was identified as promising in the MTARS evaluation for the extent to which the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD) provides support to CAC members in understanding and fulfilling their roles. NDCPD engages in several activities to support its CAC members, including conducting a well-defined orientation; providing a CAC member handbook; training CAC members on the purpose, logistics, and function of boards, committees, and advisory councils; and training CAC members on identifying and obtaining the necessary support to participate in a board, committee, or advisory council. Two additional activities engaged in by NDCPD to support their CAC members include job shadowing, and opportunities to provide feedback on NDCPD funding opportunities. NDCPD CAC Support was identified as promising during the 2009 MTARS Reviews.

Suggestions for Replicability

The North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities offers these suggestions for implementing similar supportive efforts:

- Prioritize efforts that support involvement of CAC members. This prioritization should come from the Center director, so it trickles down throughout the Center.
- Ensure a budget line is devoted to funds supporting CAC travel to the Center.
- Maximize opportunities for CAC members to learn the Center's staff and projects
- Most importantly, engage CAC members in discussion of their role, and what they need to better fulfill that role. Their discussion should guide supportive efforts

For More Information

Dawn D. Olson

CAC Liaison and Parent/Consumer Coordinator

North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities, Minot State University

500 University Avenue West, Minot, ND 58707

701-858-4472, dawn.d.olson@minotstateu.edu

