

STEERING FOR CHANGE:
THE GUIDEBOOK FOR
CONSUMER-DRIVEN ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Produced by:
Resource Connections'



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“Building partnerships and connections
for the life YOU choose”

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“We want to help people have a voice”

“We have a lot to say and want people to listen to us”

“Even people who don’t use words have a lot to say – we need to listen to them”

“We need to do what we can do to help other people”

We want to do what we can do to give people a voice and a choice”

These are quotes from us, the members of the Steering Committee of Resource Connections, Inc (RCI). We have a lot to say. We are determined to make a difference. We ARE making a difference. We want you to know how we are doing it so you can do it too.

The Steering Committee wanted to write this guidebook to help you create your steering committee - a committee that is consumer driven, a committee that has a real role to play in your organization. We are committed to helping organizations create authentic roles for people with disabilities; to create the opportunity for our voices to be heard, acknowledged, and included in the decision making policy and process of an organization. If that’s what you want, then this is a guidebook for you.

Our process is an evolving process – it continues to emerge from our work. It is interactive and vibrant. We did not create one plan and make ourselves stick to it. We created a plan based on the vision/mission of RCI, and worked at each meeting to move toward that mission, always willing to modify our process to include new information, thoughts and feelings of our members.

This guidebook will share our process: we’ll share the questions we asked at each stage of our work together. We will share some of our answers. We will share some of our results.

We think our process is what’s most important and helpful. We decided projects based on the interest of our team/committee members. We are excited about our projects and our products, but mostly, we are excited about our process, and about what we learned in the process. We learned so much about relationships, about leadership, about working together in a team, about community, and about what we each needed to do to help the organization move toward its vision/mission.

In this guidebook, we share our process and the questions we answered to help you create an active, energetic, meaningful steering committee for your organization. NEVER put people with disabilities into a token role. The organization needs to know that we have a lot to offer – that our voices need to be heard – that what we have to say is important and essential to improve the quality of life for all individuals with disabilities. We can’t accept a role where we are expected to be a silent partner. We must speak out and let people know what we know; WE know what people with disabilities need from their service providers. We cannot settle for less. WE must

Speak out. Join a Steering Committee of an organization that provides services – put yourself in the driver's seat.

This is the story and the process of a group of consumers who decided we wanted to make a difference. This is the amazing work that we accomplished. We want to help you do the same.

Thank you for listening to our story.

GETTING STARTED

So, you're thinking of creating or joining a Steering Committee for the organization that provides services for you and your friends. What do you need to think about? Where do you start? How do you begin to create a strong, effective and meaningful advisory committee?

The most important and the first conversation to have is with the organization; with the Executive Director and the Board of Directors. Their support and encouragement are so important to your success. Find out what role they want the Steering Committee to play in the organization. Find out what their philosophy is – what do they value? Do they have a vision - a picture of the future - that you can believe in too?

Here are some of the other questions you can ask to discover the organization's philosophy and commitment to creating an active, meaningful Steering Committee:

- Will this organization value our voices-do they want to listen to what we have to say? How will our voices be heard by the organization?
- Does the organization's mission or vision support the participation of people with disabilities, of the people they serve?
- Will we have a key role to play? Will they ask for our opinions about the direction for the organization's work?
- Can they explain the purpose and expectations for the Steering Committee so they make sense to you?
- Will they give the resources necessary for our success?

The Steering Committee of RCI is successful because (1) the organization (RCI) wanted us to have a real and important role in the on-going development of the organization; (2) the organization had a mission that encouraged the work of a consumer-driven Steering Committee (*"Building Partnerships and Connections for the Life You Choose"*); and, (3) the Steering Committee spent a lot of time planning to be successful. We were very thoughtful about what and who we wanted to be. The organization was very thoughtful about its definition of our role, and they were willing to invest in our success.

Once you have the commitment from the organization, there are some other questions you need to answer to get started and to keep going. Asking the right questions is the key to your success.

We have organized this guidebook by the questions we asked and answered as we worked together. You can write **YOUR** answers right in this book. You can find some of our answers in the resource material in the back of this guidebook.

MEMBERSHIP

A Steering Committee has a big responsibility. The members give voice to the needs, wishes and opinions of the people that the organization serves. A Steering Committee advises the organization. A Steering Committee helps the organization make connections with the people they serve. Choosing the members of the committee is another important job. You need to decide who should be on this committee: whose voices need to be heard? Here are some of the questions to consider:

What groups should be represented on the Steering Committee? Think about all the people served by the organization. Who does the organization impact? Who should have a voice?

- Can we think of specific individuals we might want to consider for membership? Who? What would they contribute? Who would they represent?
- Who has a connection with these individuals? If we decided to invite them to join the committee, who would be the best person to offer that invitation?
- How many members do we want? How many people do we need on our “team” to be successful?
- How will we recruit members? How will we continue to recruit members when someone rotates off the committee?
- What documents should we prepare to help us convince people to join this committee? (Consider creating a document with answers to your questions.)

Are we clear about our expectations for our members? What do we expect our members to do?

- What are our rules for attendance?

- How long do we expect members to serve?
- What are our expectations for participation? In meetings? In special projects?
- What homework or preparation will be required?
- What leadership roles will we have to take at the meetings?

How will the organization support and encourage the members of the Steering Committee?

- What is the process for communication between the Steering Committee and the organization – the Executive Director and Board of Directors? How will we be heard?
- What type of on-going relationship does the organization plan to have with the Steering Committee? Will there be a liaison role-some way to bridge the Steering Committee and the Board of Directors?
- How will we handle transportation? How will we make sure the members can get to meetings? Will we provide travel vouchers?
- Are we able to provide accommodations for people who need support to participate? How will we demonstrate that we value and welcome people with differing abilities?
- What are the benefits to the members for participating on the Steering Committee? What can they expect to gain personally from their participation? Why would they want to join this committee? (List all the possible benefits and use them in your recruitment information.)

- What type of administrative support will the organization provide to the committee? How will we get information (e.g., minutes and announcements) out to the members?
 - Will we have a facilitator? What role do we want the facilitator to play? What are our expectations?
 - What are the pros and cons of having an outside facilitator versus a staff facilitator versus a member facilitator? Is it possible to hire an outside facilitator?
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DEVELOPING THE COMMITTEE

Now, you have the members for your Steering Committee and you're ready to begin working. What do you do first? In order to create a high performing, effective committee, it's important to spend time making sure all the members feel connected to one another and to the vision of the organization. Once the committee is formed, it's important to begin building the team, and deciding how you want to work together. A facilitator can be very helpful in getting a new team/committee started out on the right foot. Having a special orientation meeting can make all the difference. The following are some things you might want to consider as you begin your work as a team:

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS and CONNECTIONS

- Talk about the mission of the Steering Committee. Talk about the purpose. What do you hope to accomplish together?
- Make sure everyone introduces themselves. Sometimes it's interesting for everyone to answer a question like "Why did you want to join this committee?" "What do you want to do to help this organization?" It's important to take turns and to listen to each other. Again, make sure everyone has a chance to talk.
- Think about how you want to get to know everyone better. What do you want to know about the other members? What do you want them to know about you? How can you start building connections and partnerships?
- Create a list of fun questions. Take turns interviewing each other. Some questions could be: Tell about a time you had a lot of fun with your friends. What were you doing? Why was it so much fun? What's your favorite thing to do? What is one thing that is really important to you? Tell about a time you were really proud of yourself. What were you

doing? What's your favorite animal? Favorite movie? What are some questions you would like to ask?

- How can you use the process of sharing and listening to stories to build your community? How can you make sure you have time for that at each meeting? How can you check in with each other? What are some things you can do at each meeting to continue to build your relationships?
- What can you do to include new members? And, what can you do to re-connect with someone who has been absent? How will you re-connect with each other at each meeting?

STRUCTURE: HOW DO YOU WANT TO WORK TOGETHER?

- How often will you have meetings? Once a month? Twice a month? Every week? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each schedule? What schedule will work best for this committee?
- Develop team guidelines – how do you want to treat each other? How do you want to respond to people who communicate in different ways? Be specific about your guidelines. Write them down. Make sure everyone agrees to follow the guidelines. It's helpful to make sure everyone has a copy.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities for each meeting. What will the facilitator do? What will the chairperson/leader do? Will you have a minute taker? Timekeeper? Will members perform these roles? Staff? Make sure everyone knows what they are expected to do.
- Make sure you have an agenda for each meeting. Decide whose job it is to create the agenda. Always take action on each item on the agenda. There are three different actions you can take: you can decide/resolve the issue; you can defer it to another meeting; and/or you can decide it is no longer something you want to consider and delete it.
- Make sure the minutes capture all of the decisions made by the committee. This will be the formal record of your meetings, decisions and actions. One of the first things to do at each meeting is to read the minutes and approve them or correct them and then approve. A formal way to approve the minutes is to have a member say: "I move the minutes be approved." The leader/facilitator calls for someone to "second the minutes be approved," and then asks "all in favor say aye." This is a formal way to say that all members have read the minutes and agree with them.
- How do you want to make decisions as a committee? By agreement? By majority? How will you make sure everyone's voice gets heard before you make a decision?
- How do you want to start each meeting? How can you use the beginning of each meeting to reconnect with the members of the committee? Could you share stories about

accomplishments? Fun activities? How can you make sure everyone has the opportunity to share if they choose?

- How will you structure the meetings so everyone has a chance to participate? Will you stay together as one large group? Will you break into small groups for discussion and then come back together for reports and sharing? What will work best for your group?
- Will you evaluate your meetings? How will you adjourn? Will you talk about next steps? Will there be homework? Are there any assignments? Do people know what their responsibilities are?

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

- When deciding what projects to do, ask: What is our purpose and the mission of the organization? Will these projects help the organization accomplish its mission?
- Brainstorm ideas-what are all the possibilities? What does the organization want the Steering Committee to do? What do the members have energy and interest in doing? Write down all of the ideas – you can eliminate some later.
- What are the pros and cons for each idea? Are the ideas realistic, practical and doable? Do you have the resources? Time? Does the committee have the energy? Which idea will best serve the organization's mission?
- If you have more than one project idea that will help achieve the organization's mission, how will you choose what project to do first? How can you make sure you know what everyone is thinking before you vote? One process that can work: have everyone advocate for their first choice – everyone states why they like one idea more than another idea. After you have heard from everyone, you can vote. The project idea with the most votes is the one you'll do first.
- Once you have decided on a project, what will you include in an action plan to get it done? What are all the tasks you need to do? When do they have to be done? Who is responsible for each task? How will you hold yourselves accountable for doing what you promise? How will you celebrate your successes?
- How will you evaluate your project? What did you learn from your experience? What worked really well? What could you do differently next time? Are there any recommendations for the Board?
- What type of a report does the organization expect? Who will write it? Who will present the report and recommendations to the Board of Directors?

ONGOING LEARNING and LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- What are some of the skills the members want to develop? What will help you be more effective in the community? In the organization? What training would be helpful to

develop the leadership skills you need? Who will you contract with to receive this training?

- Identify opportunities to practice your new skills. Are there community boards that need your leadership? Are there other opportunities for you to share your opinions, ideas and concerns?
- Is there someone who could coach you as you develop your skills? Is there someone you could ask to be your mentor?
- What can you all do to support all your members to use their leadership skills in the community? How can you keep track of the number of Steering Committee members who are on other community boards?
- Are there other projects or events that would encourage leadership practice? Are there speaking opportunities? Can you plan another event? Can you participate as a volunteer in community events?
- What support do you need to continue to do and be your best? How can you continue to grow as a Steering Committee member and as a person? What would help you continue to move toward service excellence?

CONCLUSION

We have provided you with many questions to consider as you establish a Steering Committee for your organization. We want to help you have a good experience too. Creating a Steering Committee with a clear and powerful voice in an organization takes a lot of work and energy. It takes commitment from the members of the committee and from the organization. Everyone has to work together toward a common goal. If you take the time to find the answers to the questions in this guidebook, we are confident you will be successful. Remember, creating a Steering Committee is a learning experience. We can learn from our successes and our mistakes. We want to share some of the lessons we learned from our experience on a Steering Committee.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Identify standards for membership and use it to choose members (don't just invite friends or housemates)
- Meet more often than once/month – two times/month worked much better for us. It was easier to stay connected and to keep up our energy from meeting to meeting.
- Use a facilitator to get the process started at least; having a facilitator throughout the process is helpful. It was important to have someone whose job it was to keep us focused and moving toward our goals.

- Make sure quiet folks are invited and encouraged to share. Sometimes it's helpful to go around the circle asking each person to share something.
- Take the time to get acquainted and re-connected each time you get together. It makes the work a lot easier.
- Team guidelines are very important – create them and use them to guide your interactions. Make sure everyone follows them.
- Break into small groups for discussion and then have small groups report to large group. Some people had a hard time participating in the large group.
- Help people get their points across – don't talk for them but listen to understand until you do understand. Check with them to make sure you understand correctly.
- Be patient-give people the time they need to give voice to their ideas
- Remember to have fun and celebrate your successes. It makes a difference!

We hope this guidebook will help you create a Steering Committee that adds value to your life and to your organization. We continue to learn a lot from our participation. You are welcome to use some of our ideas!

Good Luck!

