

Chapter 8: Recruiting, Orienting, and Training New and Established Council Members

Traits of a Good Council Member

Besides obtaining a working knowledge of the SILC and disability issues, what other qualities make a good council member?

- **Have a Commitment to Disability Rights**—To start with, it is best if you are committed to the rights of, and improving services for, people with disabilities and furthering the mission of the SILC in your state. Working or volunteering in the disability arena is not about the money. It is more about giving back to the community while working on improving social justice, independence, and quality of life for children and adults with disabilities within your state.
- **Bring Your Skills**—Bring the skills, experience, and connections you have to the work of the SILC. Your skills in finance, planning, public relations, writing, social media, etc. are valuable assets to the SILC. Offer your skills and connections to the council to maximize your membership and the SILC's effectiveness.
- **Learn New Skills**—In addition to learning new information, it is helpful if you are willing to learn new skills in financial management, strategic planning, evaluation, etc. It takes time and effort to acquire knowledge and skills, but these abilities will benefit both your SILC and you personally.
- **Develop Relationships**—You should develop relationships and make friends with other SILC members and staff. It will make meetings and work groups more enjoyable and effective. Try to learn the names and responsibilities of the other council members and staff as soon as you can. Treat staff as equal partners.
- **Respect and Listen to Others**—It is helpful if you listen to others, and consider different issues from all sides. Try to stay on good terms with everyone, even if someone opposes you. Respect confidences and privacy. Gather information if needed. Ask questions about anything that is confusing or that you need more information about. Other people most likely feel the same way.
- **Voice Your Opinion**—Voice your opinion, especially if you have different information or views. Your opinion counts and makes a difference. Try not to take it personally if people vote against something that you want. Consider a compromise when necessary to move ideas forward and help everyone feel that their opinions were heard.
- **Participate Fully**—Of course, making sure that you attend and actively participate in all council and committee meetings is the most basic, but

nevertheless, important quality. Be on time. Make sure that you let the chair know if you are unavoidably late or cannot make a meeting. The willingness to serve on a work committee and take action where needed moves the work of the council forward. Councils need active, engaged members. Read agendas and attachments that are sent out ahead of time before you attend meetings.

- **Follow Through**—Do everything that you say you are going to do. If you run into difficulty completing a task, let the chair know and ask for help. If you fail to meet your obligations, other committee or council members will have to pick up the slack. If you come up with a new idea, be willing to help make that idea happen.
- **Remember the Big Picture**—Be proactive and attentive, but focus on the big important stuff, such as where the SILC and the Independent Living Network are going, how they are doing, and current strategies / policies, not minor details. Try to monitor what is happening to stay ahead of problems instead of reacting to a crisis.
- **Offer Solutions**—If you point out a concern, try not to blame or point fingers and always offer a solution. Things will move forward if criticism is constructive and includes possible solutions or steps to resolve the issue. On the other hand, make sure to show your appreciation for other members and the SILC staff. Many times people hear what is going wrong, or needs to be improved, but do not hear about the things that are going right or that they are doing well.
- **Be an Ambassador**—Share information about your SILC through social media and with the social and professional groups that you belong to. There is a section on social media later on in this document.