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Checklist for Enhancing the Participation and Input of People with Disabilities

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July 2006

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ILRU supports community independence for people with disabilities through a national program of research, education, consulting, and publications. ILRU is part of Memorial Hermann/TIRR (The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research), a nationally recognized rehabilitation facility for persons with physical disabilities.

This paper was developed under Grant No. 11-P-92574/6-01 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). The contents do not necessarily represent the official position of CMS and no endorsement should be inferred.

Checklist for Enhancing the Participation and Input of People with Disabilities

Introduction

In many ways, consumers are the best experts on their disabling conditions, including their own needs for support and the effectiveness and quality of programs designed to support them. As a result, obtaining consumer participation and input at all stages of program design, implementation, evaluation and quality assurance is important. Effectively and efficiently involving consumers and obtaining their input, however, requires organizations to use creative and innovative methods. While Advisory Councils are probably the most common method for obtaining consumer input, other strategies may also meet the purpose, especially given the challenges states can face in staffing an advisory group. Alternative approaches include:

- Focus groups
- Small committees organized to consider specific issues
- Periodic surveys
- Other unique methods

It is up to the planning organization to figure out what best fits its purposes and needs. Still, "nothing about us without us" is a consumer phrase to remember in determining when and how to involve consumers in program planning.

Successful consumer involvement requires elimination of the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from full participation. People with various types of disabilities encounter various types of barriers. It is important to contact each participating person with a disability individually to determine what specific barriers interfere with his/her participation and what specific accommodations are needed. The items on this checklist are designed to assist in identifying and eliminating barriers for people with mobility, sensory, cognitive and various other types of disabilities. Accommodation needs may be individual; nonetheless, one significant shared characteristic is that the environment is often replete with barriers that interfere with the civil rights of people with disabilities and their full participation in life. This checklist will help you to enhance the full participation of people with disabilities in giving input to your programs and policies.

General Access Guidelines

- _____ 1. Does your workplace culture truly value the input of people with disabilities and consider them as colleagues, as well as service recipients?
- _____ 2. Do your workplace participants understand that consumers are the experts on their own functioning and needs while professionals are the experts on existing practices and resources, and that it is important that they learn from one another?
- _____ 3. Do your workplace participants use "people first" and positive portrayal language when referring to people with disabilities and disability issues?
- _____ 4. Do your workplace participants refrain from using acronyms and "in-group" language when speaking to or writing documents for people with disabilities?
- _____ 5. Are funds available to pay for accommodations to eliminate barriers that limit the participation of people with disabilities?
- _____ 6. Is accessible transportation and parking available to enable on-site attendance?
- _____ 7. Does your telephone equipment allow everyone to be heard, so that those off-site can participate as well?
- _____ 8. Are meeting participants informed of procedures for running a meeting and how to get recognized to make comments, especially those with physical or verbal disabilities?
- _____ 9. Do meeting chairs understand accessibility guidelines and the importance of encouraging the input of all participants with disabilities?
- _____ 10. Are meeting agendas and related materials distributed at least a week before a meeting and do they explain the purpose of agenda items and what is expected of participants on each item?
- _____ 11. Are participants with disabilities given clear information concerning how to contact a person (including TTY or relay information) regarding accommodations and questions?
- _____ 12. For those individuals who do not bring their own staff, do you provide personal assistants (other than colleagues) during meetings or events to assist with handling materials, refreshments, and other needs?

____ 13. Do you contact each participant with a disability individually to determine their specific barriers to full participation?

Mobility Access Guidelines

____ 14. Does the size and arrangement of space for meetings or events accommodate both the stationing and flow of expected wheelchairs?

____ 15. Are travel routes to the activity readily accessible (including elevators) and clearly marked with signage?

Visual Access Guidelines

____ 16. Are all distributed written materials in accessible format for those that need it? It is no longer acceptable to simply apologize that materials are not accessible.

____ 17. Are all important, last minute, unformatted documents read and/or described aloud for everyone, and not distributed until later, after they are available in alternate format for those that need it?

____ 18. Are visual materials, such as PowerPoint, tables or charts, read and/or described aloud in their entirety, as well as made available in an accessible format for those that need it?

____ 19. Do you individually determine what accessible format each participant needs (large print, computer disc, audio, Braille?) NOTE: Braille printing requires specialized knowledge and Braille printers can often be found through university disability offices.

Auditory Access Guidelines

____ 20. Do you determine what specific accommodations each participant needs in order to fully participate, including the type of sign language used?

____ 21. Do you have a source for assisted listening devices and qualified interpreters for various types of sign language, when needed? NOTE: Your state office on deafness and hard of hearing should be helpful.

____ 22. Are participants provided a TTY number to contact staff as needed, and do those who answer the number know how to use a TTY? If not, are participants aware of the state relay service and number?

Cognitive Access Guidelines

_____ 23. Is the comprehension level of all written materials assessed to ensure it is appropriate for the participants?

_____ 24. Do you refrain from making more than two or three points per page of written material and from distributing more than one or two pages on any given subject?

_____ 25. At any given meeting, do you address only the most important items and limit the number of major items to two or three, possibly four?

_____ 26. Do you meet more frequently rather than hold long meetings in order to cover all the important items? This is an important accommodation for frail adults as well.

Speech Access Guidelines

_____ 27. Are the workplace participants fully aware that speech impairments are not indicative of cognitive disabilities?

_____ 28. Are speech translators available for those whose speech is difficult to understand? NOTE: Often the person with this disability knows people who can understand their speech and translate for them.

_____ 29. Do you consult with a person who uses an electronic speech device or speech board to find out the most effective way for them to participate in meetings?

Other Access Guidelines

_____ 30. Are hidden disabilities, such as diabetes and food allergies or Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, assessed and accommodated?

Additional Resources

Home and Community-Based Services Resource Network. (2003). *Making Accessibility Real: A Guide for Planning Meetings, Conferences and Gatherings*. Accessed June 27, 2006 from http://www.hcbs.org/files/2/73/hcbs_brochure.pdf.

Kailes, J., & Jones, D. (1993). *A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings*. Houston, Texas: Independent Living Research Utilization Research & Training Center on Independent Living at TIRR.