

# Collaborations

What are the benefits of collaboration for national and community service programs with disability organizations?

Where do I begin?

How are disability organizations structured?

## Section IX: Collaborations

### Key Words and Terms

#### National Disability Organizations

*What are the benefits of collaboration for national and community service programs with disability organizations?*

Collaboration allows organizations to achieve more together than they would be able to achieve alone. Often organizations have mutual or complementary goals. Organizations that provide services to people with disabilities, or advocate for people with disabilities, are found in every community. Strong and effective collaborations with these organizations can contribute to your success in creating an inclusive service environment, recruitment, retention, ensuring compliance with federal and state laws, and providing accommodations.

#### A list of potential benefits for disability organizations and service programs

Benefits	Benefits to Disability Organizations	Benefits to National and Community Service Programs
Outreach/Placement	Create opportunities for consumers	Identify potential participants with disabilities
Recruitment	Educate consumers to possibilities	Recruit qualified committed participants
Accommodations	Allow consumers the opportunity to fully participate in service and gain valuable experience	Retention of participants with disabilities
Networking	Learn about national service	Develop relationships with disability organizations
Community Awareness	Joint projects	Joint projects

For disability organizations, collaborations with national and community service programs will provide new opportunities for people with disabilities and open up supportive environments for personal growth.

There are many areas in which disability organizations can help service programs succeed in their efforts to include people with disabilities and to create inclusive service environments. They can provide technical assistance on accessibility and accommodations, assist you in recruitment (through newsletters, brochures, and individual referrals), and assist when issues arise around retention.

The world of service, and the opportunities offered, can also help disability organizations. Service experience can provide great opportunities for individuals with disabilities. These individuals can then help to change perceptions that people with disabilities are always recipients of service, not service providers. Especially on a local level, the service community is unfamiliar with the disability community, and vice versa.

### *Where do I begin?*

The most successful collaborations are built on knowledge, trust, and relationships that are mutually beneficial. It is important for you to become familiar with the organizations in your community and for them to become familiar with your programs and with the goals of service.

Some ways to start collaborations:

- Set up short, informal meetings with the leadership of local disability organizations. Be prepared to explain your program and the goals of national and community service.
- Invite staff and consumers of disability organizations to service events and meetings and make certain those meetings are accessible!
- Coordinate a service-day project with a disability organization to either benefit the organization or its consumers.

- Invite disability organizations to conduct disability awareness training for your staff and participants.
- Join the board or advisory committee of a disability organization.
- Write articles about your program for newsletters.
- Link your website to theirs.
- Many organizations have state- or county-level conferences and meetings. Present a workshop or exhibit at a booth.

### ***How are disability organizations structured?***

In order to enhance the possibility of good collaboration, it is helpful to understand how disability organizations are set up. There are three basic ways that disability organizations are organized:

- The vast majority are private, non-profit organizations, though there are some government agencies (such as vocational rehabilitation offices and state/county offices for people with disabilities). There are also many private, for-profit organizations and service providers.
- Disability organizations can also be divided into two other broad categories — those that provide services to or for people with disabilities, and those that are advocacy organizations that are controlled and staffed by people with disabilities. Most often, the latter groups focus on systems change and increased access and services for people with disabilities. Most independent living centers are controlled by persons with disabilities and are, for the most part, staffed by persons with disabilities. Organizations such as UCP, Arc, and Easter Seals provide direct services to people with disabilities.
- Some disability organizations are cross-disability and serve a wide range of disabilities. Others are more specific and focus on particular types of disabilities. Independent living centers are cross-disability. UCP affiliates serve a range of people with disabilities but tend to focus on persons with physical and cognitive impairments. The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) focuses on persons who are culturally Deaf. The American Federation of the Blind focuses on persons with visual impairments.

Many disability organizations are affiliates or chapters of national organizations. The state or local organization may be very large or very small. There are also local organizations that provide services that are not necessarily affiliated with a national organization. Please see Appendix D for contact information for national organizations. They can assist you in locating the closest local organizations.