

# Increasing Capacity to Serve Members with Disabilities

## How-to establish a Disability Collaborative

Community based organizations who serve seniors and people with disabilities have extraordinary missions, dedicated staff, and valuable resources — but they can only provide some of the support an individual needs. For seniors and people with disabilities, navigating services and resources from different organizations across a widespread geographic area can be a challenge and often overwhelming. They often miss the opportunity to receive the full-scope of services from the resources available in their area. Creating a collaborative will help to decrease the problem of fragmented resources. By joining forces organizations will develop a strong relationship with each other and the community they serve.

## Why Collaborate

Collaborate to pool resources and work together for your community. Reach out to community based organizations to bridge the gap between seniors and people with disabilities and valuable resources. When there are more organizations involved more can be achieved.

## What are the Benefits?

By addressing the need for a cross-disability collaborative, *“the IEDC has increased our capacity to serve our members with disabilities, to connect them to community resources, and to provide community-based care coordination,”* states Dr. Bradley Gilbert, CEO of IEHP.

By collaborating you build a trusting community, valuable connections, and a resource base that you can share with your members.

Benefits to the Community:

- Knowledge of available resources
- Access to employers
- Access to independent living services
- Empowered to live independently Benefits to the Health Plan and CBOs:
- Networking with local organizations
- Expanded referral base
- Additional training
- Cross promotion of events
- Education on available resources
- Better understanding of the population you serve
- Build capacity

## Who should collaborate?

A cross-disability collaborative should be inclusive of all organizations that provide resources and services to seniors and people with disabilities.

These organizations can range from

- Independent living centers
- Regional centers serving people with developmental disabilities
- Area agencies on aging
- Deaf and hard of hearing organizations
- Special education programs
- In-home support services

Remember an influential collaborative is one that builds community. To do so you need diversity in membership.

## Getting Started

To start a cross-disability, cross-county, collaborative you need a plan. This way you'll identify your opportunities and obstacles. For example, to get our vision off the ground we needed to reach multiple organizations across Riverside and San Bernardino counties, the latter being the largest county in the nation.

Ben Jauregui the Disability Program Manager led the initial planning and outreach efforts. As a member of the community, highly involved in promoting universal access for people with disabilities, his leadership continues to be vital.

*“Realizing there is a need for an interagency network is the first step. To launch the collaborative, reach out to other organizations and encourage them to participate. What you will find is that others also want to share ideas and build a community.” – Ben Jauregui*

If you cannot easily reach potential collaborators, but you need to gauge which organizations will participate — send out a survey. This will create a common ground in which to move forward. The IEHP Disability Program sent out a survey to other organizations serving this diverse population of people with disabilities. From the survey the IEDC created a set of goals and a mission statement: To promote equal opportunity, universal access, and full participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of life. The mission statement is the driver, evaluated each year to ensure goals are met.

## Time Commitment

The initial groundwork for the IEDC began in 2006 however, success did not occur overnight. In the beginning, the IEDC dedicated 14 hours a month to create flyers, membership forms, and schedule meetings and presenters for the

upcoming year. Developing and creating the website also took additional time. Now in our fourth year, we spend 10 hours a month on IEDC related activities such as, preparing for meetings, communicating with members, recruiting, and updating the website. On the day of a meeting, be sure to set aside more time to prepare.

It's understandable that not all health plans will have a Disability Program that can dedicate additional time and resources. However, there are other hybrid models that can serve the same purpose as a collaborative.

Begin by establishing a partnership with the local Center for Independent Living. Convene community groups through your established connections. This will help to spread out the time commitment and responsibility as well as extend your reach to all organizations in your county.

## The Inland Empire Disabilities Collaborative (IEDC)

Launched as a networking tool, the IEDC currently brings together over 120 members from regional organizations. This joint effort has allowed the IEDC to promote equal opportunity and universal access. Recently, Disability Rights California (DRC) honored the IEDC in uniting and mobilizing organizations to better serve seniors and people with disabilities.

Disabilities Rights California (DRC) is the nation's largest advocacy group for people with disabilities. Established in 1993 as California's Protection & Advocacy, Inc. (PAI), the DRC works to bring about fairness and justice for people with disabilities through legal work, advocacy, community partnerships, and education.

## What to do once you've established a Collaborative

Once you have invested time, effort, and resources into establishing a collaborative, what next?

To keep your collaborative influential and valuable for member organizations, hold events.

This will give members the opportunity to engage with the community. In return, the community will have access to a wide range of resources.

Events are very important to the IEDC. It gives us the opportunity to build relationships and link seniors and people with disabilities to services they may need. Events can be large or small in scope. For example, the IEDC hosted the Disability Mentoring Day, to connect people with disabilities and employers. In this way we are promoting equal opportunity and independence.

Hosting large events will draw a large number of participants. The Disability Resources Expo is funded by several sponsors from the community including PossAbilities—a community outreach program offering people with disabilities a sense of community—and Rolling Start Inc. a transitional living center that empowers people with disabilities to live independently. The Expo is hosted biennial to showcase services and products that enhance independent living for people with all types of disabilities. The first Expo drew more than 1,200 attendees featuring over 100 exhibitors and several educational sessions.

Exhibitor booths can include a wide range of services:

- Health
- Jobs
- Transportation
- Housing
- Assistive technology
- Youth and senior services
- Education

In addition to the large events, monthly meetings keep member participants up-to-date and engaged. Meetings need to be held at convenient locations where member organizations network and listen to keynote speakers. For example, speakers have included Lyn Daucher, Director California State Office on Aging. At other meetings we have hosted

Teresa Favuzzi, Executive Director California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, and David Sayen, Regional Director Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services. The monthly meetings not only allow members to convene regularly, but also build capacity.

## **How to Sustain the Collaborative**

The task of sustaining the collaborative resides in member organizations.

During the development process you addressed your reason to collaborate, who you should collaborate with, how to engage, and what to do once you're established. Along the way you will overcome obstacles, network with state agencies, and establish rapport with your community. Is this enough? While these aspects of the collaborative allow it to thrive, it's member support that sustains its endeavors. This is the core of the IEDC's success.

Aaron Moffet, IEDC member and Professor of Kinesiology at Cal State University San Bernardino, says it best, [“The DisAbility Sports Festival has only been able to succeed because of the support of the IEDC and its members. This support will help us continue to grow and reach our goal of providing physical activity opportunities to people of any age and disability.”](#)

After becoming a member of the IEDC, organizations keep the collaborative sustainable by cross-promoting events, providing referrals and letters of support, and most importantly possessing a sincere passion for serving seniors and people with disabilities.

Overall, a collaborative will achieve more goals that otherwise would have been tough to reach. By pooling together resources the process of developing, implementing, and maintaining a collaborative is less labor intensive and less time consuming. Always remember your reason for collaborating. Strive to achieve a positive impact that will affect the lives of seniors and people with disabilities in your community.



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