

# Sustaining Active Advisory Committees: Strategies for Medicaid Infrastructure Grants

**M**IG Advisory Committees bring valuable guidance and support to the activities of Medicaid Infrastructure Grant projects. But like any partnership, these Advisory Committees may struggle to sustain their momentum over time. The following ten strategies can help MIGs and their Advisory Committees stay active and engaged beyond their initial charge.<sup>1</sup>

## **1. Establish a vision and mission for the committee, and set clear short and long-term goals.**

Successful partnerships engage in a thoughtful process to define a vision and mission, and clear short- and long-term goals. They also take time to ensure understanding among all the partners. Collectively defining the goals gives all members ownership of the committee, which increases the likelihood that members will stay involved.

## **2. Define roles and responsibilities for committee members with meaningful tasks.**

It is important to define the various roles that members will play, and ensure that all members understand and accept these roles. Committees

could create written plans that include the roles and responsibilities of members. It is equally important that these roles are meaningful. Members are also more likely to remain actively involved when they feel their role is valuable. And keep in mind that active participation goes beyond attending meetings. By asking members to assume significant roles, such as educating policymakers, they can make valuable contributions and feel that they have true ownership of the committee and its activities.

## **3. Structure the committee's work so that all partners benefit.**

Each member brings different strengths, knowledge, and resources to the committee. But whatever their role, members must benefit from participating in the committee and successful partnerships draw on the strengths of individual members. When all members perceive they have something to gain, they remain actively involved, even though each member's perceived gain may be different.

## **4. Measure progress on a regular basis.**

Just like the projects for which they provide guidance, advisory committees should set indi-

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from N. Relave and S. Deich, *A Guide to Successful Public-Private Partnerships for Youth Programs* (Washington, D.C.: The Finance Project, January 2007), at [http://76.12.61.196/publications/publicPrivate\\_PM.pdf](http://76.12.61.196/publications/publicPrivate_PM.pdf).

cators or milestones to regularly assess whether their efforts are productive. Showing continued progress toward goals is vital to keeping members engaged. And measuring progress can also indicate what's working and where new strategies are needed.

### **5. Keep members informed.**

Advisory committees can struggle when members do not receive the information and support they need to fulfill their roles. Members need concise materials in advance of meetings or other activities. Members also need periodic updates on MIG projects and activities. Regular communication keeps partners informed but also lets them know when their help is needed.

### **6. Adapt to changing conditions.**

The fiscal and policy environment surrounding the MIGs can change over time. Advisory committees that are able to adapt to changing conditions will be better able to sustain member interest. In fact, changing conditions often provide a catalyst for re-engaging advisory committee members.

### **7. Support other state and community efforts.**

Employment and true community integration for individuals with disabilities require the resources and support of a broad range of stakeholders. Working with other partnerships or efforts, such as Business Leadership Networks, can bring greater attention and energy to critical issues, and help advisory committees sustain momentum.

### **8. Share information on promising practices.**

Peer sharing and learning have been vital to the efforts of MIG projects, and could also help their advisory committees learn about successful

approaches in other states. MIG staff and advisory council leaders may want to reach out to their peers both in and out of state to bring new ideas to the table.

### **9. Plan to maintain momentum.**

Advisory committees should take time to plan how they will maintain momentum and sustain their efforts. For example, committees may want to structure activities so that there are opportunities to celebrate small and interim milestones and successes.

### **10. Give credit and recognition to committee members.**

An advisory committee will benefit from recognizing the efforts of its members. And opportunities that build goodwill through public recognition can help keep committees strong and attract new members.

### **Ideas from the Field**

The Advisory Council in **Louisiana** has been a valuable partner to the MIG through its hands-on work and its active buy-in and support. The use of *working committees* has proved especially effective for the Council, and ensured the active engagement of Council members. For example, working committees have been used to develop legislative recommendations. Council members have further supported legislative work by communicating with state legislators and attending hearings. The Advisory Council also used working committees to support the MIG in developing its series of Work Pays Tip Sheets.

Changing conditions in the state of **Nevada** are leading the MIG in several new directions, creating an opportunity to re-energize the Advisory Council and focus members on new roles. The MIG is planning to recharge the members of its Advisory Council by bringing in

a skilled speaker and trainer in leadership development to galvanize the members as they, and the MIG staff, begin planning and implementing new activities and partnerships.

The MIG Leadership Council in **Oregon** is reorganizing to provide a better structure for its work as well as greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of members. The Council is forming “working groups” along with a high-level policy council that will be comprised of stakeholders across state agencies. The working groups are providing a renewed focus for the members, which is important in keeping members actively involved. Working groups are being created in the following areas: employer engagement, sustainability, work incentives, and supported employment. The sustainability work group will develop a five-year business plan to lay the groundwork for sustaining the Leadership Council beyond the availability of MIG funding.

## Tips for Success

Further strategies and recommendations for an active advisory council include the following:

- ✓ Give council members ownership of their activities, responsibility for their work, and credit for their activities and successes.
- ✓ Be responsive and accountable to the advisory council. Members need to feel that they are being heard. The Louisiana MIG provides monthly reports to its Council.
- ✓ Advisory councils need a purpose, and a vision that all members can buy into. A shared vision and mission help all members see the benefit of the work.
- ✓ Take advantage of changing conditions, or a reorganization, to recharge an advisory council and engage members in new roles and responsibilities.
- ✓ Create an open and welcoming environment that invites input and participation.
- ✓ Let council members be part of your change process.