

Case Study for Statewide AT Advisory Council- How One Statewide AT Program Advisory Council Works-

An interview with Willie Gunther, Executive Director with

Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP)

Question: How many Advisory Council members do you have?

Answer: Our Advisory Council fluctuates from 23 to 25 members at any given time. Because we are a non for profit organization, we also have nine Board of Directors that serve IATP. As such, our Advisory Council is a bit unusual in that we have two groups that help guide and make decisions for IATP. At first, we thought that we could collapse these two advising groups into one, and RSA allowed us to do so, but that did not fly, so we still have two separate groups that advise for IATP.

Question: How does the Advisory Council meet (in person, by phone) and how often?

Answer: Our Advisory Council meets in person only once year. However, we do a lot of individual meetings with Advisory Council members. The way that we work at IATP is the Advisory Council gets together once a year at an annual meeting with both the Advisory Council and Board.

All of our Advisory Council members are connected with AT in some way, so that helps too. Even though we do not meet as a group regularly, we are regularly in contact by email or phone. What is interesting too is that many of our Advisory Council members eventually turn into Board Members.

Question: What goes on at each meeting? What do members do during an Advisory Council meeting?

Answer: At the annual meeting, we report on all our data for the year. The report provides a two year comparison of IATP's program data and a review of IATP's ranking on a national basis with the other statewide AT programs. The annual meeting is usually a four to five hour meeting. We also go into discussion about program projections for the upcoming year and tightening policies and procedures. We also share our annual report at this meeting, which then is disseminated statewide.

Question: How do you or your staff prepare for the Advisory Council meeting?

Answer: I start to develop a report based on the numbers and data after the close of the federal Fiscal Year. The report is then presented at the annual meeting by staff in each program area. Prior to the annual meeting, we have a full staff meeting to review and discuss the data to be presented at the annual meeting. We also have a debriefing staff meeting after the annual meeting to identify necessary changes.

Question: How do you recruit Advisory Council members?

Answer: We try to recruit Advisory Council members any way we can! However, we do get a lot of interest from people who have benefited and have been served by IATP.

Question: How do you orient new Advisory Council members?

Answer: When we first started forming our Advisory Council, we had frequent meetings. This was to bring the Advisory Council members up to speed, as well as to get to know each other. Now, as new Advisory Council members join, we offer to bring them in to our offices for the day to expose them to all of our services. For others who cannot easily access our office, we have extensive discussions about what we do via telephone. We have policies for how long an AC member should stay on as an Advisory Council member, but we have not enforced this policy.

Question: How do you retain new Advisory Council members?

Answer: We always have food at our meetings, which always makes people happy! However, we have people who really want to be Advisory Council members. There is not much busy work for our Advisory Council members because we make it easy for them to participate and advise. This also helps to retain Advisory Council members.

To learn more about IATP's Advisory Council, contact:

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