

Partners in Policymaking® Coordinator's Handbook

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In 1987, the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities created Partners in Policymaking.® Since then, Partners programs have been implemented and funded throughout the U. S. and internationally.

More than 15,000 Partners graduates are part of a growing national and international network of community leaders serving on policymaking committees, commissions, and boards at local, state, and national levels.

Partners is an innovative, competency based leadership training program for adults with disabilities and parents of young children with developmental disabilities. The purpose of the program is two fold:

- Teach best practices, and
- Teach the competencies of influencing public officials.

Overview of the Handbook

This is the sixth edition of the Coordinator's Handbook since 1990. The purpose of the Handbook is to help Coordinators when they are starting new programs and to maintain the quality of existing programs.

To accomplish these ends, the Handbook is organized into four sections:

Introduction – an overview of the Handbook, an overview of the reasons Partners in Policymaking® developed, and an introduction to the concepts of partnerships with policymakers, best practices, and systems change.

Quality Standards – the principles and values which underpin the Partners program, the standards for a model replication program, the competencies Partners participants will acquire, Coordinator duties, criteria and rationale for selecting participants, and the use of national speakers.

The Sessions – an outline of the curriculum, design and process considerations for each session, graduation, and follow up.

Guidelines and Helpful Ideas – guidelines, hints and approaches for skill building activities, recruitment and selection, creating a welcoming program, quality improvement, funder-program relations, and budgets.

Why Partners in Policymaking Developed

The goal of Partners in Policymaking is to educate participants to be active partners with those who make policy. They will become partners in policymaking. The idea is to develop partnerships that are based on positive relationships. In today's political climate of radical change, Partners graduates must work harder than ever to prevent the loss of basic rights for people with disabilities. Partners graduates can change the future by influencing public policy today.

The origins of Partners program are rooted in the many and complex problems faced by people with disabilities and their families. The idea for Partners emerged in 1986. At that time, people with disabilities and families:

- Had no centralized, organized, systemic education and training to provide them with state of the art experiences and information.

- Needed systemic training to develop competencies involved in effectively influencing public officials to make grassroots advocacy really work.
- Had few training programs to prepare them for positions of leadership in local, state, or national organizations.
- Needed a shared vision for self advocacy – motivated, well-informed, active, energetic volunteers and self advocates who share a vision about the year 2000 and beyond.
- Had no mechanism for state and national leaders in the disabilities field to meet and discuss issues with people with disabilities who are traditionally unserved and underserved.
- Had no systemic educational program available that was designed to improve competencies and increase their empowerment.
- Were at risk of losing an aging leadership.
- Didn't have much of an opportunity to meet each other. Few parents could meet adults with disabilities who could help them dream for their children. Few adults with disabilities knew parents of children with disabilities who could give them a perspective on the experiences of their parents.

In response, Partners in Policymaking was developed to

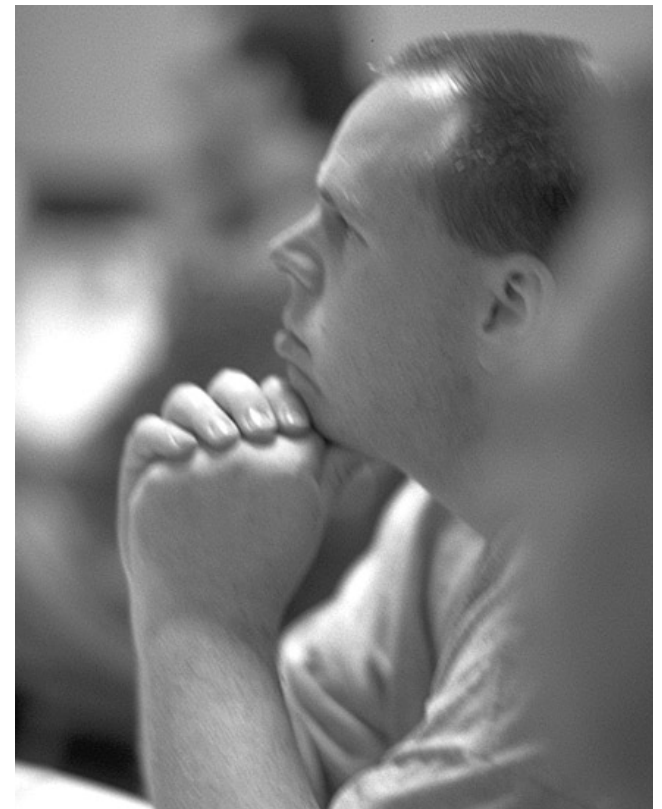
- Train participants in **best practices** over a wide range of issues, and
- Help them acquire the skills necessary to **change systems**.

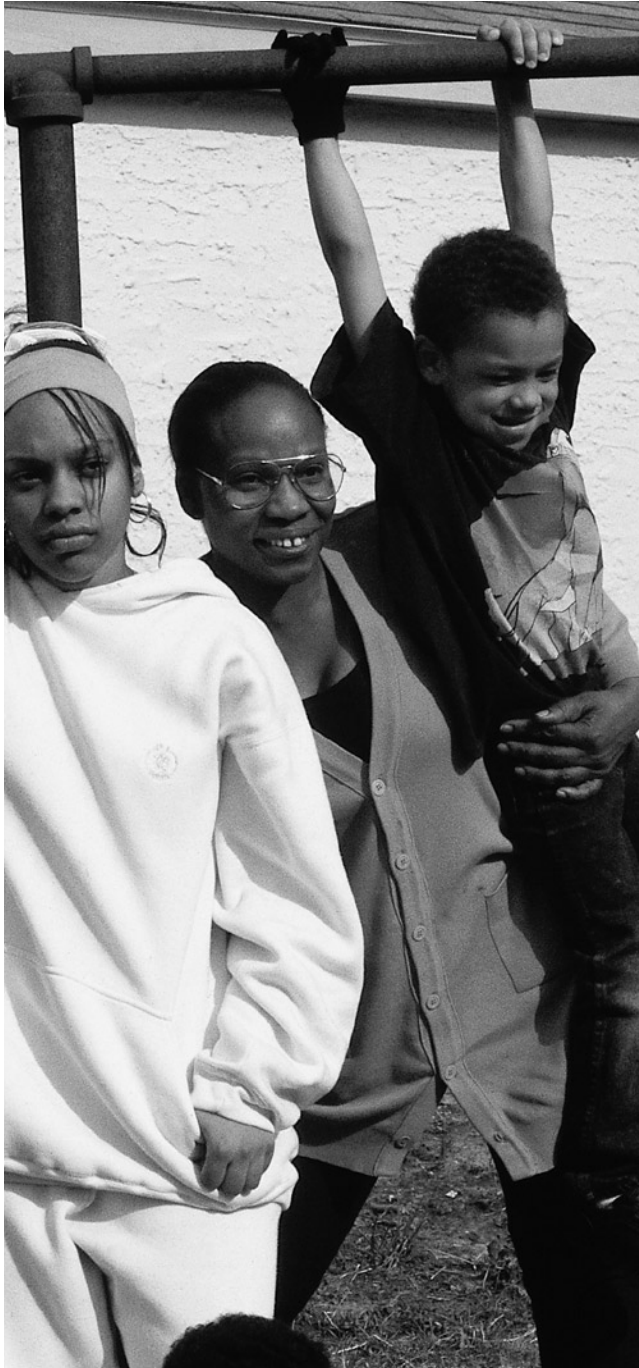
Partners graduates create a **shared vision**, enlarging the power base of disability rights advocates.

Partners participants become competent to change their own lives, and then to work for changes that will affect others with disabilities at local, state, and national levels. Partners graduates are expected to be **agents of long term change**. They learn there are no “quick fixes.” They are trained to achieve long term successes.

Partners has allowed me to dream again...to dream about my son the way all parents dream about their children. Partners has showed me how I can change and must be a part of change in our society that includes all people.

a parent from Illinois





Partnerships with Policymakers

Policymakers are the people in government who are elected or appointed to make decisions about rules and regulations, who control the money, and who legislate. They are politicians and civil servants. There are an estimated 54,000 elected and appointed men and women within the U.S. government alone. Policymakers and policymaking bodies include school principals, school boards, city councils, mayors, county and state officials, state senators and representatives, state agency boards, and federal legislators and agencies.

As the number of Partners graduates increases, a network of highly motivated, powerful individuals are positively influencing the thousands of policymakers who shape disability issues at all levels of government .

Graduates of quality Partners programs are well equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to become partners with anyone in a position to make policy at the local, state, and federal levels. Some Partners graduates have become elected and appointed public officials.

A Fundamental Focus on Best Practices/ State of the Art

Question: What is meant by best practice and state-of-the-art in terms of disability issues?

Answer: Both of these terms refer to the most up-to-date and best ways of doing things, from a national perspective.

Best practices and state-of-the-art are always evolving! What is best practice today may not be best practice in six months or a year.

State-of-the-art information gives Partners participants the big picture, allows them to dream big, and gives them the strategies to turn their dreams into reality. The collective impact of Partners participants dreaming the big dream and working to achieve it will affect people far beyond the graduates and their families – the face of disability issues will change.

The program does not exist to teach participants how to get access to services that are already available in their state. This information might come out during the training sessions, but it is not, and cannot, become the focus of the entire program. Most Partners participants, through their life experiences, already know all they need to about what is and what's not available, and how to get it. It is a waste of program time, money and energy for Partners in Policymaking to offer an introductory course on state services.

The design of Partners is based on national speakers who keep their presentations up-to-date so they contain the most current information of best practices/state of the art.

Partners is about today's best practices. It is very important that every Partners program be up to date. Just look at how quickly our understanding of best practices changed between the mid-1980s and the 21st Century!

Life Area	2005	1990	1985
Education	Full inclusion for every child with a disability.	Inclusion for children with disabilities.	Integration for some children, for part of the day.
Employment	People with disabilities are hired directly by employers. They receive competitive wages and have career paths.	Supported work with agency job coaches.	Demonstration projects in a few states: experimentation with entry level positions.
Living	A home of your own with the supports of your choice.	Some supported living.	Small group homes.
Assistive Technology	Anything that enables a person with a disability to have a better, more independent life, from hightech to no-tech, voice activated technology, Web access, digitized imagery, e-mail.	Computers, wheelchairs, adaptive daily living equipment.	Wheelchairs and communication devices.



Partners in Policymaking is about systems change. Systems change in terms of disability issues means:

An organized effort to improve the way things are currently done by educating and influencing policymakers to make changes that are positive and more responsive to people with disabilities and their families.

Systems Change

Systems change is fundamentally about working toward and achieving a new vision. Historically, the entrenched systems and policies in our society (from local to federal) have not served people with disabilities and families well.

Appointed and elected officials have traditionally made policy decisions about people with disabilities and their families. Partners in Policymaking is based on the idea that policy decisions should be made instead by people with disabilities and families in partnership with each other and elected and appointed officials.

The commitment of Partners in Policymaking is to enable people with disabilities and families to help make far reaching changes in the systems that are supposed to serve them. By influencing policymakers at all levels, systems can become more responsive, customer friendly, and consumer driven.

Personal change in participants is a by-product of the Partners program. If Partners graduates are competent in personal change but do not have systems change skills, the program is not investing its funds wisely. The funder is expecting a cadre of disability advocates who are able to assist in the critical efforts facing the disability community today. If a Partners program is not producing graduates competent in systems change, the future of that program is in jeopardy. Funders will be unwilling to continue to invest money in a program that does not produce results.

Parents of children with disabilities and adults with disabilities can receive training in advocacy and personal change from a variety of sources.

Partners in Policymaking is one of the only training programs that is teaching systems change.

Partners in Policymaking graduates who are competent in systems change are prepared to be the leaders of tomorrow.