

TCDD Support for Full-Participation of Self-Advocates on Workgroups

Current and new state advisory workgroups demand meaningful participation of stakeholders, including self advocates. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission is accepting applications for a number of new advisory committees created by the 83rd Texas Legislature, some to be appointed by October 1st. <http://www.hhsc.state.tx.us/stakeholder/2013/July-Aug/3.html>.

The national group, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered, takes the stand that infrastructure, funding and support is necessary for self-advocates to have full and meaningful participation in the development of public policies. The new workgroups for SB 7 and SB 1226 require participation of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While the agencies have the authority to pay for advocates to come in for meetings, they likely do not have the means to support advance meetings to ensure that self-advocates are well prepared to provide meaningful participation. Additionally, agencies may need additional resources or training to ensure inclusion and equal and full participation of self-advocates with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Supporting the full participation of self-advocates on workgroups is also a goal in the current TCDD state plan - Goal 6 that focuses on Self Advocacy activities. Activities that could help support self-advocates' full participation in cross-disability and culturally diverse leadership coalitions and support them to ensure that their voices are heard are proposed in support of that Goal. The proposed activities are:

1. Provide funds to an entity to organize and prepare self-advocates to fully participate on workgroups, task forces and committees. The entity would:
 - Be responsible for working with the sponsoring agencies and various stakeholder groups to educate and train self-advocates on what it would be like to be on an advisory board;
 - Conduct pre-meeting discussions and/or webinars for self advocates to discuss and learn about agenda items to prepare for the official meeting. Pre-meeting discussions could be coordinated by advocates and agency staff once the system is set up.
 - Develop common accommodations for persons to participate on advisory committees to be used by the presiding officers and other members to ensure inclusion.

2. Establish partnerships with organizations to use video conferencing and webinars in advance of an advisory committee meeting to review agenda and issues. Disability Rights Texas and many of the local authorities have video conferencing capabilities that they would likely make available for this purpose.

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Funding

With action from the Public Policy Committee and approval of the Council the Full-Participation of Self-Advocates Initiative could be *started* with part of the budget set-aside for public policy efforts.

Proposed amount: TCDD staff propose authorizing up to \$20,000 from funds available for Public Policy Initiatives for a period of up to one year. If approved, staff will coordinate discussions with state agencies to further assess interest and capabilities before soliciting proposals.