

TIPS TO FORM ADVISORY BOARDS

The Career and Community Studies (CCS) program at Kent State University has been in the process of developing a comprehensive advisory board to supplement the mission of this CTP program and to strengthen ties to community and state. During initial program development with a TPSID grant, CCS created four advisory committees with each focused on areas pertaining to academic, residential living, university access, and career development. Members of individual committees consisted of KSU faculty and administrators from most every department or office within the university. Committee outcomes included curriculum, on-campus living, and access into all facets of policy and system changes in order to establish the CCS program as a recognized Kent State program.

CCS is fully developed and no longer externally funded as it is sustained through tuition and program fees. Thought now turns toward development of an expanded advisory board that delivers a greater reach beyond the university. This board will provide on-going support and sustainability. Through conversations with many postsecondary transition programs around the country on this topic, it was determined that there is a desire for program advisory boards; however there is consensus that little guidance is available as to how to go about that. Even so, each program provided nuggets of information that advanced thought and ideas beneficial to the research conducted. The time, tips, and tours that administrators and staff from postsecondary programs around the country gave is valuable. Therefore, this paper is to share information gathered that might be useful for other postsecondary programs as they contemplate on the development of an advisory board.

Tip #1- Know the difference between an “ADVISORY” board and a “BOARD OF DIRECTORS”. An advisory board serves the purpose to help compose and contribute to ideas that support the program mission but does NOT make regulations or action calls for how the program runs.

Tip #2- Decide objectives and outcomes desired of your board (review tip #1). Ask “Where and what are the needs of your program?” The goal should always be to support the already existing mission of your program; however, you may want to develop specific goals in the areas of fundraising, outreach, or partnerships with other organizations.

Tip #3- Terms of membership are beneficial. This can include, but not limited to, how long a member serves. Consider implementing policy on disciplinary actions, hierarchy for responsibilities and leadership, meeting frequency, and attendance.

Tip #4- Seek individuals who can give their “*Time, Talent, and Treasures*”. *Time* - meaning attendance and full commitment to the board given to the best of one’s ability. *Talent* - regarding the services, networks, and or knowledge a potential member can provide. *Treasures* – meaning money and resources. Is the member committed to contributing personally to the board’s financial goals and or fundraising efforts?

Tip #5- Close proximity is your friend. Although telecommunications work well, you will want members who can physically attend meetings in order to support engagement and involvement. However, do not hesitate to seek or invite the right person who is a great match to join the board, even if he/she comes from out-of-state.

Tip #6 – Consider how many members you want on the board. Consensus from this research was that no more than 12 members is an effective and manageable number. However, this number can change as objectives and goals and objectives fluctuate over time.

Tip #7- Who will you seek to serve on your board? Suggestions include, but not limited to: a student with disabilities, a peer mentor, a university faculty, a parent, employed past graduates, state representation from Vocational Rehab, Board of DD, Employment First, local people of influence (mayors, school superintendents), disability support networks (service providers, local/state Autism/ Down Syndrome chapters), a university administrator (dean, provost), and a member from the local Chamber of Commerce. One resource said it proficiently by saying, “Select people whose backgrounds help make your program more viable.”

Tip #8- Have explicit expectations for contributing to fundraising efforts. If fundraising will be a goal of the board, then have this expectation for all members. However, consider that not all may be able to contribute financially to the board’s goal; therefore, it would be helpful to establish other methods that a member can contribute. For example, members can commit to contacting their networks to contribute to funding campaigns, or serve at fundraising events.

Tip #9- ALWAYS have the mission on the table! This keeps the board engaged and focused, thus preventing unnecessary topics and mission drift. Review the mission at the beginning of every meeting.

Tip #10- Meeting frequency is up to your discretion. Quarterly meetings are most often recommended.

Tip #11 – Create and provide a new member “on-boarding” packet. This can include program mission and highlights, conflict-of interest policy, statement of expectations for members, personal commitment form, resources such as contacts of program staff, board members, lists of sub-committees and expectations, calendars of meetings and events, terms of conditions, Advisory Board Policy Handbook, strategic plan and core values, etc.

Tip #13- Designate someone to keep minutes. Minutes benefit by keeping everyone engaged and on board with discussion topics and serves as a reference for future meetings and goals.

Tip #14- Evaluate and assess board effectiveness. As needs of your program arise, as tasks are completed, as new federal, state, and local policies and regulations occur, continue to gauge membership need. Do not allow the advisory board to become stagnant or unproductive.

Tip #15- Believe in the power of your program. Before most individuals offer their time, talent, and treasures they will want to see the value of the program and the effect it has on others. Help them to recognize that their contribution to the efforts of your program results in changing lives!

