

# Some Ways to Involve Persons with Developmental Disabilities in Your Organization

**Take time to listen to each person.**

Remember: Listening begins with helping someone find his or her voice, regardless of whether or not there is speech.

**Treat each person like a person, not like a person-with-a-disability.**

Remember: Talk to each person directly instead of through someone accompanying him or her.  
Remember: Consider persons with developmental disabilities in terms of their gifts and capacities.

**Pay attention to and respect each person's important and unique perspective, knowledge, and experience.**

Ask: How can we bring these ideas and perspectives into our neighborhood organization or project?

**Look for each person's particular skills, interests, and strengths.**

Ask: What brought you here? What do you like to do? What skills do you have that you would like to contribute? What are your concerns? What are some of your challenges?

Remember: A person with disabilities can speak for him- or herself based on his or her own experiences, knowledge, and perceptions; a person with disabilities is not speaking on behalf of all persons with disabilities.

**Find a role for everyone who is interested by matching his or her skills and interests to the needs of the organization or project.**

Remember: Think broadly; there are roles for everyone: for example, giving new perspectives and ideas, pouring coffee, bringing food, greeting people, taking minutes, stuffing and stamping envelopes, putting up flyers in the neighborhood, passing out information, calling people to remind them about a neighborhood event, or just being present. Encourage participation. Present opportunities to try something new.

**Don't make assumptions about people.**

Remember: Ask, clarify, and give people choices.

Remember: Be direct about what you are asking someone to do, such as giving someone a ride to a meeting or helping put together a mailing.

**Support each person's involvement.**

Remember: Each person will want and need a different kind of assistance, whether a word of encouragement, a problem-solving discussion (e.g., how to get to a meeting or how to proceed with a task), information, a reminder call about an event or meeting, or someone to act as a mentor until the person gains sufficient confidence or skills or both.

**Find alternative ways to communicate.**

Remember: Language that is concrete and direct is most easily understood by most people.

Sometimes it is helpful to paraphrase so that everyone understands. Create written materials that are easy for everyone to understand. Pictures and graphics are helpful.

**If a task seems too complicated for someone, break it down into small steps.**

Remember: Work can be fun. Even the smallest successes are worth celebrating.

**Make an extra effort to acknowledge each person's contribution.**

Remember: Nothing goes without saying. Everyone appreciates being appreciated.