

Presentation at CICA Conference May 19, 2015

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The Role of Advisory Committees & How to Maximize Their Effectiveness

A. INTRODUCTION

It is important to remember that public authorities and their advisory boards/committees have different roles and responsibilities from county to county. Some advisory boards have a very limited role, little funding and difficulty recruiting members. Others are more generously funded and supported, and given greater responsibilities and freedom to act.

I feel fortunate that the Alameda County Public Authority and Advisory Board have always had a strong tradition of advocacy, support for the philosophies of independent living and consumer-directed services, and for being active and well-informed.

Many advisory boards are not formally authorized (or informally allowed) to perform all the roles we will discuss. But I believe that it is difficult to maintain an effective and active board if they are not given a meaningful role and the resources and support to carry out their responsibilities.

Today I am discussing the **possible roles** of advisory committees, the supports that help them function effectively, and some ideas about how they can become more active.

B. W&I Code 12301 Mandates and Additional Roles

1. Each public authority whose governing body is the board of Supervisors must have an advisory committee/board comprised of a majority of past or present users of publically or privately paid personal assistance services, which must also include two

providers (only one if county has fewer than 500 IHSS recipients), and which may include advocates for seniors and those with disabilities, and no more than one County employee. The governing body of an “Independent” public authority, one whose Board of Supervisors is not the governing body, must have a similar composition.

2. Advisory committees were originally mandated to submit recommendations to the board of supervisors on the preferred mode of IHSS such as independent provider, or contract mode or SIP (Supported Independent Provider, which included additional services, such as emergency workers, home health aides, public health nurses).
3. Advisory committees are to provide ongoing advice and recommendations regarding IHSS to the board of supervisors and any IHSS administrative body. **[How many of you do this?]**
4. Other roles of advisory committees:
 - recruiting, Interviewing and recommending new committee members to the board of supervisors
 - serving on the selection committee to recommend the hiring of an executive director
 - providing general policy and/or program direction, usually to the executive director, as to the operation of the public authority
 - approving or consulting on the public authority budget and/or overseeing or monitoring spending
 - serving as a member of the bargaining team
 - representing the interests and serving as the voice of IHSS consumers and providers
 - communicating with their fellow committee members
 - suggesting agenda items for committee meetings
 - bringing community concerns to the attention of the public authority and IHSS program

- participating in drafting or presenting periodic reports to the County and/or board of supervisors
- serving on work groups and/or providing feedback to the State and/or IHSS department on the IHSS program and operation and when planning or implementing changes
- serving on work groups to plan or recommend changes to the public authority's policies, operation and services
- taking positions as a committee and advocating to support or oppose legislation and regulations and policies and to influence at the local and state level how the IHSS and related programs are operated
- attending relevant trainings and conferences
- participating in outreach activities of the public authority, including health fairs and other community events, PA events, and speaking with the media
- participating in local and statewide activities, such as CICA, Olmstead, and the IHSS Coalition
- participating as requested by the Legislature or State administration on hearing panels or state workgroups
- representing the public authority at meetings and community events
- participating as trainers at PA trainings
- serving as mentors to IHSS consumers or providers

C. Supports That Help Make You an Effective Advisory Committee

1. Advisory committees must be given a meaningful role (ideally, most of the responsibilities above) and receive the information and support to carry them out.
2. The public authority and IHSS department must solicit and listen to their advisory committee members' feedback and recommendations, take them seriously, and make every effort to implement their recommendations

3. Public authorities must share local and statewide information, including passing on information and news from CAPA, CICA, CDCAN, and other organizations
4. Committee members must have their expenses paid or reimbursed, including attendant care, internet access and phone calls, travel to IHSS-related state and local events, training and conferences, meals when away performing committee responsibilities, and lodging when needing to stay overnight, and if possible, a stipend paid for their participation at official committee meetings, and translation/interpreter services provided
6. Committee members must have reliable transportation available or arranged to attend PA meetings, including van service for those who require that mode
7. Committee meetings must be held regularly at a convenient location and arrangements made to participate remotely when they are unable to attend in person
8. Nutritious snacks or food should be provided at long meetings or when members are away from their homes for 4 or 5 hours
9. There should be written rules of conduct for members at committee meetings to encourage participation and respect for each other, and to ensure orderly, efficient meetings.
10. Those being selected as members must understand they are expected to work hard, come to meetings prepared and ready to participate, assist and represent the public authority well at community events, and regularly attend meetings and other committee functions and trainings
11. Members and staff must work together to prepare meeting agendas and be respectful and honest with each other, keep each other informed, and appreciate what they accomplish

12. Meetings should focus on outcomes and not just be discussions or complaint sessions or sharing of a member's personal issues or problems
13. Members should know PA staff and their duties, be realistic about their expectations, and should not expect special treatment (e.g. intervention with IHSS) or favors because they are committee members
14. There should be periodic retreats or planning sessions at which staff and members get to know each other and work together
15. PA staff should arrange for regular presentations and/or Q&A sessions by IHSS managers at meetings covering the realities and limitations of the IHSS staff, planned changes and reorganizations, and IHSS processes such as eligibility, enrollment, timesheets, & authorization of hours
16. Members should have opportunities to speak before the board of supervisors, to advocate for sufficient funding to be effective, and ensure the board of supervisors understand the life realities of IHSS consumers and providers and the impact of State and local practices
17. New members should receive an orientation from staff and members covering their role, board procedures and expectations, the operation and services and organization of their public authority, and the history and original intent and purpose and essential values of the IHSS program and public authorities
18. Members should receive training in the legislative and budget process, advocacy and communicating with the media and legislators and government officials, and should have opportunities to observe hearings and others testifying, and receive talking points but be encouraged to share their personal story/impact when testifying or meeting with legislators

19. Members should be supported and encouraged to interact with and communicate with other public authority advisory committees and actively participate in CICA
20. Members and PA staff should take personal responsibility to recruit new committee members and maintain full membership in the committee and have a quorum at each meeting.

D. Expanding Your Role and Effectiveness

If your advisory committee now has a very limited role and/or is not well informed, there may be things you can do.

1. Put “Expanding the Role of the AB” on the AB agenda and discuss whether other AB members want a larger role; perhaps invite a speaker from a very active AB.
2. Propose one or more of the following. Carry it out well to demonstrate the AB’s ability to exercise such responsibilities.
 - Encouraging all AB members to have internet access to facilitate communication, to receive news and AB agendas, to keep informed of CICA activities, to receive the CDCA newsletter, etc. Ask for reimbursement of a portion of the cost of internet service.
 - Having the PA share information from CAPA, CICA, CDCAN, Disability Rights CA, and other groups.
 - Having AB members serve on the selection team or help recruit and/or recommend to the Board of Supervisors new AB members and/or executive director candidates.
 - Reviewing the PA’s budget and ongoing spending; perhaps asking for a presentation by the County on the budget process or for some training on understanding budgets.
 - Having an AB member serve on the bargaining team.
 - Serving on State and local workgroups dealing with IHSS planning, recommendations or changes.

- Attending community events to solicit the views of other IHSS consumers and providers so you can represent those views at AB meetings.
- Making sure AB agendas contain meaningful agenda items; proposing PA agenda items.
- Reading about issues to be discussed at PA meetings in order to be prepared to express your opinion about them.
- Participating in the presentation and/or preparation of a periodic report to the PA governing body.
- Making recommendations to the IHSS program and PA to improve services or operations.
- Finding out if your County has established general, standing political positions and exploring if the AB can vote to take or recommend positions pro or con consistent with those positions on proposed legislation or plans by the Administration.
- Submitting written or email testimony or attending hearings to share personal or PA views on pending legislative matters.
- Attending trainings and conferences to expand knowledge on IHSS-related topics.
- Attending outreach activities, community events, job and health fairs to educate the community about the PA and IHSS.
- Recommending additional funding to support the AB through a modest stipend to attend AB meetings and reimbursement for actual expenses incurred in your role as AB members, since under the State's MOE funding formula, increasing the AB budget costs the County nothing.
- Conducting AB meetings in an efficient, respectful manner to achieve outcomes, rather than just have discussions, so as to enhance the image of the AB and to justify expanding its role and resources.
- Recommending changes in the PA Bylaws to formalize an expanded role.