

Self-Advocacy Leadership Manual

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Introduction

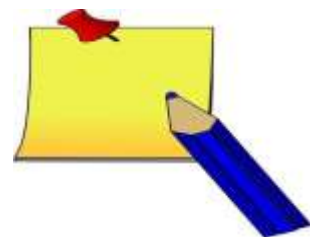
Hello—this is the People First TN Self-Advocacy Leadership Manual!

People First is part of the self-advocacy movement which began in Sweden in **1968** by a group of parents of children with developmental disabilities. In **1974**, the People First movement came to the USA, and in **1982**, People First TN was formed as the first self-advocacy organization in the South! We have a proud history as a very important and necessary part of a grassroots movement—a movement that has positively changed the lives of self-advocates and people with disabilities, as well as the lives of their families and people in their communities! Here are a few major accomplishments that wouldn't have happened without the strong voices of members of People First Tennessee:

1. Passing legislation limiting the number of people living in a group home.
2. Passing legislation that stopped segregation in workshops.
3. Closing ALL Developmental Centers in Tennessee; bringing over 1,500 people back into their community!

These tremendous milestone accomplishments could never have been finished without a strong advocacy movement... and yet, there remains a stigma, a prejudice, against people with intellectual or developmental disabilities! This is why we need you! People First must rise from the background and history books to once again bring together voices of self-advocates to collectively SHOUT OUT our issues, concerns, and facts about people with disabilities!

We hope you will use this manual, full of questions and activities to help you get moving toward your advocacy goals.



Section 1: Self-Advocacy



**“People First helped me become a
better advocate for myself.”**

Diamond G., self-advocate

Activity: Fill in the Blank...



"Self-Advocacy is _____."

Got it filled in? Was it difficult for you? Was it easy? Did you come up with several answers? If you are reading this with other people, were their answers different from yours?

Whatever your answers are, it's okay!

The truth is, self-advocacy means a lot of different things to many different people. As you begin your self-advocacy journey, it is important for you to take the time to think about what self-advocacy means to you, and to remember all the different opportunities you have to use your voice!

Let's try breaking it down with another activity!



Activity: "I'm a Self-Advocate!"

This activity is meant to get you thinking about the Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why of Self-Advocacy. Don't worry, it's pretty simple. Just do your best to answer each of the questions. We'll give you a list of some of our answers after each one, just in case you get stuck. **Please try to answer them on your own first. Ready?**

Question 1: How do YOU define Self-Advocacy?

You can define it using words, sounds, or feelings. Write down all the ideas you have.

Our Answer:

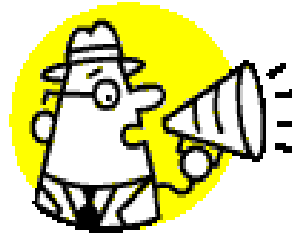
Self-Advocacy is about **speaking up and speaking out** for yourself and for other people who can't or won't speak up for themselves. Again, if you had other answers, that's okay! You don't have to use the exact same words. Self-Advocacy is about speaking up for the life that YOU want, so as long as your answers make sense to YOU and YOUR LIFE, your answers are fine!

Question 2: Who can you share with?

Part of Self-advocacy is sharing things that are important to you. Who can you share the important things in your life with?

Our Answers:

- Social Worker
- Family/Parents/Guardians
- Staff
- Friends
- Coach
- Clergy (Pastor, Priest, Rabbi, etc.)
- Counselor
- Legislators and Politicians



BONUS QUESTION: Why might you want to share things with politicians? What might you share with them? We are going to talk about Political Advocacy a little later. Write down your ideas about it now.

Question 3: What Can You Share?

What are some important things that you might want to share with people?

Our Answers:

- Your Name
- Feelings
- Hopes, dreams & goals
- Your Story
- Questions or concerns
- If you are unhappy, being hurt or feel unsafe

Question 4: How Can You Share?

Everybody communicates! Self-advocacy is about sharing what is important to you in ways that work best for you. What are some ways that people can communicate and share about the things that are important to them?

Our Answers:

- Speaking
- Sign Language
- Texting
- Expressions or pointing
- Motions
- Communication devices
- Emails, letters, phone calls
- Social Media and Chat

Question 5: When/Where Can You Share?

When and where can you share what's important to you? Try to think about all the places you go or you want to go.

Our Answers:

- Work/School
- Annual Meetings, IEP or ISP Meetings
- Home
- Trainings and Conferences
- Office appointments
- At your place of worship
- Anywhere in the community

Question 6: Why is Advocacy Important?

Try to think of everything Self-Advocacy can do for you.

Our Answers:

- To share what you want & need
- Put a stop to what you don't like or want
- To get better services & supports
- To show we are equal
- It is my right to speak up for myself!

REMEMBER: You decide what you share when you share it, and with whom you share! You can do it!

That's it for this activity! Did anything surprise you? Were any of your answers different from ours? Go back and circle the answers that are most important to YOU. It may help you later. Let's move on to the next section!

Section 2: Spreading the Message



“People First Tennessee is a vast group of individuals. We advocate for so many important things and have become recognized as spokespersons for ourselves.”

Scott F., self-advocate

Starting a Self-Advocacy Group

It is very important to take the time to think about what Self-Advocacy means to you, and why it is important to you as an individual, but chances are some of you who picked up this book want to be a part of a Self-Advocacy Group. That is what this section is all about!

Activity: Stronger Together!

Just a couple questions for you this time! We hope you'll keep these in mind whenever you ask people to join or support your group. Being able to share your self-advocacy goals is a skill as much as anything else - the more you do it, the easier it will get! If you practice telling people why they should join your group, you will become a master at recruiting new members and that will only make your group stronger. See what you can come up with.

Question 1: Why do you want to start a Self-Advocacy Group?

Why is speaking up and speaking out important to you? What do you hope the group will be able to do? Do you have a specific **goal** in mind, or **something special you want to accomplish**? Write your answers on the lines below. If you need to, go back and review your answers from the previous activities.

Question 2: What are some good things about being part of a group?

We'll show you some of our answers for this one but try to come up with your own first. Remember, you can cover our answers up if you need to.

Our Answers:

- Making friends
- It's fun
- Working together
- Helping each other
- Meet new people

Did anything surprise you this time? Were any of your answers different from ours? **Go back and circle the answers that are most important to YOU.** You are doing great so far! Let's look at how you can use this to recruit members.

Did You Know? There are many benefits to meeting and hanging around people that don't often get talked about.

Learn about Networking here: bit.ly/3wmw1r4

- "People part of multiple groups are healthier, live longer, and have less cognitive decline!" bit.ly/3ysDEyV
- "The best Network for you helps you achieve your goals!" bit.ly/3M28hPZ

Section 3: Recruiting Members



“People First is often the highlight of my month. Spending time with self-advocates and other supporters is so encouraging. My all-time favorite event has been virtual bingo with the Nashville Predators!”

Dara B., parent-advocate

So you've gone through the when, where, what, who, why, and how of self-advocacy AND you know why you want to start a group. Great! Now you've got to go out and find some members. Sometimes the best way to do this is to hold an informational meeting. Here's how we break down the steps:

1. No matter how you choose to ask people, be sure to ask them when they're available. Ask for dates and times.
2. Start with the people you are close to! Go back and look at your answers for "Who can you share with?" and "When and Where can you share? Ask those people and search those places for like-minded people.
3. Send emails. If you use social media, like Facebook or Twitter, post something about starting a group, and ask people to message you if they are interested.
4. Based on the answers people give you, choose the time when most people can come. Don't worry if everyone can't come to the first meeting; you can always get input from people who couldn't come.
5. Choose a place to meet. Make sure it is easy for people to get to and is accessible. Can wheelchairs fit in the room? Walkers? Is the room big enough to fit everyone comfortably?
6. Do you need any help running the meeting? Of the people who said they wanted to come, who could help you? What do you need them to do? Make sure you ask them if they want to help before you put them to work.
7. Do you want to have snacks or drinks? What kind? How much will they cost? Where will you get the money? When will you buy them?
8. Make a flier, and pass copies around your workplace, school, agency, and community. Check out Section 11: Resources for a sample flier.
9. Once you settle on a date, post it again on social media, if you can. Send emails. make phone calls. The more people you tell the better!

10. Decide what to talk about during the meeting, and PRACTICE!
11. It can be a challenge for some people to feel comfortable introducing themselves. Icebreakers are a great way to lighten the mood and relax your group. Remember to keep your icebreaker simple and accessible so no one is left out. We've put some sample icebreakers in Chapter 11: Resources.
12. Try to keep your speech short. Leave time for questions.



Activity: Back to Basics!

Self-Advocacy is still a new thing to many people. If you aren't sure what to say during your meeting, take the people who come through the questions from "I Am a Self-Advocate" activity from the first section. If you decide to do this activity during your meeting, we recommend you come prepared to write down people's answers somehow. Use a notebook, or maybe a large piece of paper or a whiteboard or chalkboard. You'll need something to write with, too! Writing all this down will help you later when the group is ready to find its focus.

Of course, if you want to do something different, please do! Just be sure to ask:

- Can everyone see this?
- Is it easily understood?
- What supplies or help do I need to do this?
- How will I get input from everyone?

Remember, this is a group you are building.

That means everyone gets a say!



After you've answered all your questions...

1. Ask participants who would be interested in joining a self-advocacy group.
2. Ask when they would like to meet again, and for how long.
3. Where would they like to meet? Can you use the same meeting space next time? Do you need to find a new place? Take suggestions from your new group members!
4. Make sure you have a way to contact them before they leave. Try using a contact sheet. We have an example in Section 11: Resources.
5. Make sure everyone knows when the next meeting is and that you'll be contacting them soon.
6. After the meeting, don't forget to reach out to the people who could not come to the informational meeting. Let them know when the next meeting is and ask them to attend. If they can't, offer to keep them posted on what the group is doing, and include their information on your contact sheet. Maybe they'll be able to participate in something later.
7. Think about making another flier with the date, time and location of your first official meeting. It'll remind people about the next meeting, and let others know what you're working on.



You did it! The wheels are in motion. Let's get ready for your first meeting!

Section 4: Your First Meeting!



**“I joined People First because I wanted to
advocate for people and myself!”**

Bill G., self-advocate

So you've had your informational meeting and gotten your self-advocacy group some new members. You're all excited and ready about your first official meeting. That's awesome! But where or how do you start? We recommend you start with developing some Group Rules.

Activity: Brainstorm Group Rules

It is VERY important for every self-advocacy group to have rules or guidelines. It's not meant to take the fun out of the group at all. Some simple rules will help the self-advocacy group run smoothly and help make sure everyone feels respected and heard during meetings.

Get some big pieces of paper and maybe an easel, and think about helpful and not-so-helpful behaviors and actions during group meetings and activities. Try to decide as a group which are the most important rules and make sure everyone agrees. Circle each rule that the group agrees on and ask someone to rewrite them on a clean sheet of paper for the next meeting.



Because these rules are new, it might be a good idea to hang the piece of paper at your meeting location and quietly point to each rule as needed during meetings.

Example: If you have a rule about not talking when it isn't your turn, and someone is talking over people during the meeting, you could get that person's attention, and then point to the rule on the paper.

We've included a sample of Advocacy Group Rules in Section 11: Resources. As always, give it a try yourself first.

That's it! How did you do? If you like, go ahead and write your Group Rules on the back of this page. It never hurts to have a spare copy AND if you put it here, you and your self-advocacy group members will always know where to find it.





Some of you might be thinking...

"What if I don't want to run meetings like that?"

"Can't I join a group that already exists?"

Some of you may be thinking all this seems like a lot of work. Sometimes it can be. If you don't want to build a group from scratch don't worry. There are a few things you can do to try and find one.

- Start by checking out www.selfadvocacyonline.org This is a terrific online resource for Self-Advocates full of information for advocates to use any time you want! Click on the "Find Self-Advocacy Groups" button, find your state on the map and click on it. You may find information about a self-advocacy group there.
- If there aren't any groups listed near you, try searching for your local Center For Independent Living (page 45), also called a **CIL**. Ask someone who works there if they know of any Self-Advocacy groups in the area. Some CILs have support or youth groups. Try going to one of their meetings and share your goal to join a self-advocacy group. Bring this book with you to share with them if

you can and show it to them. Maybe you will meet some people who are more comfortable with organizing and leading meetings and are interested in helping you.

- Do you live near a college or university? Try to see if there is a group for people with disabilities on the campus.
- Go back to the activity and question "Who can you share with?" Ask those people if they know of any self-advocacy groups in the area.
- Ask for help! Make a personal flier about wanting to find a self-advocacy group. Post about it on social media. If you keep at it, maybe the right people will see it and connect you with a group or start one for you to join!

Above all, please remember that a self-advocacy group doesn't need to be huge. If you don't want to host big meetings, invite some friends over to your house, or talk about Self-Advocacy with your family, friends, or roommates. Invite them to explore Self-Advocacy Online, or this book with you. Help them to advocate for themselves and ask them to help you. It's always a good idea to spend time strengthening your own skills. It's not a race or a competition.

Small steps forward are still steps in the right direction!



Section 5: Leaders and Leadership



“By asking questions, being a good leader means involving and guiding a group of people to a successful outcome—without commanding or being bossy!”

Frank M., self-advocate

Since this is the Self-Advocacy Leadership Manual, we had better talk about leaders and leadership. As always, we're going to get you thinking!

What makes a good leader? What traits do they have? Should they have any specific skills? We will give you some of our answers BUT write your ideas down first.



A Good Leader:

- Works hard.
- Listens to other people.
- Is a good mentor =a person who teaches someone else to do what they do.
- Is kind, polite, and respectful to people.
- Tries to solve problems.
- Is comfortable talking to people, a good public speaker.
- Tells people when they do a good job. Encourages others to try.
- Is always helpful.
- Represents the group well when he or she is out among other people.
- Is willing to learn.
- Loves what they do!

- Always tries to set a good example.
- Is responsible.
- Holds himself and others accountable for their actions.
- Shares things with the group. Makes sure everyone has something to do.
- Speaks up when a person needs something.
- Tries to make things better

Did we miss anything? Are you good at any of these things? **Go back and circle the answers that are most important to YOU.**

Is there anything that you want to learn in order to be a good leader? Go ahead and write those below. Maybe you can make learning them a personal goal and have your group members help you with it!

Now here's a really important question. Is there anyone else you know that has any of these traits? Who are they and what traits do they have? Are they in your self-advocacy group? If not, ask them to be a part of your group. Sit down with them the next time you see them and tell them what you've noticed about them. Say something like, "Hey, you're really good at speaking up for people. I think you will make a great Self-Advocate! Would you like to join a Self-Advocacy group?"

Make sure you tell them what you hope to accomplish with the group. Show them your excitement and let them know you believe in them. Encourage them, but don't force them, and if they refuse don't get discouraged. Just offer to keep them posted about what the group is doing. Maybe they'll change their mind later.



Some of you might be thinking...

"I'm really shy, and I get nervous when I talk to people.

Am I still a leader?"

YES! Everybody has something to offer to the world. You don't have to be the loudest voice in the room for your voice to matter. You just have to speak up! It's all about working together.

**“I want to be a good leader and encourage people to speak up.
But how do I do it?”**

It takes time to learn to encourage people properly. Everybody is different, and as a leader you have to learn how to be observant and notice what works for different people. What is encouraging to one person might not be encouraging for the next person. A good trick is to encourage people to do one small thing, and if they do it, celebrate with them!

Examples:

- **“Can you say one thing/ask one question during the next meeting?”**
- **“Can you tell one person about your goal next week?”**
- **“Can you pass out papers for me next time?”**
- **“Can you share this flier with one person?”**

Next time you meet someone who needs a little encouragement to try, say to yourself, “What is one small thing I can ask this person to do?” Don't forget to try it for yourself too!

Section 6: Finding Your Focus



“People First has helped me grow as a self-advocate and person in ways that I could have never even thought. If it wasn’t for a friend introducing me to People First, I would not be the person I am today.”

Peach C., self-advocate

You've got yourselves some Self-Advocacy Group Rules.

Now it's time to decide what you are going to work on as a group.

We learned in Section 1 that self-advocacy is speaking up and speaking out for yourself and for other people who can't or won't speak up for themselves. We also said that self-advocacy is important for sharing about the things you want and need. Many people want and need different things, so when you are working as a group it can be really hard to decide what your focus should be.

Why is Picking a Focus So Important?

Do you have a dream or a goal you wish to accomplish? Of course! Everyone does. Do you think anyone else in your self-advocacy group has the same goal? Chances are someone does. If you and your group members work to find the things you want in common, the group will be able to work together to accomplish one goal for several people. **Several voices are louder than one** and if each of your group members learn to work together and share your goals with the community, your group will be seen as one who aims to get things done and should be taken seriously. It's okay if you don't know where to start. Go ahead and give this next activity a try.

Activity: Dreams and Desires List

Below is a list of "I want" statements, or things self-advocates have said they wanted to achieve in their self-advocacy groups or in their own lives.

Put a circle around any of the dreams you want, too!

Bright Idea: If you can, make copies of these pages and hand them out to each of the self-advocacy group members. When everyone is finished, count how many people circled each item. Let members know that they can ask for help.

I want a job in my community.

I want to learn to be a strong self-advocate.

I want better transportation options.

I want to help people.

I want to live on my own.

I want to learn about healthy relationships.

I want to make more friends.

I want to learn about how things in my agency work.

I want to learn new things.

I want to show people the skills I already have.

I want to learn about disability laws.

Now it's time to think about what you need to do to pursue your focus. How will you speak up and speak out for it? What do you need to learn about it? Who might you need to talk to about this new goal? Write down your ideas below. It's okay if you don't know all the answers. Do your best! You can always change them later.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



Section 7: Finding Support



“People First has been a great thing for me during COVID. Using Zoom, I have been able to make new friends, see old friends, and even play music. I also learn about speaking up for myself.”

Andrew B., self-advocate

All About Advisors, Allies and Mentors

An important part of self-advocacy is asking for help when you need it. A good way to get help with running your self-advocacy group is to recruit an advisor.

An advisor is **not** a member of your self-advocacy group. An advisor or mentor is an ally or someone who believes in your self-advocacy group's focus. An advisor wants to help your self-advocacy group by offering guidance, making suggestions, and doing basic things to help the group run well.

If you haven't heard about an advisor before, you may have a few more questions, so we're going to try to answer a few for you.

Why is it a good idea to have an Ally—an Advisor?

- They will be there to answer questions if you have any.
- They can give you ideas if you get stuck.
- They can help you solve problems.
- They can give you reminders of what to do if you need them.
- They can help your group figure out something to work on if you're not sure what to do.

These are just a few examples. Let's take a look at what makes a good self-advocate advisor, ally or mentor.

Good Advisors, Allies and Mentors:

- Know there will be disagreements and help members resolve them.
- Communicate with each member directly, not through other members.
- Are honest and trustworthy.
- Follow through.
- Come to all the meetings.
- Follow the group's rules when we have to point out someone's mistake.
- Give advice when asked.
- Ask questions.
- Will listen.
- Will ask us what we want him/her to do
- Learn what supports each person needs.
- Look for ways to help everyone get involved.
- Make sure everyone knows when and where the meeting is.
- Let the leader lead.
- Isn't afraid to speak up and doesn't talk too much.
- Let the members make the decisions.
- Doesn't quit.

That's a long list! Basically, an ally or an advisor:

- Listens to the self-advocates and the group.
- Offers advice or opinions when someone asks.
- Communicates well.
- Does what the group asks.
- Gives ideas but never makes the final decision.
- Is trustworthy and honest.
- Is someone you feel safe with.
- Knows you are capable of making your own decisions and choices.

Again, the advisor is NOT there to do everything for you or to run the self-advocacy group or to tell you how to run it. **An advisor (ally or mentor) offers guidance, suggestions, and advice.** It is up to YOU and the self-advocacy group to work with the advisor to decide what he or she should do for the group.



Activity: Finding An Advisor—an Ally—a Mentor

Below is a list of things an advisor might do. Go through the list as a group and circle the items that are most important to you. This will help you find the right person.

We want an advisor who:

Listens to our opinions.

Shows us how to do things.

Lets us try things.

Helps us get the supplies we need for our meetings and events.

Is kind and respectful.

Likes being around us.

Asks us questions.

Gives advice.

Doesn't get upset if we don't like an idea from them.

Communicates well.

Informs us of opportunities in our organization.

Great! Now you know what you're looking for in an advisor. Now you have to find one. Maybe you already have someone in mind? Is anyone helping you go through this manual? Would he or she make a good advisor? Did someone help you host your informational meeting? Would he or she make a good advisor? Ask yourself again, "Who can I share my dreams and goals with?" Is there someone you listed that you could ask? Don't forget to ask all the group members for their ideas.

Write down the names of all your possible allies (advisors) here:

Write down who (which group member or members) will ask the person if they are interested and when:

If the possible advisors already do the things that the group thinks are the most important, invite them to your next self-advocacy meeting. Introduce them to the group and tell them about the work you have already done. Go through this section of the manual with them and make sure they understand what an advisor is supposed to do. Share your dreams and goals. Make sure they can come to the meetings regularly. Ask them if they are up to the challenge of being your self-advocacy group's advisor!

All About Advisors, for Allies and Mentors

“People First is special to me because it’s the only organization led by and created for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I get more than I give in my role as a mentor.”

Lauren P., People First Ally

Hello new advisor! You have been chosen to serve as advisor for a brand-new self-advocacy group. If you aren't quite sure what to do next, this section will help. Let's start with the basics.

As you can see from the above quote, and hopefully from the last section, an advisor's job is to advise. An advisor gives guidance, offers opinions, and helps when needed. A good advisor knows when to keep those opinions and pieces of advice to themselves. Figuring out when to advise and when not to can take a really long time. And that's okay. The important thing is that you start.

Hopefully the self-advocacy group has gone over the last section with you, and you have some idea of what they want you to do. Go ahead and re-write the things they asked you to do:

If you have a large piece of paper, write down your duties and hang them alongside the group rules. This will help the members remember what your duties are AND give you a point of reference if the group starts to rely on you too much.

Example: If the self-advocacy group says an advisor shouldn't vote but they keep looking to you for opinions or approval during votes, point to that on the Advisor's Duties List and ask, "Am I supposed to do that?" Hopefully over time the group will become more comfortable and confident and will look to you for opinions or approval less and less.

Other Things to Try:

- When doing something for the group, have a group member help as much as possible.
- Post a list of steps for voting on the wall. Write it out with the group. Every time there's a vote, point to each step as it happens. After some time, ask the group if they would like to try it without the voting list.
- Every time the group asks you to do something, ask them, "Is this something I can help you learn how to do?"
- Always remind the group that the self-advocacy group is theirs.
- If a self-advocate needs help during the meeting, ask the group if someone would help him or her before you do.
- Always, always, always celebrate and empower self-advocates who speak up and speak out about what they want, when they take initiative, or they tell you they don't like your idea. Your job is to work your way out of the role of advisor, and those are good signs that the self-advocacy group is heading in the right direction.

These little prompts will hopefully remind those that need it that they are the leaders in their advocacy group.



Things to Do For Yourself:

- Set boundaries for yourself. This may include days or times of self-advocacy activities.
- Be honest about what you need. Tell the group when you are having a problem, and work with them to find a solution.
- Trust your advocates and yourself. You're all creative and can find solutions to problems. You got this!
- Final Note to Allies: Start slow and take breaks when you need to. Reset when you need to. Change your plans if something doesn't work. It's not a race. You will get to where you need to go if you don't give up!

Finding Support

We at People First TN regularly hear how hard it is to find support for your self-advocacy work. There is no real one-size-fits-all solution for that, but there are a few things you can try:

- Reach out to People First; we'll help you anyway we can.
- After asking permission, reach out to self-advocates' family members.
- Self-advocates can advise, too. Ask the self-advocacy group if they would be okay with a self-advocate serving as a co-advisor.
- Reach out to schools and parent groups.
- Instead of looking for one person to help you do a lot of things, find many people to help you with little things. Ask a couple of friends or co-workers to come to one meeting a month to provide extra support. Remember to ask the self-advocacy group if it is okay.
- Check out other disability advocacy groups in your area using

<http://www.selfadvocacyonline.org/>

- Contact your local Center for Independent Living (CIL).



Tri-State Resource and Advocacy Corp.

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Local: (423) 892-4774
Toll-free: (800) 868-8724
Fax: (423) 892-9866
TTY: (423) 892-4774 x8
Director: Mark Woolfall,
ilctrac@yahoo.com

disABILITY Resource Center serving → Knox County

Address and contact:

9111 Cross Park Dr, Bldg E, Suite 135
Knoxville, TN 37923
Email: drc@drctn.org
Local: (865) 637-3666
Fax: (865) 637-5616
TTY: (865) 637-6796


Empower Tennessee

serving counties →
Cheatham, Davidson,
Robertson, Rutherford,
Sumner, Williamson, and
Wilson

Address and contact

2601 Elm Hill Pike, Suite O
Nashville, TN 37214
Email: info@empowertn.org
Local: (615) 200-6028
Fax: (866) 244-9838
Director Brandon Brown,
brandonb@empowertn.org


**TARP Center for Independent
Living**

serving counties →
Weakley, Henry, Benton,
Humphreys, Stewart,
Houston, Montgomery,
Dickson

Address and contact

1027 Mineral Wells Ave. #7
Paris, TN 38242
Email: Info@Tarp1.org
Local: (731) 644-0026
Toll-free: (866) 895-8277
Fax: (731) 644-1116
Text: (731) 363-7792
Director Denise Wardle,
DeniseW@tarp1.org


**Jackson Center for Independent
Living**

serving counties →
Madison, Crockett, Gibson,
Carroll, Henderson, Chester,
Hardin, Haywood

Address and contact

23 Federal Drive
Jackson, TN 38305
Email: information@jcil.tn.org
Director Beth James,
beth@jcil.tn.org


**Memphis Center for
Independent Living**

serving → Shelby county,
N. Mississippi, E. Arkansas

Address and contact

111 S. Highland #358
Memphis, TN 38111-4640
Email: info@mcil.org
Local: (901) 726-6404
Fax: (901) 726-6521
Director Sandi Klink, sandi@mcil.org

Section 8: Mission and Vision Statements



“People First Tennessee is a statewide disability rights organization with the goal of empowering people with disabilities to have voices in addressing issues of equality that affect them.”

So you have your group. Your group has some rules, and a focus, and an advisor to go along with all of it! You're rolling right along. The next thing we would like you to try as a group is to develop a **Mission** and a **Vision Statement**. Mission and Vision Statements are also great tools to help your group stay focused on the things they want to achieve. They are another tool to help your group find your focus. and keep it.

A good **Mission Statement** tries to answer the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of your advocacy group. Namely:

What do you do? **What** do you advocate for?

Where do you do it? In your state? County? Neighborhood? Agency?

Who do you do it for or with? **How** do you do what you do? **Why** do you do it?

Illinois' Self-Advocacy group Mission Statement:

Our mission is to speak up for ourselves and each other while working together to make changes in our communities and in Illinois.

Kansas' Self-Advocacy group Mission Statement:

Our mission is to promote empowerment and independence for adults with developmental disabilities.

Louisiana's Self-Advocacy group Mission Statement:

People First of Louisiana supports people with disabilities to empower themselves in becoming effective decision makers, to gain more independence, and enjoy life as equal citizens of the USA.

A **Vision Statement** is what your group hopes for in regard to the future. It describes what you hope will change or what you will accomplish as you work towards your mission or goal.

On the next page are a couple other chapters' **Visions**:

Illinois' Self-Advocacy group Vision Statement:

Our vision is for self-advocates to work together to get the support we need and to live the life we want in the community.

Kansas' Self-Advocacy group Vision Statement:

Our vision is that all Kansans with intellectual or developmental disabilities will have the opportunity to express opinions and make choices in order to create a life where they are treated with the same dignity and respect as persons without developmental disabilities.

Louisiana's Self-Advocacy group Vision Statement:

People with disabilities build personal visions that are reached through respect, equality and many different experiences that lead to choices and life decisions.

People with disabilities support one another to control their own lives, understand and speak up for their rights and live up to their responsibilities.

Try looking back at all the activities you have done so far. What could you put in your Mission Statement or your Vision Statement? If you are a brand-new group, creating a Mission and Vision Statement can take time. It's okay if you don't know right now. Write down any ideas below:

Section 9: Group Structure



**“Self-Advocacy means I have a voice in
what I want for my life.”**

Joe W., self-advocate

One of the best ways to keep your group running smoothly and working toward your goals is to elect officers, namely President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Electing these officers will help your group meetings run smoothly and efficiently so you all can focus on getting things done. Let's take a look at what each of them do.

President:

- Calls group meetings to order or starts the meeting.
- Calls on people who want to speak during the meeting.
- Asks people to share when something is being discussed.
- Brings up new items on the agenda.
- Guides a vote, if something is being voted on.
- Ends, or adjourns the meetings.
- Supports other members as needed.



Vice-President:

- Supports the President if he or she needs help.
- Takes on the President's duties if the President is absent.
- Supports other members as needed.



Secretary:

- Take roll call at the beginning of the meetings. This means that he or she calls out names to see who is there/passes around a sign in sheet.
- Take notes about what happens during the meetings. These notes are called the Minutes.
- Read the Minutes from the previous meeting so that people remember what you accomplished last time.
- Keeps records of group activities. This usually means a folder full of each meeting's Minutes and a calendar of important dates for the group.
- Reminds members to come to meetings via phone, email, or social media.
- Takes on the Vice-President's duties if he or she is absent.
- Supports other members as needed.



Treasurer:

- Manages the group's money.
- Likes math. Is comfortable doing some adding and subtracting money.
- Puts the group's money in the bank.
- Takes money from the bank to pay for chapter expenses.
- Gets receipts when paying for chapter expenses like snacks and supplies, and keeps those receipts organized in a folder.
- Keeps track of expenses by using a receipt book or checkbook register.
- Gives the monthly Treasurer's Report during group meetings. The Treasurer's Report details to the rest of the group how much money the group has in the bank, how much was spent and how much was earned.
- Collects dues from the members if your group decides to collect dues. Dues are small membership fees which can be used to fund group activities when needed.
- Performs the Secretary's duties when he or she is absent.

These are the most common officer positions. Some groups don't have any officers at all. Other groups add more positions or splits these positions among two or three people. For example, if the Secretary has difficulty writing the minutes, it's okay if he or she shares the position with someone who likes to write. The most important thing is that things get done, and that everyone feels well supported and has what they need. **It's your group, so you decide!**

If you decide not to have all these officers' positions in your group, try to at least choose someone to lead your meetings, and someone to take notes of what happens during them. **Try to make sure that everyone who wants a job gets one.** Giving people a job will help them feel invested in the group and give them even more of a reason to keep coming to meetings.



Quick Tip: If you or anyone in your group needs help doing something, it is **ALWAYS** okay to **ask for help**. Everybody needs help sometimes, and asking for help is a great self-advocacy skill. **Ask** *each other* for help **BEFORE** you ask your Advisor. Your Advisor is there to help you, but this is YOUR group. It's always a good idea to see what you guys can do first. **You CAN do it!**



Let's Talk About Committees!

There may be some self-advocacy groups that have a lot of things they want to work on and other groups only have a few. If you're a group that has a lot of goals, it might be a good idea to think about forming committees in your group. Committees are smaller groups of self-advocates who meet together to work on specific projects apart from the rest of the group.

For example, let's say your group is working on training the staff at your agency. You all have been working so hard that people have said they would like to have a small celebration when the staff training is complete. You want the celebration to happen as soon as the training is over, so it needs to be planned soon, but nobody wants to stop working on the staff training project. This would be a good time to form a Celebration Planning Committee. The Celebration Planning Committee could then meet outside the regular group meetings to plan the party without interrupting anything else.

Here are some other huge advantages to forming committees within your Self-Advocacy group:

- Forming committees will give more members an opportunity to lead. Committees should have structure too, just like your larger group. Forming committees will give other people a chance to lead too.
- They are great for learning. There's a lot going on in the world. Sometimes it can be hard to keep up. Having a committee focus on learning about specific issues or skills is a great way for you to become experts on several things over time.
- They are a good way to include people who can't make it to regular meetings. If there is someone who can't come to regular meetings,

perhaps they can meet with the committee instead, and be a part of the group that way.

- They are good for people who might not want to take on big projects, or like to change things up sometimes. Some committees don't have to exist forever. If there are people in your group you like to work on smaller projects, joining a committee might be a good way for them to get some leadership experience too!

What are some things your group might have a committee on? Check back in the Finding Your Focus section if you need ideas and write them down here:

Did you know? The President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer form something called an **Executive Committee**. One of the Executive Committee jobs is to meet separately and plan the agenda for each meeting. Let's look at agendas now.

Agendas and Reports

In the last section, we mentioned agendas and some different kinds of reports. Here's a basic low-down on what they are. We'll have some samples here too.

Agenda

The **agenda** is a list of things your Self--Advocacy group will talk about during the meeting. It is important that the group has an agenda because it will allow you to organize your thoughts and ideas and get your points across in a timely manner. It allows the other members to be **prepared** for the upcoming topics and discussions as well. By doing this, the group is able to **stay focused** and the meeting will run more smoothly. We have a sample agenda in Section 11: Resources; you can copy and fill in to use at your meetings.

Financial Report

A financial report is all about the money! It shows how much money your group has, how much you spent, and what you spent it on. If you earned any money through a fundraiser or other event, it shows how much you earned, and how you earned it too. There is a sample Financial Report in the Resources Section; you can copy and fill it in to use at your meetings.

Meeting Minutes or Secretary's Report:

Meeting minutes are simply notes about what happened during your group's meeting. They might include who was there and who was absent during your last meeting. We have a sample Meeting Minutes in the Resources Section; you can copy and fill it in to use at your meetings.

Robert's Rules of Order

Sometimes you'll have to vote during your meetings. You might vote to elect officers, to approve/not approve reports, or you might vote on what your group's next project should be. The most important thing to remember when you're voting is to make sure everyone's vote is counted. If someone has an objection or doesn't agree, always write that down. If you don't have time to cover something during one meeting, make sure your Secretary makes a note to put it on the next agenda.

There is a set of rules that some groups follow when it comes to voting during meetings and running them in general. They're called "Robert's Rules of Order." We have an easier-to-understand version of "Robert's Rules of Order" in Section 11: Resources.

Quick Tip: If you are interested in working with legislators, or participating in political advocacy, it might be a good idea to learn these rules. You might be able to use them to serve on a board or committee in your agency or community.

Section 10: Getting Things Done



Why did I join People First?

“to make a difference!” Sam G., self-advocate

How To Make Change Happen

We know you have goals; some small, some really big. In this section, we're going to give some tools to help you plan how to get those goals done. Like anything else in this book, planning things is a skill that takes time to learn. Be patient. If you do this often enough, it will get easier, and you'll be able to teach somebody else what you know.

Before we start, go back to Section 5: Leaders and Leadership. What was your group's focus? Write it down again and keep it in mind as you go through these activities.

Using An Action Plan

No matter what kind of goal you have, an Action Plan is a great tool for planning how to accomplish it. An Action Plan is a simple grid that asks, "Who will do what and when?" for each step of a goal. It can be used for self-advocacy group goals and for individual ones, too. Here's what it looks like:

Action Plan

Goal: _____

WHAT TO DO	WHO WILL DO	BY WHEN	NOTES

There is a blank Action Plan in Section 11: Resources. Before you fill out an Action Plan, we encourage you to use the next page to list all the things that need to be done to achieve your goal. Don't worry about listing them in order right now. Just list them out. You'll probably think of more as you go along and find some that turned out to be unnecessary. That's okay. Nothing is set in stone!

Once you have each step written down, and in order, go back and assign each step to someone. Write their names in the "WHO WILL DO" column.

After that, go back a third time, and assign a deadline to each step. Write those in the "BY WHEN" column. Try to be realistic with your deadlines. Don't rush yourselves. Make any notes about things you have to remember in the "NOTES" column. If you have a personal or group calendar, you can write the dates on there, too!

Hint: If you know the date that the entire goal has to be complete, put that in the last row of the Action Plan, and work backwards from that date.

If you miscalculate something and need more time or miss a step don't worry! Like everything else about self-advocacy, planning takes practice!

A Few Things To Keep In Mind

Most advocacy activities involve working with other people or asking for things. If you need to ask another person for something to achieve your goal, that other person is called a **decision maker**.

Think of it this way...

Did you have to find a place to host your first meeting? Did you have to ask someone's permission to use that place? That person was the decision maker for that room. Did you ever need to borrow something from a friend or family

member? Then your friend or family member was the decision maker for the item you borrowed.

It can be strange to think of it that way, but it's very important to identify the decision makers for your goals, especially when it comes to choosing advocacy goals for your agency or organization, such as your People First chapter, or your school. By **agency advocacy** we mean practicing "Nothing About Us Without Us," by making sure you have a say in what goes on at your agency. By **political advocacy** we mean taking action to change or be involved in local and statewide policies.

Let's try to identify some decision makers now! Ask your Advisor, and supporters for help if you need it.

Who are the decision makers in your organization? Who is the Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director/President?

Who are the decision makers in your city/town? Who is the mayor?

Who are the decision makers in your state? Who is your governor? Who are your state senators? Congressmen/women?

You can look up your Tennessee Government officials here:

<https://www.tn.gov/directory.html>

Can you think of any other people whose decisions might affect your daily life? Write them down and what they do here.

Note: If you chose to get involved in political or agency advocacy or anything that affects change, be sure you follow up with the decision makers for the issue. Make it part of your Action Plan!

The Environmental Checklist

Have you ever thought about getting involved with your organization and helping yourself and other self-advocates speak up and speak out there? Try going through the Illinois Voices Environmental Checklist with your group to see where your agency might improve; find the Environmental Checklist in Section 11: Resources. Ask your advisor for help if you need it. If you find areas which could be improved, try to come up with solutions to each problem. After that, set up a meeting with your organization's decision maker and show them this checklist and your solutions.

People will be more likely to work with you if you share possible solutions that show that you are knowledgeable and willing to work with them.

If you have difficulty coming up with a solution for your decision maker, focus on the benefits of empowering self-advocates. Consider making a presentation about the benefits of self-advocacy to the leaders at your organization.

Remember to use your Action Plan to help you.



Advocacy Methods

So you're ready to make things happen! How will you get your message across?

Let's look at a few different advocacy methods:

- **Writing Letters:** The letter is the most popular choice of communication with decision makers. You can either write one letter and have each member sign a copy and include a personal message or have everyone write their own.
- **Face to Face Meetings:** We recommend this one! Meeting in person is a formal, strategic communication. You have already prepared your key message. Tell your story from your key message. Make your story clear, brief, and interesting. Real life stories make issues meaningful and personal. Meeting decision makers allows them to put faces to the names, and actually see the people they serve in person.
- **Fliers/Posters:** Let the community know what you are working on.
- **Phone Calls:** Prepare a call sheet and script of questions. Make each caller comfortable with the issue that they are advocating for.
- **Media Interviews:** Media is a way for mass communication. Like radio, newspapers, Podcasts, and other ways that reach many people. This is useful when advocacy issues need a human face. Make sure that you are prepared to deliver the message clearly.
- **Petitions:** Gathering signatures of the supporters of your issue shows strength in numbers. Decision makers listen when a large number of people voice their opinion. Petitions do not have to be complicated or long.
- There is actually a lot of advocacy you can do in a limited amount of time. Take a look at this "Got Time" handout in Section 11: Resources. It's all about small things you can do to advocate for a cause when you don't have a lot of time. If you can think of any others, put them in the blanks!

Hosting Guest Speakers



If you are still not ready to get political, that's okay. There are still plenty of things you and your group can do! You might think about hosting a guest speaker.

Hosting a guest speaker is a wonderful way to learn something new and/or advocate for issues that matter to you. Not only will you learn something, but if you do it enough you will increase the influence you have in your community.

If you are not sure who to invite, we've got a few ideas for you. Be sure you see who you and your group can come up with first. Try making a list of things you want to learn about, and then do some research to find a local expert on each subject.

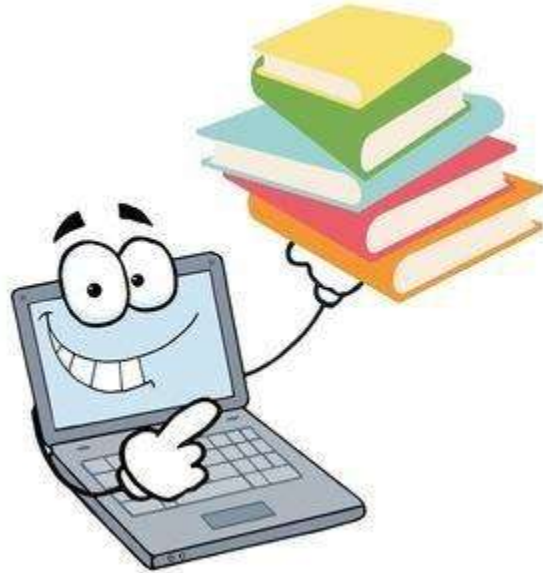
- Contact local hospitals, social services, health & government agencies. They might have a list of possible speakers on topics that you are looking to discuss
- Write and/or call chairpersons of specific departments of a university or college. For example: psychology, social work, disability studies, humanities, law and medical schools all have talented and knowledgeable professionals and eager students who could be possible speakers.

- Government agencies might be able to educate your group about entitlement benefits.
- Non-profit agencies can discuss alternative services to what the government provides. They can also share their philosophies about the community and the services provided.
- Lawyers specializing in legal rights of people with disabilities might be able to review your rights with you. Try looking up www.equipforequality.org.
- We know we have some people who are concerned about being healthy out there. Try searching for alternative health providers like meditation experts, yoga teachers, and dietitians.
- Pharmaceutical (medication) company representatives could come and speak about taking medicine wisely.
- Personal finance experts can help you learn how to manage your money.
- Invite someone from your organization that you don't know very well to visit a meeting and ask them what they do there. The more you know about how your organization works, the better.
- Invite another advocacy group. Exchange ideas and tips and look for ways to work with and help each other.

No matter who you host, be sure to dress the part. Dressing nicely is another way you can show people you're serious about what you do.



Section 11: Resources



“Believe you can and you’re halfway there.”

Theodore R., self-advocate

Alabama People First Handbook <https://peoplefirstofalabama.wordpress.com/>

Equip for Equality <http://www.equipforequality.org/>

Florida Self-Advocates Network'D <https://www.flsand.org/>

Green Mountain Self-Advocates (People First Vermont) <https://gmsavt.org/>

Illinois Self-Advocacy Alliance <http://selfadvocacyalliance.org/>

Illinois Self-Advocacy Alliance Webinars <http://selfadvocacyalliance.org/webinars>

Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered <https://www.sabeusa.org/>

-Technology Handbook: <http://selfadvocacyinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/My-Technology-Handbook-by-SABE.pdf>

-GoVoter Project: <https://www.sabeusa.org/govoter/>

Self-Advocacy groups across the nation <https://www.selfadvocacy.net/usa/>

Self-Advocates of Indiana <https://www.saind.org/>

Self-Advocacy Online <http://www.selfadvocacyonline.org/>

Speaking Up For Us of Maine <http://sufumaine.org/>

Ten Tip Sheets For Self-Advocacy Groups

<https://www.selfadvocacyinfo.org/resource/tip-sheets-for-self-advocacy-groups/>

The Self Advocate Coalition of Kansas <https://sackonline.org/>

New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project <http://www.arcnj.org/programs/njsap/>

People First of California <https://www.peoplefirstca.org/>

People First of Louisiana <http://www.peoplefirstla.org/>

People First of Missouri <https://www.missouripeoplefirst.org/>

People First of Ohio <https://www.peoplefirstohio.org/>

People First of Washington <http://www.peoplefirstofwashington.org/>

People First of West Virginia <https://peoplefirstwv.org/>

Self-Advocacy Meeting



When:

Time:

Where:

Hope to See You There!

Icebreakers For Your Meetings:

Feel free to use these when meeting or if you want to bring a little happy energy into the room.

Roses and Thorns

Ask each person to share one good thing that happened to them recently, or a "Rose." and one not so good thing that happened to them recently, or a "thorn." This also might be good to do after each self-advocacy project, so you can figure out what you can do better for the next one.

Desert Island

Ask each person to imagine that they are stranded on a desert island. Then, ask them to name three things they would want with them. Remind the group that these would be the only things they would have for the rest of their lives. Don't forget to ask why they would choose them.

What's Your Favorite (Blank)

This is another good one to use before you officially begin each meeting. All you have to do is choose a different topic for people to choose from each time, and then ask people to share their choices. Example: "What's your favorite song?" The possibilities are endless!

- * **Suggested Topics:** Favorite color, animal, food, place, time of year, hobby
- * Who's your favorite person, athlete, actor or singer?
- * If you could be anything you wanted, what would you be?
- * If you could live anywhere in the world, where would you live?
- * Describe your dream house
- * Describe your dream vacation

Our Advocacy Group Rules



- Be on time
- Put cell phones on silent or turn them off
- No texting during the meeting
- No cursing or name calling during the meeting
- Treat everyone with respect
- Be prepared for meetings
- Listen to others and don't interrupt
- Raise your hand if you want to say something
- Help each other
- Ask for help if you need it
- Participate in the meetings
- Try to attend as many meetings as you can

Agenda

Date _____



Call Meeting to Order and Introductions



Attendance by Sign In Sheet



Treasurer Report



Old Business



New Business



Statewide Advocacy Information



Upcoming Events



Information Sharing, Learning Opportunities, and chapter info.



Financial Report

From _____ **to** _____

Money in the Checking Account \$ _____

Dues Paid \$ _____

Contributions/Fundraising Money Earned \$ _____

Money Spent on Supplies \$ _____

Money Spent on Other Things (list things) \$ _____

Self-Advocacy Meeting Minutes Date _____ / _____ / _____



Members Present (list names of all people at the meeting)



Time the meeting was Called to Order at _____ am/pm.

The meeting was called to order by _____

What was talked about at the meeting? (This is where you follow the agenda and write down what was said)



Time the Meeting Ended _____ am/pm

Name of person doing meeting minutes _____

Robert's Rules of Order

Helps guide everyone so that meetings are fair and organized. Rules:

- Everyone has the right to participate in the discussion if they wish
- Everyone has the right to know what is going on at all times
- Only urgent matters may interrupt a speaker
- Only one thing can be discussed at a time

A **Motion** is a call for action related to the topic that is being discussed. These topics may include minutes or notes from previous board meetings, review of financial reports, or other decisions. A motion requires a "second" to be considered. Each motion must be decided upon, (passed, not passed, put away until later, referred to committee, or postponed indefinitely) before another motion can be made.

About Motions

1. Everyone has a right to share thoughts and ideas about a topic or something you want people to know or something you don't understand.
2. Each motion must have an ending:
 - Passed
 - Defeated – did not pass
 - Tabled – wait until next meeting to make a final decision Referred to committee – a committee will look into the topic Postponed but no date given to make a decision

How to Make a Motion

1. A member raises his/her hand when nobody else is talking.
2. The President calls the member by name.
3. The member makes the motion: "I move that..." or "I move to...."
4. Another member seconds the motion: "I second the motion" or "I second it" or "second."
5. The President states the motion: "It is moved and seconded that...."
6. The President asks if there are any questions or discussion about the motion.
7. Once all questions have been asked and answered, and discussion has taken place, the President asks members to vote on the motion: "All in favor of..., please say 'yes'; any opposed say 'no'." If there are more 'yes' than 'no's', the motion passes; more 'no's than 'yes', the motion does not pass. The President announces if the motion passes or not.
8. The President can ask that the vote be taken by a show of hands or by ballot instead of by saying 'yes' or 'no'.

How To Do Things During a Meeting

–To start the meeting

To start the meeting, the president calls the meeting to order. "I call the board meeting to order."

–You want to bring up a new idea before the group.

After recognition by the President of the board, present your idea or topic. A second is required for the idea or topic (also called a motion) to go to the floor for discussion or consideration.

"I make a motion that we write a letter to the editor of the newspaper about the Governor's budget."

–You want to change the wording in a motion under discussion.

After recognition by the president of the board, move to change the wording by saying the changes you want to make.

“I move that we change the wording so that everyone can understand. The words are confusing, and we shouldn’t use initials.”

–You want more time to study or learn more about the idea of topic being discussed.

Move to refer to a committee. Try to be specific as to what you want the committee to do. “I move that the finance committee learns more about this topic.”

–You want more time personally to study the proposal being discussed.

Move to postpone to a specific time or date.

“I move that we learn more about this topic and make a decision at our next board meeting on September 7, 2022.”

–You are tired of the current discussion.

Move to limit discussion with a time limit or only having a set number of people talking. Board members will have to vote to limit discussion, and it has to pass with 2/3 of board members saying ‘yes’.

“I move that we only talk about this for 15 more minutes” or “I move that only 3 more people can share their thoughts on this topic.”

–You have heard enough discussion.

Move to close the discussion. Board members will have to vote to close the discussion, and it has to pass with 2/3 of board members saying ‘yes’.

“I move that we end this discussion.”

–You want to postpone a motion until some later time.

Move to table the motion; tabling just means postponing it until another meeting. Be sure to discuss when you would like to bring it up again.

“I move that we table the motion until our next board meeting on Dec. 4, 2022.”

–You believe the discussion has drifted away from the agenda and want to bring it back.

Call for a point of order and remind the group what topic should be discussed.

“I call for a point of order so that we can get back to talking about the plan for next year’s rally.”

–You want to take a short break.

Move to take a break for a set period of time. “I move that we take a break for ten minutes.”

–You want to end the meeting.

A member makes a move to adjourn or end the meeting. “I move we adjourn or end the meeting.”

–You’re confused about a procedure being used and want clarification.

Without recognition, call for Point of Information or Point of Parliamentary Inquiry. The president of the board will ask you to state your question and will attempt to clarify or explain the situation.

“I call for a Point of Information. I do not understand the words that are being used or how it applies to self-advocates.”

–You may interrupt a person who is talking for these reasons only:

to get information about business – **point of information**

to get information about rules – **parliamentary inquiry**

if you can't hear, safety reasons, comfort, etc. – **question of privilege**

if you see a breach of the rules – **point of order**

if you disagree with the president of the board’s ruling – **appeal**

Action Plan**Goal** _____

What To Do	Who Will Do	By When	Notes

Section 12: People First Basics



“Champions are brilliant at the basics.”
John W., team coach

What is Self-Advocacy?

- Self-advocacy refers to a person's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his/her own interests, needs, and rights.
- It is making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions.
- Self-advocacy is understanding your strengths and needs, identifying your personal goals, knowing your legal rights and responsibilities, and communicating these to others.
- Being part of a People First group means being part of a grassroots network that allows you to join with regional, state, and national advocacy groups to speak up for yourself and have YOUR voice heard.

People First self-advocacy groups are based on...

- People that want to be perceived by others as people who have something to offer and skills to share rather than being seen as persons with handicaps and limitations.
- People First is a self-advocacy organization where people learn to speak up and out for themselves. "To advocate!"
- People First voting membership is open to all persons who have a developmental disability. Only voting members can be officers.
- People First is a peer group process which, over time, allows persons to learn to talk for themselves, advocate for themselves, listen to others, make choices, listen to peers, make decisions, solve problems, and ultimately develop leadership skills.
- People First is a process which must be paced to ensure that every person present has a chance to participate to the best of their ability
- People First must initially be a blend of advisors or allies working with people with disabilities to provide the modeling and support necessary for the development of self-advocacy and leadership skills.
- People First advisors or allies model for and support individuals with disabilities to neutralize barriers that stand in the way of persons advocating for themselves. Advisors do not lead, control or coerce.
- People First belongs to the people.
- We speak out fearlessly for those who cannot speak out for themselves!

