



Guiding Voices in County Board Governance



**Department of
Developmental
Disabilities**

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What are County Boards of Developmental Disabilities?

County boards of developmental disabilities (DD boards) in Ohio are local government agencies that handle money, oversee operations, provide case management, authorize services and sometimes directly give support to help people living with developmental disabilities. These services are meant to make their lives happy, healthy, and fulfilling. Each DD board is made up of people who live in the county where the board is located. Boards are focused on their specific county, which helps them meet the unique needs of the people who live there.



County boards of DD were first created in Ohio in 1967 because the state realized that no other systems in place could properly address the needs of people with developmental disabilities and their families.

To fund services, DD boards can ask voters in their county if they agree to pay taxes to support the agency and the services needed by people with disabilities. Board members can learn more about how DD boards are funded during the orientation process. Board staff are happy to explain concepts or provide materials differently upon request.

All 88 counties in Ohio have a board of DD to meet the needs of people with disabilities and their families in their county.

DD boards are responsible for:

- Deciding if people in the county can get help from the board. Sometimes, this is called eligibility.
- Running, funding, or overseeing programs and services.
- Making sure that the services and providers available to people with developmental disabilities are working well and meeting needs.
- Providing or arranging services for young children and adults including help at home.
- Planning a budget and approving how money is spent.
- Reporting yearly about what the board did and how it spent money.
- Deciding who gets hired, setting how much they get paid (including salaries and benefits for all DD board employees), agreeing to long-term work contracts for top employees, and arranging employee benefits. Notably, the superintendent or their designee hires all positions for the DD board. The DD board focuses on strategic decisions and leadership,

while the superintendent handles daily operations and staffing (except for their own position). DD board members are responsible for hiring a superintendent, approving their employment contract and evaluating their performance.

- Offering service and support administration, helping people living with a disability get the information and support they need to live their lives.
- Checking and approving homes where people can get help caring for someone with a developmental disability called respite care.
- Following a policy called “Employment First,” which says that getting a job in the community is the main goal for every adult receiving help from their DD board.
- Setting goals to make sure more people with developmental disabilities find jobs in the community, have technology offered as an option for more independence, and other policies related to their strategic plan.

Ohio law encourages DD boards to appoint people with professional experience whenever possible. However, it’s important to remember that people living with disabilities are also valuable voices in the decision-making process. They are directly impacted by the decisions made by the DD boards.

What People with Developmental Disabilities (DD) Offer County Boards

People with developmental disabilities (DD) bring a critical and unique perspective as voting members on county boards of developmental disabilities (DD boards). Some benefits include:

1. People who receive services can share and add meaningful input based on life experience. All board members benefit from hearing and seeing the perspectives of people with disabilities in a professional decision-making setting and role.
2. When the voices of people who experience services firsthand are members of DD boards, a more complete view of services can be discussed to meet the needs of people with DD.
3. People who use these services can best explain how those services impact their lives and what could be improved.
4. When more people with DD have a seat at the table as voting members on DD boards, it acknowledges their dignity by giving them a say in the services that are crucial to their communities and their lives. This change will continue to influence the philosophy of inclusion at each DD board.
5. When DD boards hear input from people with developmental disabilities and family members as voting members, they can better carry out their mission to support the people they serve.
6. Many organizations have a percentage of people who use their service on their boards. Hence people who receive services as voting members of the boards is also implementing best practices. As more DD boards have voting members who relate and connect to the people they serve, people with DD will have their voices, opinions, and ideas not only heard but valued and counted. This builds esteem and confidence that people with DD



can and will control their own lives.

When DD boards have voting members with DD, the philosophy shifts toward self-direction and the independent living philosophy. Services are truly enhancing independence and self-reliance. Boards are helping people living with DD pursue their life aspirations and develop to their fullest potential.

How Members of DD Boards Are Selected

The DD board is made up of seven members: five are chosen, not by the DD board or DD board superintendent but, by the county commissioners and two are chosen by the senior probate judge of the county.

Qualifications for all DD Board Members (Starting July 1, 2025)

To be eligible to serve on a DD board, a person must:

- Be a resident of the county
- Be a U.S. citizen
- Know about developmental disabilities
- One member must be an adult living with a developmental disability

Additional Considerations for Selecting DD Board Members

When selecting DD board members, the county commissioners and senior probate judge should consider:

- People with developmental disabilities
- Family members of people with developmental disabilities
- People with professional knowledge or experience in areas such as:
 - » Running businesses
 - » Handling money
 - » Understanding laws
 - » Working in healthcare
 - » Hiring people
 - » Serving in government roles

The county commissioners and senior probate judges should also strive to select board members who represent the diversity of the county population. This includes considering factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status.

Specific Requirements for County Commissioners and the Senior Probate Judge: When selecting DD board members, the county commissioners must choose at least one person with developmental disabilities and at least one family member of someone with developmental disabilities. The senior probate judge must also choose at least one person with developmental disabilities or a family member of someone who receives support to live in a home or supported living arrangement. If the senior probate judge chooses someone with developmental disabilities, this fulfills the county commissioners' requirement to choose at least one such person.

Reviewing DD Board Membership

Boards of DD should review the board membership profile at least annually to anticipate upcoming vacancies. When positions become available, announcements should be made regularly to encourage applications.

Filling Empty Seats or Vacancies on the DD Board

If there is a vacancy, or opening, on the DD board, the county commissioners or probate judges responsible for making appointments. This means that they do not have to wait until all the seats are empty to make appointments. County boards and appointing authorities might post board openings notices differently. You should ask your DD board how openings are communicated in your county.

Section 5126.021 | Membership of county boards: <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-5126.021#:~:text=The%20board%20of%20county%20commissioners,county%20shall%20appoint%20two%20members.>

Recruitment Methods

The DD board composition requirement could result in significant interest to serve from people living with developmental disabilities, their families, and the public. It is important to begin identifying adults with developmental disabilities to serve before a vacancy is required so that appropriate expectations can be set well in advance.

Identifying candidates can be done in several ways:

- **Service and support administrators (SSAs):** SSAs are the front-line connection to people served and their families with DD boards. Ask SSAs to invite people demonstrating good leadership skills to attend DD board meetings. This exposure will help demonstrate the flow of the board meeting and begin to set expectations. Advocacy groups can also be a front-line method of identifying potential interested candidates.
- **DD board Leadership:** Board leadership needs to have regular engagement with prospective board members. This could be designed as an event for the community to meet with board staff and leadership to learn about operations.

- **Appointing authorities:** Maintaining relationships with appointing authorities is also necessary when recruiting new members. Anyone can attend their county commissioner meetings to meet the commissioners, give public comment, see how their meeting is run, and learn about how local government makes decisions.

Ideal members for any board, particularly DD boards, are engaged in their communities and are a connection between their organization and the public. Maintaining relationships with advocacy and community organizations such as The Ohio Self-Determination Association, People First of Ohio, The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, Centers for Independent Living, and other advocacy organizations are essential to recruiting diverse people living with disabilities on DD boards.

Being Appointed and What to Expect

Being appointed to a DD board is a significant accomplishment and responsibility that involves a structured process, expectations, and a commitment to service. Here is a summary of what to expect throughout the process and responsibilities once appointed:



Initial Conversations

Interested people should start by engaging with their local county board superintendent to understand the requirements and expectations of serving on the DD board. Local teams including service and support administrators may help identify necessary supports and resources for prospective applicants to effectively serve in any leadership role, make introductions with the superintendent or other administrative staff, and find other opportunities for community advocacy as needed.

Understanding Vacancies

Vacancies for DD board membership vary and depend on the type of position. Ensure the person filling a vacancy aligns with the seat's requirements. There is a process to follow for filling vacancies depending on if they are at the end of the term or mid-term.

Attending and Networking at DD Board Meetings

Attending DD board and county commissioner meetings can provide insight into how meetings are run, help to understand the dynamics, and build relationships with DD board members and appointing authorities.

Engagement with Appointing Authorities

DD board appointments are made by the county commissioners or the county probate judge, not by the DD board. The superintendent or prospective applicants can attend public county commissioners' meetings to make introductions with the appointing authorities potentially considering their application. Actively participating in county commissioner meetings or meeting their probate judge can demonstrate a commitment to civic engagement.

Preparation and Skill Development

Engage and volunteer with community organizations and outreach or educational programming groups including Project STIR™, local advocacy groups, Aktion Clubs, nonprofit agencies, centers for independent living, and others. This will help make meaningful connections and enhance skills to better prepare for DD board service.

Responsibilities and Commitment

Active DD boards are crucial in shaping policies and practices while ensuring accountability and support for people living with disabilities and their families. Here is an overview of what to expect as a DD board member.

Time Commitment

Expect roughly 3 to 5 hours per month for attending meetings, traveling for board business, responding to inquiries, and preparing for meetings. This might vary from county to county. Sometimes the public may communicate additional important information so anticipate checking email or voicemail outside of preparing for the usual meeting.

Board Meetings

Meetings are typically held monthly on a consistent day and time. Members can request an excused absence for personal or medical reasons, but generally, no more than three absences per year are permitted. Attending regularly scheduled meetings in person is very important as members can be removed for not attending DD board meetings. Members can request virtual attendance periodically. Once appointed to a DD board, members have the responsibility to make decisions for the well-being of the organization and all people supported by the board. This means decisions by the board should focus on what is best for everyone and not be based on a person's needs or wants. Sometimes this could mean abstaining (not voting) on a particular issue coming before the DD board.

Understanding conflicts of interest is crucial for board members. These conflicts can arise when personal interests or relationships might unfairly affect decisions. This includes participating in discussions that could benefit the board member directly. This is not unusual to have a conflict of interest, but it is important for board members to be aware of these situations and discuss them openly with the superintendent to avoid ethical issues. For more detailed information and guidance, board members are encouraged to consult the [Ohio Ethics Commission](#).

Preparation

Board staff will provide information packets before meetings. Reviewing these materials beforehand is essential.

DD board members must participate in yearly in-service training sessions to stay eligible for their role. These sessions need to be conducted or approved by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and are four hours every year. New members also have to complete a special orientation training session to begin service. DD boards may also schedule training before a regularly scheduled meeting. Board staff may consider



establishing mentorship programs that pair newer members with experienced members for at least the first year of service.

DD Board Meeting Structure

Meeting Start

The meeting begins with a call to order from the board president, roll call for attendance, and a general welcome to signify the meeting has started. When names are announced during roll call, members should respond by saying "present," "here," or raising a hand.

Public Comments

There is usually time set aside for public comments. Public comment allows for non-members to speak on issues before the board. Specific rules may restrict discussion about DD board employees. Sometimes, there are no public comments.

Consent Agenda

Routine items that do not require much discussion are grouped into a single motion and vote. Examples include meeting minutes, financial reports, or program updates. A motion is made by one of the board members, followed by a second to the motion by another board member. Any board member may do either of these. This may sound like, “I move to pass the motion.” and another would add, “I second the motion.”

Agenda Items

During the meeting, the superintendent and leadership staff will explain how the board used money in the previous month and how policies are being implemented. Board members should ask questions if something is not clear. Other topics may include MUI (Major Unusual Incident) reports, updates on activities from leadership, matters related to board governance, and updates to policies. Board members are usually listening carefully to staff updates during this time and asking questions as needed.

DD Board Governance

DD board Governance includes discussion on structures, rules, and practices the board must follow. This is an opportunity for board members to share information or ask questions about decisions made during the meeting.

Executive Session

Executive Session is a private time during the meeting for necessary DD board and staff members to discuss confidential matters including legal issues and employment-related discussions. It is very important not to discuss the topics with anyone outside of Executive Session.

Old Business and New Business

Boards may use terms like “old business” or “new business.” This means they plan to revisit topics from previous meetings and discussing new matters if needed.

Adjournment

Adjournment means the meeting is over or it is time to close the meeting.



Important Notes

Executive Session Confidentiality

Discussions within the Executive Session are confidential and not open to the public. Topics discussed here are sensitive and legally bound to confidentiality. You should not discuss Executive Session with anyone outside of the meeting.

Meeting Efficiency

The agenda is structured to ensure an efficient flow of the meeting. Different sections are allocated for various types of discussions and decisions.

As a DD board member, commitment, preparedness, and active participation will contribute significantly to the support provided by the board for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Technology and Transparency

- All DD board members should have access to the technology or other resources they need to serve effectively. Determine what specific technology needs board members may have through dialogue and open communication.
- DD board meetings should be accessible to the public. This may include providing technology that allows people to listen to the meeting remotely.
- DD boards are allowed to create a policy where board members can join meetings electronically, and through video calls. If a member joins remotely, they will be considered present toward the quorum, and can vote with the rest of the board as long as they follow the approved policy. A quorum is the minimum number of people needed at a meeting to make official decisions. DD boards must have four members present.
- DD boards must follow all Sunshine Laws and other relevant provisions in the Ohio Revised Code.

- » The Ohio Sunshine Law is a set of rules that helps make sure government meetings and decisions are transparent and open to the public. The Sunshine Law also says that the public has the right to access certain records and documents related to the board's activities. This includes things like meeting minutes, budgets, and other important information. By making these documents available, the board ensures that everyone has the same information and can understand how decisions are made.
- » Learn more from the Ohio Attorney General's Office.

Transportation and Other Support

Some people may need assistance with transportation or other support while conducting or preparing for board business. These services could be provided through a waiver, if appropriate, provided directly by the DD board, or reimbursed as appropriate expenses.

It is important to clearly understand appropriate accommodations and what expenses are reimbursable early in the recruitment process as a DD board member.

Reimbursement for DD Board Member Expenses

Board members are not paid for their work, but they may be reimbursed for expenses they incur while doing their job. This includes expenses like travel, meals, and lodging.

Refer to the Ohio County Board of Developmental Disabilities Handbook from the Ohio Auditor for additional guidance on reimbursement of expenses or local DD board policies for more information.

Meeting Preparation and Distribution of Relevant Materials

DD board members are often required to review and approve policies, budgets, and expenditures for their respective boards. This is a lot of information to review, so it is important for boards to distribute it in a timely manner to members so everyone has time to review and ask questions.

Administrators may find that presenting documents in different formats may help board members to process information more efficiently. It may also be helpful to offer the assistance of administrative staff in reviewing the content of the consent agenda and other topics before the upcoming board meeting to facilitate the flow of the meeting and understanding of the materials.

Best Practices Regarding Attendants

The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council has resources for working with attendants in professional settings such as a DD board meeting. However, here are some additional recommendations:

- Attendants can be paid direct support professionals, family members, or assistants hired by the people needing them.
- The person with a developmental disability is appointed to serve on the DD board, not the attendant. As such, the attendant participates in the meeting as a member of the public. The attendant may or may not need to be in the room, but generally should not sit at the front with the rest of the board.
- DD board staff may want to include a break between the meeting and any potential Executive Session. It may also be helpful to provide light refreshments.



Because of the confidential nature of some of these materials, basic assistance with managing documents should be provided by administrative staff both during the board meeting and in the Executive Session. Generally, an attendant as a member of the public would not be permitted to join in Executive Session. If a board member needs support for personal or medical needs during Executive Session, this should be discussed and resolved in advance. Possible strategies include having the attendant within listening distance to provide support upon request or having support from board staff. If these solutions are inadequate, members could request a waiver for the attendant to be present in an Executive Session stipulating all information discussed is confidential.

Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council Resources

Sudden Impact! Demanding and Commanding Respect on Ohio's County Boards:

<https://ddc.ohio.gov/resources-and-publications/advocacy-self-determination/sudden-impact>

- This booklet highlights Ohioans with disabilities who are making a difference by serving on their DD boards. (Published 2020)

Guidelines for Working with Their Personal Care Assistant at Meetings, Conferences & Special Events: <https://ddc.ohio.gov/resources-and-publications/advocacy-self-determination/pub-pca-guidelines>

- This booklet answers questions about how to work with a Personal Care Assistant (PCA) at meetings, conferences, and special events. PCAs are attendants, caregivers, aides, support workers, and others. (Published 2014)

How to Run a Meeting: <https://ddc.ohio.gov/resources-and-publications/clear-language/how-to-run-meeting>

- This toolkit helps people with disabilities learn how to lead meetings in their communities! It explains how to vote, make decisions, and run things smoothly. (Revised 2017)

Visit ddc.ohio.gov to find these resources.

Rights for People Living with Developmental Disabilities

DD boards are responsible for protecting the rights of people with developmental disabilities. Ohio law has a “Bill of Rights” that lists the rights of people with developmental disabilities. These rights include:

- Everyone has the right to be treated with respect and dignity. This means that everyone should always be treated with kindness and respect- everyone has unique values, perspectives, and experiences.
- Everyone has the right to a safe and comfortable place to live. This means that we all should have a home that is clean, safe, and meets our unique needs.
- Everyone has the right to eat healthy food. This means that people should have access to enough nutritious food to stay healthy.
- Everyone has the right and freedom to practice their religion or not practice any religion. This means that everyone can choose to go to church, temple, mosque, or any other place of worship, or choose not to go to any place of worship.
- Everyone has the right to get medical and dental care when needed. This means that people should be able to see a doctor or dentist whenever they are sick or injured.
- Everyone has the right to get other needed services, including occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, and specialized behavioral support. These services can help with everyday tasks like walking, talking, and managing emotions.
- Everyone has the right to get needed care in the least intrusive way possible. This means that their caregivers should use the least restrictive methods possible to address their needs.
- Everyone has the right to privacy. This means that all should have their own space and that their personal information should not be shared with others without their permission.
- Everyone has the right to communicate with others in the way they choose. This means that they should be able to talk to people, write letters, use sign language, or use any other way of communicating that works for them.
- Everyone has the right to own and use their belongings. This means that everyone should be able to keep their clothes, toys, and other possessions and use them as they choose.
- Everyone has the right to spend time with other people. This means that all people should have opportunities to socialize with friends and family.
- Everyone has the right to reach their full potential. This means that all people should have access to education, training, and other opportunities to develop knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- Everyone has the right to work and be economically independent. This means that all should have the opportunity to get a job and earn their own money.
- Everyone has the right to be treated equally under the law. This means that they should not be discriminated against because of their disability.
- Everyone has the right to be free from abuse. This means that no person should be physically, emotionally, or psychologically abused.



- Everyone has the right to participate in educational, social, and recreational programs. This means that everyone should have access to programs that will help them learn new skills, meet new people, and have fun.
- Everyone has the right to have a say in the decisions that affect their life. This means that they should be involved in making decisions about their care and treatment.
- Everyone has the right to choose someone to speak for them if they cannot speak for themselves. This means that they can choose a parent, guardian, or advocate to represent their interests.
- Everyone has the right to manage their own money if they can do so. This means that they should be able to control their finances.
- Their personal information should be kept confidential. This means that their personal information should not be shared with others without their permission.
- Everyone has the right to complain about their care or suggest changes to policies and services. This means that they should be able to give feedback about their care and suggest ways to improve things.
- Everyone has the right to be free from unnecessary restraints. This means that they should not be physically or chemically restrained unless it is absolutely necessary to protect them or others from harm.
- Everyone has the right to participate in the political process. This means that they should be able to vote, run for office, and express their political views.
- Everyone has the right to refuse to participate in medical research or experiments. This means that they should be able to say no to participating in research studies, even if they are offered money or other incentives.

Your Rights in Ohio's DD System & Beyond: https://dodd.ohio.gov/your-family/advocacy/Kit_rights