

CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

BASIC FACTS

GOVERNANCE

Governance of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) can vary as widely as the agencies themselves as far as structure is concerned. However, a crucial element of the IL movement is the consumer-driven model, which does dictate governance be by persons who themselves experience a disability. This means that the Board of Directors or other policy making body must be comprised of 51% or greater people with disabilities. The staff of CILs must also meet this requirement.

The following is probably the most typical structure for a CIL:

Board of Directors: This group sets policy, and hires/manages the Executive Director or person charged with day to day operations. Most have standing committees relating to topical areas such as Services, Finance, Personnel, and the like. They meet regularly.

Executive Director or Program Manager: This individual is hired and managed by the Board of Directors and, in turn, hires and manages the balance of the staff. They oversee day to day operations and implement the policy set by the Board of Directors.

Basic Structure: The element that all CILs have in common is that the services and direction of the group or agency is driven by persons with disabilities. From Section 725 of the Rehabilitation Act – Standards and Assurances for Centers for Independent Living:

(1) Philosophy

The center shall promote and practice the independent living philosophy of--

- (A)** consumer control of the center regarding decision-making, service delivery, management, and establishment of the policy and direction of the center;
- (B)** self-help and self-advocacy;
- (C)** development of peer relationships and peer role models; and

(D) equal access of individuals with significant disabilities to society and to all services, programs, activities, resources, and facilities, whether public or private and regardless of the funding source.

CONSUMER ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES

Centers provide services to individuals with a range of disabilities. Eligibility for services at any CIL is determined by the center, in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act. Generally speaking, to be eligible for services, a person must experience a significant disability, which limits their ability to function independently in areas such as self care, mobility, employment, communication, education, residential, etc.

Also relevant to eligibility is how consumers expect services to help them. Choices in this area include:

- Improve ability to function in their family or community
- Maintain ability to function in their family or community
- Obtain, maintain, or advance in employment

IL SERVICES

Four (4) **core service** areas currently exist for CILs, and are essential to the efforts of people with disabilities to live independently, and include:

1. **Information and Referral (I & R):** Centers maintain extensive resource information on numerous disability related topics that might include housing, transportation, legislation, laws, adaptive equipment, employment opportunities, databases of interpreters, support groups, and lists of contacts in other service organizations and agencies.
2. **IL Skills Training:** Centers provide training and instruction to assist individuals and groups to gain skills, such as using transportation systems, managing budgets, cooking, using adaptive equipment, making good decisions, grooming, and many other subjects.
3. **Peer Counseling:** Centers offer opportunities for persons with disabilities to meet with other persons who experience disabilities, with the goal of allowing these “peers” to explore options, problem solve situations, discuss how to make adjustments, and provide support about the challenges of living with a disability.
4. **Advocacy:** Centers provide two types of advocacy. First, CIL staff assist persons with disabilities to obtain the necessary support services and accommodations from other agencies and individuals in the community. This is called known as **individual advocacy**. In this process, consumers learn *self-advocacy*. CILs also work with communities and

organizations to initiate changes within communities, agencies, businesses, government entities, etc. to promote activities which will create a more accessible and inclusive environment for persons with disabilities to live more independently. This is what is known as **systems advocacy**.

While the above services are required by all CILs, some centers may also offer any number of other services. In addition to the 4 core services, CILs may offer such services as:

- **Technical Assistance** services ranging from accessibility surveys to equipment repair
- **Community Education/Outreach** services, including newsletter production, to increase the public knowledge about the needs and issues which face persons with disabilities
- **Social/Recreational** services to assist in planning opportunities for social interaction and peer support in a relaxed atmosphere
- **Lifespan Respite** services to provide information and referrals that connect families and trained respite providers, as well as offering respite training to families, providers and community volunteers.