



DISABILITY POLICY CONSORTIUM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

(Revised October 2007)

I. GENERAL

A. Purpose

The Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) is an independent, membership-directed group of organizations that advocates on behalf of and with Texans with disabilities of all ages and their families. The DPC's purpose is to achieve the development and full implementation of public policy that promotes and supports the rights, inclusion, integration and independence of Texans with disabilities and their families.

B. Guiding Principles

DPC member organizations endorse the following Guiding Principles, which serve as the foundation for our activities:

1. People with disabilities possess the dignity and worth innate to every human being.
2. Individuals with disabilities, like all other people, have unique abilities, preferences, needs, desires, goals, and dreams.
3. People with disabilities have the right to full access and inclusion in all aspects of community life.
4. Children with disabilities have the right to grow up in a family.
5. Individuals with disabilities have the right to act on their own behalf, to direct their own future, to represent their own interest, and to make decisions and take risks based on their own goals and values.
6. People with disabilities have the right to accurate and timely information, presented in a manner they can use, in order to have options and make informed choices.
7. Individuals with disabilities and their families have the right to full participation in the making of policies that affect their lives.
8. People with disabilities and their families have the right to accessible services and supports customized to their needs, flexible to changing circumstances, and provided in their home community.

9. People with disabilities are entitled to the same civil rights protections as any American citizen.
10. People with disabilities have the right to freedom from abuse and neglect.

C. Activities

The DPC works to promote the rights, supports and services that foster the inclusion, integration and independence of people with disabilities by conducting the following activities:

1. Identifies and analyzes existing and proposed public policy that affects people with disabilities and their families.
2. Provides information to policy makers and the public about the needs and concerns of people with disabilities and their families.
3. Adopts joint positions on public policy issues affecting people with disabilities and their families.
4. Promotes communication between policy makers and people with disabilities and the organizations that represent them, including public participation in the development, review and implementation of public policy.
5. Keeps its members and interested parties informed of policy trends, issues and events within and outside of Texas that affect the lives of people with disabilities and their families.
6. Participates in other advocacy activities which may include utilizing expanded communication networks within the statewide disability community, regional information forums, events to educate policy makers, technical assistance and training, and volunteer support.
7. Provides financial assistance for reasonable travel expenses to DPC recommended individuals participating on statewide work groups, task forces, committees, boards, and other complementary activities, to support the involvement of Texans with disabilities and their families.

II. MEMBERSHIP

A. Membership Eligibility

To be eligible for membership in the Disability Policy Consortium (DPC), applicants:

1. Must be a disability advocacy organization which advocates on behalf of and/or with Texans with disabilities and their families.

2. Must endorse and have a primary purpose consistent with the DPC Guiding Principles, which serve as the foundation for consortium activities.
3. Must be governed by a board of directors or, if fiscally associated with a larger entity, have a consumer advisory committee that provides significant input on policy and program matters.
4. Must not be a direct service provider exclusively.
5. Must not be a professional association.¹
6. Must have a consumer focus.²

B. Types of Membership

1. Statewide Membership

To be eligible for statewide membership, organizations:

- a. Must be statewide in scope and representation; or
- b. Must have a statewide focus and participating chapters/affiliates that represent a significant portion of the statewide population.

2. Local Membership

To be eligible for local membership, organizations:

- a. Must be local or regional in scope and representation; and
- b. May be an affiliate or local chapter of a statewide DPC member organization.

C. Voting Membership

1. Statewide Member Voting

A statewide member organization has one vote.

¹ Professional Association: For purposes of eligibility for membership in DPC, a professional association is defined as a trade association or other group consisting of for-profit members whose mission includes advocacy to favor business practices of its members. Organizations of attorneys, architects and for-profit service providers are examples of these professional organizations. Groups and other membership organizations, consisting of non-profit member organizations, whose advocacy benefits the service populations of its members, shall not be considered professional organizations for DPC purposes.

² Consumer focus: an organization whose purpose is to represent the interests of individuals with a disability, parents or guardians of children with a disability, or immediate relatives or guardians of adults with a disability (presumably someone not able to represent themselves).

2. Local Member Voting as Local Coalitions

A coalition of local member organizations has one vote.

- a. A Local Coalition is created when three (3) or more diverse local member organizations together apply to the DPC and are approved to become a Local Coalition of the Disability Policy Consortium.
- b. No more than one (1) of the three (3) local member organizations of a Local Coalition may be an affiliate or local chapter of the same DPC statewide member organization or other state or national organization.
- c. Once the application to become a Local Coalition has been approved by the management committee, that coalition shall designate one representative as the voting member of the DPC.

D. Interested Parties

Interested parties who are not Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) members, such as individual members of the public and representatives of organizations, governmental agencies or businesses, are welcome to attend public meetings. Upon invitation only, interested parties may also attend DPC committee meetings

III. DPC STRUCTURE

The DPC's operations are determined and designed by the DPC membership. In order to provide the membership with continuous avenues for full and timely participation on issues of concern, the DPC operates through the following means:

A. Communication

1. The DPC may select appropriate spokespeople as necessary to represent and communicate on behalf of the DPC.
2. The DPC relies on timely communication among its members in order to be effective. The DPC utilizes a listserv as a way for members to communicate in a secure and confidential environment that is inaccessible to non-members. For all general membership and committee meetings, notices including action items and planned discussion are posted two (2) business days in advance on the DPC's electronic listserv or other format as specifically designated by the DPC membership.
3. Each member organization is responsible for providing the DPC with current contact information for its organization and DPC representatives.

4. DPC member representatives are responsible for keeping their respective organizations and constituents informed of DPC activities and soliciting input and approval, when necessary, for DPC positions and other activities.

B. General Membership Meetings

- a. General membership meetings provide a forum for joint consideration of issues and action by the full DPC membership, as well as an opportunity for information sharing with other interested parties. General membership meetings include educational presentations, regular policy issue committee reports and opportunities for comments or input from interested parties.
- b. Matters brought for DPC consideration must be presented by a DPC member organization representative. The DPC strives for an informal consensus and has developed procedures to adopt positions and make decisions.
- c. DPC general membership meetings are held on the first and third Tuesday of each month unless otherwise determined in advance by the full DPC membership.
- d. The DPC provides interpreters for its member organizations and their representatives as needed to participate in DPC membership meetings, as funds are available. DPC funding requests will incorporate funds needed to provide reasonable accommodations.

C. Grantee and DPC Support Staff

Staff recruitment, hiring, supervision and evaluation must be performed by the grantee/fiscal agent for staff funds according to its existing personnel policies and procedures. However, the DPC membership provides input as appropriate to ensure that the DPC's staff support needs are addressed. The DPC management team plays an essential role in this process. In consulting with the grantee or communicating with staff, representatives of DPC member organizations act in an advisory role and do not exercise formal staff supervision.

Professional and administrative staff acts as directed by the DPC as necessary to ensure that the DPC's general activities are carried out efficiently and effectively. Staff activities include:

1. Technical research, tracking, documentation, and analysis of public policy issues for dissemination to the DPC membership;
2. Participation in DPC policy issue committees to increase continuity among committee and full DPC membership activities;
3. Drafting and distribution of correspondence and other communications in support of DPC positions and actions;

4. Coordination of DPC membership meetings and activities such as securing guest presentations and preparing agendas and meeting materials;
5. Securing public policy information services and resources to assist the DPC membership;
6. Coordination of special events and training, and development of training curricula;
7. Staff support provided by DPC program administrator at management team meetings;
8. Encouraging non-participating/inactive members to participate in DPC activities.

D. Officers and Committees

Nominations of officers are held during the month of October. Officers are elected by a simple majority of the voting members and are to serve for one year, beginning November 1st of each year.

1. Chair and Vice-Chair

- a. The chair and vice-chair must be representatives of member organizations. If the chair or vice-chair leaves before the end of a term, an individual is selected by a simple majority vote to fill such a vacancy and complete the remainder of the term.
- b. The role of the chair is to develop the general DPC membership meeting agenda in concert with membership interests, convene and facilitate DPC general membership meetings, and serve on the management team. The DPC chair may identify DPC spokespersons on different issues or designate working groups to address issues as necessary between DPC membership meetings. The DPC chair directs and keeps discussions focused.
- c. The role of the vice-chair is to convene and facilitate DPC general membership meetings in the absence of the chair, serve on the management team, and otherwise serve in the role of chair as necessary. The Chair and Vice-Chair may choose to serve as Co-Chairs.

2. Membership Committees

- a. The DPC establishes policy issue committees as determined by its membership. Policy issue committees provide in-depth analyses of matters within their purview and inform the full DPC membership of their activities and recommendations for DPC action. In general, the DPC does not act on an issue that falls within the purview of an existing committee until the committee has reviewed it, unless time does not permit.

- b. Policy issue committees are open to all DPC member organizations. Committee meetings are held at least quarterly and are announced in advance to the DPC membership. An agenda, action taken and list of members present is recorded by DPC staff.
- c. Committee conveners serve on a voluntary basis must be representative of member organizations. Committees may determine their need to include individuals who are not representatives of DPC member organizations as needed to increase expertise and outreach on committee issues. Committees may designate their participants to serve as points-of contact on committee issues.

3. Management Committee

The management committee acts on behalf of DPC membership organizations to review and make recommendations to the membership regarding DPC operational matters handled most efficiently by a small team approach or other matters the DPC specifically delegates to the management team. The management committee ensures that the DPC's written policies and procedures are up-to-date and accurately reflect the DPC's actual operations and recommends draft revisions to the DPC general membership for adoption. The management committee reviews and develops recommendations regarding the DPC's needs for internal and external communication and participation, education and technical assistance. The management committee also reviews and coordinates DPC staff and support service needs.

The management committee consists of the DPC chair, DPC vice-chair, a representative of the grantee/fiscal agent providing DPC staff support and representatives of two DPC member organizations selected by the full DPC. The management team makes decisions as necessary through a consensus and reports its business and recommendations to the full DPC following its meetings. The management team selects one of its members to serve as its meeting convener.

E. Procedures for Taking DPC Positions and Other Actions

The DPC generally conducts its activities based on adherence to its Guiding Principles and well-developed, previously adopted positions. However, occasion may arise when these points of reference are not sufficient to clarify the membership's position, reach a new decision, adopt a new course of action or make a specific recommendation. In such matters the DPC follows this formal protocol:

1. Sixty percent (60%) of voting members³ must approve the action item for the item to be adopted.
2. DPC action items are open for at least two business days. Following membership meetings at which a vote is taken, an e-mail will be sent to all voting members not in attendance, describing the item and providing a timeframe for them to vote no shorter

³ See Article II, Section C.1 and C.2.c

than two full business days after the vote was taken. Following the close of a vote, notice of action taken will be provided to the full membership.

3. In cases in which an action involves written communication of a position, such as a letter, the DPC may determine it is necessary to individually sign on supporting members.
4. All organizations may join DPC members in signing on positions or letters as approved on a case by case basis.
5. If the DPC approves a position, further action clearly related to the position is automatically approved providing it is consistent with the DPC's guiding principles.
6. To bring up an action item "out of order" (without advance notice) two-thirds of those present at the meeting must determine that the action can be taken up at that time.

F. Conflict of Interest

1. It is assumed that organizations join the DPC with the intent to support the DPC's Guiding Principles and participate in DPC activities. This policy recognizes that from time to time real, apparent and potential conflicts of interest may arise in the course of conducting the DPC's business.
2. DPC members shall not engage in or conduct any activity that might result in or give the appearance of financial gain, benefit or other conflict of interest for themselves or their organization with DPC actions without full disclosure to the DPC membership. Such instances include but are not limited to the following situations:
 - a. Member organizations may have a conflict of interest if their organization may benefit financially from a decision or endorsement of the DPC. This does not preclude the DPC from providing a support letter for a funding application by a member organization as long as that member organization's representatives refrain from any DPC vote on the matter.
 - b. Individuals may have a conflict of interest if they would receive direct benefit from a decision of the DPC, not including services and supports for which the DPC advocates.
3. Each DPC member organization shall at all times publicly disclose all real and potential conflicts of interest. Each member shall specify a known affiliation with individuals or organizations that might benefit from a matter under consideration by the DPC and refrain from voting on such issues. If a voting member of the DPC also works for a state agency, they must identify their relationship with that agency and refrain from voting on any matters that would significantly affect that agency.

IV. PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The Disability Policy Consortium will make decisions regarding public policy priority issues as follows:

A. Purpose

The purpose of setting DPC Public Policy Priorities is to identify and communicate (internally and externally) key public policy positions that have broad support from the disability community in Texas.

B. Guiding Principals

DPC Public Policy Priorities must align with the DPC guiding principles.

C. Tiered Levels

DPC Public Policy Priorities are “tiered” related to the level of support and involvement of member organizations on behalf of DPC. There are three levels of tiered issues: Priority, Supported and Endorsed; all levels are supported by DPC and may be identified as such to external audiences.

1. Priority Issues

Issues that are very important to most members, and which most 2/3 voting members⁴ agree are highest priority issues. There is broad and deep participation by member organizations on these issues.

- a. **Focus** A limited number of issues are selected as Priority Issues, in order to effectively guide advocacy strategies, activities and communication.
- b. **Activities:** In support of Priority Issues, most DPC member organizations agree to do more than one of the following activities:
 1. provide testimony,
 2. make visits or otherwise engage in informing or educating policy makers,
 3. sign-on at hearings when possible,
 4. provide timely information through member networks, and/or otherwise initiate activities to encourage grassroots support

⁴ See Article II, Section C.1 and C.2.c

c. **Selection Process and Criteria:** Issues will be discussed using gradients of agreement and other consensus-building tools, and assessed for level of priority by gauging the degree of member organization commitment to the various advocacy activities listed above. The following criteria shall be met to be considered a Priority Issue:

1. the issue affects a large number of DPC organization constituents,
2. the issue is timely and/or requires prompt attention,
3. 2/3 of the voting members support the issue being included as a top priority on DPC Public Policy Priorities, and
4. most DPC member organizations plan to be actively involved.

2. Supported Issues:

Issues that are very important to members, and which a simple majority of voting members agree should be designated Supported Issues. Participation by member organizations on these issues overall is less intense for than for Priority Issues.

- a. **Focus:** A broad number of issues may be designated as Supported.
- b. **Activities:** In support of Supported Issues, a simple majority of DPC member organizations agree to do at least one of the following activities:
 1. provide testimony
 2. make visits or otherwise engage in informing or educating policy makers
 3. sign-on at hearings when possible
 4. provide timely information through their individual member networks and/or
 5. otherwise initiate activities to encourage grassroots support (providing ongoing advocacy efforts)
- c. **Selection Process and Criteria:** Issues will be discussed using gradients of agreement and other consensus-building tools, and assessed for level of priority by gauging the degree of member organization commitment to the various advocacy activities listed above. The following criteria shall be met to be considered a Supported Issue:
 1. the issue affects a large number of DPC organization constituents,
 2. the issue is timely and/or requires prompt attention,

3. a simple majority of the active members support the issue being included as a Supported Issue on DPC Public Policy Priorities, and
4. some DPC member organizations plan to be actively involved.

3. Endorsed Issues.

Issues that are very important to at least one member, and which a simple majority of voting members agrees should be Endorsed Issues. Participation by member organizations on these issues overall is limited, but some DPC member organizations agree that *“if you see me in the hallway or cafeteria I’ll be happy to sign in support.”*

- a. **Focus:** A broad number of issues may be designated as Endorsed.
- b. **Activities:** In support of Endorsed Issues, at least one DPC member organization agrees to do more than one of the following activities:
 1. provide testimony
 2. make visits or otherwise engage in informing or educating policy makers
 3. sign-on at hearings when possible
 4. provide timely information through their individual member networks and/or
 5. otherwise initiate activities to encourage grassroots support (providing ongoing advocacy efforts)
- c. **Selection Process and Criteria:** Issues will be discussed using gradients of agreement and other consensus-building tools, and assessed for level of priority by gauging the degree of member organization commitment to the various advocacy activities listed above. The following criteria shall be met to be considered a Supported Issue:
 1. the issue affects DPC organization constituents,
 2. the issue is timely and/or requires prompt attention,
 3. a simple majority of the voting members support the issue being included as an Endorsed Issue on DPC Public Policy Priorities, and
 4. at least one DPC member organization plans to be actively involved.

D. Process

1. Proposing Issues for Consideration

Any member organization may propose an issue for consideration to be included in the DPC Public Policy Priorities at any business meeting. DPC Committees may also forward issues for consideration. Background information in the form of a “briefing paper” that clearly outlines the substance of the proposed position must be included in the proposal.

2. Managing Approved Issues

- a. Each approved DPC Public Policy Priority is “assigned” to the appropriate DPC Committee for monitoring.
- b. Each committee shall review the briefing paper in more detail and request or propose clarifications, when needed, to ensure all DPC members have a common understanding of the issue and the DPC position(s).
- c. Briefing papers shall be used by members and committees to ensure that all member input on behalf of DPC is consistent with the currently approved position. Policy discussions and legislative actions will at times evolve in directions beyond the scope of the original position and briefing paper approved by DPC. Committees and members should seek DPC guidance (at business meetings when possible, and through the management committee when urgent) when policy discussions move beyond the original framework, and update the briefing paper accordingly.
- d. DPC member organizations must trust that those working on behalf of DPC will fairly and objectively represent the approved DPC position as best possible, and endeavor to make fair and objective determinations about providing input for DPC versus seeking further guidance to clarify the DPC position. Mutual trust is central to an effective coalition.