

Finding Allies and Partners

Where to Start

When thinking about allies or potential partners to aid you in building or growing your youth program consider the following:

- Who else might have an interest in serving your target consumer group (youth with disabilities)?
- Which organizations have similar values or missions? (For example, are they concerned with the rights of others?)
- What organizations can complement yours? Do they have expertise that you would benefit from? (For example, is there a local LGBTIQ+ organization or a social justice community agency that partnering with might strengthen/expand your program?)
- Who do you already know? Do you already know someone that works for this organization that you could start with? Sometimes having that personal connection is the extra push you need.

Know Your Ask

Potential partner organizations may serve different purposes than a CIL. Consider why you are reaching out to the organization and know ahead of time what it is you are asking of them.

- Are they potential funders?
- Do they have access to young people with disabilities through their programming that might benefit from your services?
- Do they have other resources that would help your program to succeed?
 - Do they have accessible transportation?
 - Could they donate food for different activities you have planned?
 - Do they have expertise that your program might benefit from?
 - For example, if you are running an art group, perhaps a local artist would come in and lead a class.
 - If you are teaching a class on saving money for future goals, do they have information on savings strategies or programs that might benefit people with disabilities?
- Are you hoping to hang a flier or offer information that they can give out to potential consumers?

Know Who You Are

Independent Living is one of the best kept secrets in our local communities. When preparing to meet with an organization that could potentially partner with you, it will be helpful to have your 'elevator speech' prepared ahead of time. It is helpful to be able to explain why you are unique and would make a good partner. The following are a few examples:

- Independent Living is based upon peer support. We can offer opportunities for young people with disabilities to not only set goals, but to really see themselves reaching them. Sometimes seeing someone else succeeding who has experienced

similar barriers gives you the confidence and strategies that you need to reach those goals. Through connecting to a community, you are stronger. Being a part of the disability community can strengthen a young person's support system moving forward.

- Independent Living is consumer driven. We believe that working on goals with someone rather than doing for them leads to lasting change and confidence. We can help connect them to community resources, learn skills, and offer encouragement along the way.

Be Prepared

It is important for other organizations to see you as a professional ally.

- Bring brochures from your Center for Independent Living.
- Have flyers ready for specific programs you are advertising that include the time, date, location, and purpose.
- If you are teaching a class, bring information on the topics that will be covered and any outcomes or testimonials you have from previous attendees.
- Bring a copy of your IRS 501c-3 letter (the information organizations might use to deduct any donations they make to your organization from their taxes).
- Be prepared to answer questions about who you are and how your programs fit with what the potential partner already does.
- Don't forget your business cards.
- Follow up. Don't forget to follow up and follow through with any promises you made to the organization when talking with them. It is also a good practice to follow up with a thank you to the organization for taking the time out to meet with you and offer to answer any questions they thought of following meeting with you.

To find partner organizations, check out our Brainstorm Bank factsheet



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