This publication was downloaded from the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center's website (www.nadtc.org). It was developed by Easter Seals Project ACTION, a technical assistance center operated by Easter Seals, Inc. through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration.

Effective Transportation Advisory Committees:

Creating a Group that Reflects all Community Voices

Acknowledgements

In 1995, Easter Seals Project ACTION (ESPA) produced the report *Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Advisory Committee: A Model Members' Handbook and Training Module* in which the ACCESS Committee, an advisory committee to SunLine Transit Agency (California), was used as the model. Building on research and feedback from a six-member steering committee, consultants compiled a member handbook and a training module designed to assist ACCESS Committee members with communication, improving effectiveness of meetings, building consensus, and understanding their role in the community and within the SunLine organization.

With the goal of providing tools and guidelines for establishing and maintaining an effective advisory committee for any transit agency, ESPA distributed a request for information and sample advisory committee documents in summer 2011. With the information we received, and with information provided in the 1995 report, ESPA created this publication, *Effective Transportation Advisory Committees: Creating a Group that Reflects all Community Voices.*

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Advisory Committees: The Link Between Transit Agencies and Customers with Disabilities

Countless individuals, including the 54 million Americans with disabilities,[1] rely on public transportation to get to school, work, places of worship, retail stores, medical appointments, social events, and a myriad of other places. Advisory committees present transit agencies with the opportunity to engage directly customers who use their services on a daily basis, citizen advocates and business owners. By involving the public and bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, advisory committees can help transit agencies develop successful initiatives, resolve problems and create an ongoing dialogue that serves everyone in the community.

Easter Seals Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation in Our Nation) hopes that this guidebook will serve as a helpful resource to both transit agencies that are considering creating an advisory committee for the first time and agencies that are looking to help their current advisory committee increase its effectiveness. Although this guidebook may be useful to many types of advisory committees, it focuses on groups devoted to increasing accessible transportation.

Table of Contents

" Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much. "

- Helen Keller

Foreword

Community integration is essential for people with disabilities to lead independent lives, and accessible transportation is a core aspect of integration. A livable community is one that meets and addresses the transit mobility needs of all of its residents. Advisory committees for accessible transportation help ensure that the local government, the local transit agency and other stakeholders in the community understand what the mobility needs of residents are and give them the opportunity to develop collaborative solutions.

In the disability community, many of us live and work by the phrase "Nothing about us without us." This phrase is especially pertinent regarding advisory committees for accessible transportation and other disability-related topics. Advisory committees that truly seek to improve accessibility and community involvement for people with disabilities must include people with disabilities in their membership and make their meetings accessible. Along with including people of different ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds and ages, it is important to include people with disabilities in every group that is making decisions for the community.

Since joining the Easter Seals Project ACTION National Steering Committee in 2009, I have been involved in discussions about accessible transportation across our nation with both transit agency and disability organizational leaders. Those discussions have underscored my long-held belief that when it comes to making decisions affecting accessible transportation, having the right people in the room is critical. Without a doubt, bringing community residents who represent a variety of backgrounds and perspectives—including those with disabilities—to the table, provides an opportunity to discuss accessible transportation options and promote livability for all.

Kelly Buckland
Executive Director
National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)

I: Purpose, Structure and Membership

Purpose

Advisory committees can serve a range of purposes and may be referred to by a variety of names. Whether a committee is established to facilitate regular communication between the disability community and a transit agency or to provide input for a specific activity, such as the design of one transit stop, all advisory committees must clearly define their purpose and scope to both attract the right membership[2] and keep the group on track. One of the first steps in establishing a committee or redefining the charge of an existing committee is to draft and approve a purpose statement. To the right are examples of purpose statements:

Arlington Transit Advisory Committee (Virginia)
The Transit Advisory Committee will provide advice and recommendations to the County Manager on transit service, facilities, plans and policies, and budget issues that are specific to Arlington County.[3]

Lane Transit District Accessible Transportation Committee (Oregon)
ATC members are appointed by LTD to: 1) review, advise and assist in the distribution of monies from the Special Transportation Fund for the Elderly and People with Disabilities; and 2) to advise the District on other matters relating to the provision of accessible transportation services in Lane County.[4]

CityLink's ADA Advisory Committee (Illinois)
The purpose of the ADA Advisory Committee is to assist the administration at CityLink in addressing concerns, policies and procedures as it relates to accessible transportation, and reflect the needs and values of the entire community. This committee will serve as an informed advocate for the physical, mental, and cognitively disabled community.[5]

It is important to include people with disabilities in every group that is making decisions for the community. – Kelly Buckland

Structure

As reflected in the examples on page 5, defining how the committee fits into the local or regional government and the transit agency is important because there are many types of advisory committees. Some committees advise transit agencies, some give recommendations to local governments, some have decision-making powers, and others may work with both the transit agency and the local or regional government. For example in Corpus Christi, Texas, leadership from the Regional Transportation Authority's Committee on Accessible Transportation has a non-voting seat at RTA Board of Directors meetings and has periodic meetings with an RTA Board Chairperson.[6] Whether committees have actual power to make decisions or not, they should be aware of how the agency or local government uses their advice and takes action.[7]

Lines of communication must be clear as well, and they may vary according to the size of the community (e.g., large urban, urban, small urban, rural). A strong line of communication between the committee and the transit board or local governing body will facilitate successful campaigns, programs or other changes in the community. Members of an advisory committee should check with the transit agency to make sure they are aware of the formal line of communication.

Additionally, considering what to name a committee is important as that will define the group internally and externally to the public.[8]

Options include *council, task force,* and *board*— though groups should use *board* with caution as many boards of directors are fiscally responsible for the transit agency while advisory committees more often aim to help an agency implement its objectives, such as being more accessible.[9]

Membership

Recruiting a membership that is representative of the community is also crucial to having a productive committee. On its website, the King County Transit Advisory Commission of Washington state lists its membership as "residents, businesses, and other stakeholders concerned about transit service in the county. Most are bus riders. All live in King County, and collectively they reflect the county's diversity."[10] In accordance with King County ordinance #17025, at least half of the commission members have a disability, are older or work with people with disabilities or older adults.

Additionally, elements of Title VI and Environmental Justice (EJ) laws may affect what membership is best for the advisory committee. In 2011, the Federal Transit Administration issued several proposed Circulars that provide "practical guidance on incorporating EJ principles into Public Transit decisions", "clarify what's already required by law and draw a sharper distinction between the requirements for Title VI and Environmental Justice."[11] The final Circulars may include recommendations on making public outreach more inclusive and user-friendly with considerations for location, timing, format, and accessibility.

"The bottom line is that an advisory committee needs a sense of purpose, doable tasks, a timeline, praise and recognition, and a belief that its input is valued.[12]"

– Building an Effective Advisory Committee, U.S. Department of Education.

Other actions to consider when beginning recruitment include:

- Determine the demographic make-up of your community (e.g. people with disabilities and others of various ethnic groups, economic statuses and ages) and ensure that it is represented on the committee.[13] Adding representation from non-traditional stakeholders, such as from school districts, can also contribute to the richness of the committee. If your group receives federal funds, see the membership representation rules as per Title VI regulations at 49 CFR Part 21, *Non-Discrimination in Federally-Assisted Programs of the Department of Transportation.*

- Use a variety of methods to recruit new members: word-of-mouth, posting flyers on buses/vans, putting articles in the transit agency newsletter, and inviting community members to participate.[14]

- Have a simple application form that prospective members can complete, to include such information as the reasons the person would like to participate and any relevant background, experience, or special knowledge/expertise.[15]

- Have a group or a nominating/membership committee interview the applicants in order to:
  - communicate what is involved in making a commitment to participate,
  - ensure that new members understand the functions and role of the committee, and/or
  - identify potential members who may have expertise or knowledge not held by current members but that is pertinent to the work of the advisory committee.[16]

- Limit the size of the group. More than 20 members can make it difficult for all members to be a part of discussions.

- Establish the frequency of meetings, the structure of meetings, the terms of service, and what officers the group will have, if any.[17]

After forming the committee with the right mix of people and skills, it will be necessary to make sure members are properly oriented to the purpose of the committee and expectations for their participation in the group.

Determine the demographic make-up of your community…and ensure that it is represented on the committee.

Photo credit: www.pedbikeimages.org / Dan Burden

II: Making Meetings Accessible

To ensure the inclusion of transit customers with disabilities on an advisory committee, meetings must be held in facilities that are accessible to and usable by people with disabilities, including wheelchair users, and easily reached using the transit system's fixed-route and paratransit systems. Information to be discussed at the meeting must be accessible and available to participants in accessible formats as needed by each, sign language interpreters must be provided for members who need them, and the meeting space should be equipped with an assistive listening system for those who can use it.

Best practices for making a meeting accessible include:

- Ensuring the meeting is physically accessible to everyone, including people who use wheelchairs

- Ensuring the meeting is held in a building that is accessible by public transportation and at times that are within the public transportation service availability

- Ensuring the times and locations of meetings are accessible to minority, low-income and limited English-proficient populations (i.e., hold meetings during off-peak periods and at community facilities)

- Posting accessible signage to direct participants to the meeting room

- Ensuring the meeting room has enough space to accommodate participants using mobility aids

- Providing materials in alternative formats (e.g. plain text, braille, CD), assistive listening devices and sign language interpreters as needed by committee members

- Placing microphones at a height that is accessible to people using wheelchairs

- Ensuring that everyone uses the microphone if one is provided

- Reading all of the text on presentation slides aloud

- Saying the count aloud if people raise their hands to vote

- Providing a nearby relief area for service animals

U.S. Department of Transportation's *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making*[18] and U.S. Department of Justice's *Accessible Information Exchange: Meeting on a Level Playing Field*[19] include more information on accessible meetings.

Sign language interpreters must be provided for members who need them.

III: Orientation

A thorough orientation on the goals and objectives of the advisory committee provides new members with a sound foundation that will guide them in carrying out their duties. Items that should be covered in an orientation include:

- The role and responsibilities of the committee as a whole, including how the committee interacts with the local government
- The roles and responsibilities of the individual committee members
- The structure of the meetings (i.e., time, place, how they run, who the elected officers are)
- The decision-making method(s) the committee follows (e.g., majority voting, two-thirds vote)

In addition, orientations for advisory committees that are focused on accessibility or are looking to better include the disability community should include an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) as is the practice of the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART).[20] Orientations may also include an overview of other disability-related legislation and issues, including defining independent living philosophy and consumer-control—the idea that people should be in charge of the services they want and use.

Information to Include in New Committee Member Orientation

- Description of the new member orientation process
- When and how the advisory committee was formed
- How members are recruited
- Term length for a member
- Diversity of backgrounds among committee members
- Committee bylaws or operational guidelines
- Relationship between this advisory committee and the transit board of directors or local governing body
- Roles and responsibilities of a member
- Committee meeting schedule
- How the committee communicates with the transit staff, including addressing differences of opinion between the committee and the agency
- Ways the committee completes work (e.g., at committee meetings, through sub-committees, individual assignments)
- A typical agenda and how it is prepared (e.g., originated by transit agency staff, drafted by committee chair with input from members)
- Examples of how the committee has effectively worked with the transit agency to promote positive change

IV: Running a Meeting

Holding productive meetings is essential to the success of an advisory committee. And a successful committee provides a forum for entertaining and acknowledging a diversity of opinions. As stated in the U.S. Department of Transportation's report *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making,* "A [Civic Advisory Committee] molds participants into a working group. It is democratic and representative of opposing points of view, with equal status for each participant in presenting and deliberating views and in being heard."[21] Without organization and strong group communication skills, even the most diverse and well-oriented committees will be unable to build consensus.

Usually, an elected officer, such as a chairperson, will run the meeting with assistance from staff from the transit agency.[22] For DART's Citizens Advisory Committee, for instance, the chair presides at all meetings and the vice-chair leads in the chair's absence or upon his or her request.[23] A third officer, the secretary, keeps permanent record of the committee meetings in cooperation with DART. All three must follow the committee's bylaws as well as the parliamentary authority that the committee follows—*Robert's Rules of Order, New Revised.*

Robert's Rules of Order

Originally published in 1876, *Robert's Rules of Order* was written by the engineer Henry Martyn Robert who intended his rules to be used by non-legislative organizations. Today, many chairpersons find it helpful to manage meetings according to these parliamentary guidelines.

As laid out in *Robert's Rules in Plain English,* the basic rules of parliamentary procedure are as follows.[24]

- The rights of the organization supersede the rights of individual members.
- All members are equal and their rights are equal.
- A quorum (a number of members decided by each committee) must be present to conduct business.
- The majority rules.
- Silence is consent.
- A two-thirds vote is necessary whenever the group is limiting or taking away the rights of members or changing something that has already been decided.
- *One* question at a time and *one* speaker at a time (motions may only be made if they relate to the question at hand, and interruptions are not permitted).
- Debatable motions must receive full debate.
- Once a question is decided, the same motion or one essentially like it may not be brought up at the same meeting.
- Personal remarks in debate are not allowed.

Robert's Rules may not work for all groups, but it is important to establish some set of guidelines for voting and speaking to keep meetings productive and avoid conflict.

Regardless of who leads the meeting, that person should follow an agenda prepared prior to the meeting and distributed to each participant at the meeting's start along with minutes from the previous meeting if they exist. If possible, the agenda should be distributed in advance of the meeting to give members an opportunity to prepare content for specific agenda items. This is particularly important for members who need the agenda in a format other than standard print. The sample below is an agenda used by Lane Transit District's Accessible Transportation Committee that, along with detailed minutes of the previous meeting, was given to committee members at their April 2011 meeting.[26] It includes items that are often on an agenda, such as announcements, agenda review, minutes approval, program updates, and the date of the next meeting.

Accessible Transportation Committee

Meeting Agenda

Tuesday, April 19, 2011
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Lane Transit District

I. Call to order

II. Introductions, Announcements, Agenda Review

III. Audience Participation

IV. ACTION: Minutes Approval, March 15, 2011 (Page 2)

V. ACTION: Special Transportation Fund
Proposed FY2011 - 2012 Allocations (Page 12)

VI. West Eugene EmX Update – Staff Presentation (Page 13)

VII. Criteria for Bus Stop Improvements (Page 13)

VIII. Program Updates
    a) ATC Chair's Report
    b) Lane Transit District (Page 13)
    c) Ride*Source* Call Center – Call Center Advisory Committee Update
    d) Ride*Source* ADA paratransit Service
    e) South Lane County (Cottage Grove)
    f) West Lane County (Florence)
    g) East Lane County (Oakridge)
    h) White Bird Clinic
    i) Other (Page 17)

IX. Adjourn

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, June 21, 2011

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." – Henry Ford

Conflict Management

Even with an established set of guidelines, groups may experience certain conflicts due to internal issues, such as differing personal styles or temperaments, differences due to authority or positions, or mistrust within the group. When disagreements do occur, committee members should work toward resolving the situation. Although developed in 1974, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) remains the leading tool used to identify individuals' conflict management style.[27] According to Thomas and Kilmann, (a) people exhibit five main conflict management styles and (b) a specific situation may dictate which style is best to use. The five styles are:

- Accommodating
- Competing
- Avoiding
- Compromising
- Collaborating

With the conflict management styles in mind, groups can work toward building consensus. Steps in reaching consensus include:[28]

1. Each member of the group shares the major **new** insight gained during the information gathering stage.

2. Each member of the group declares his or her **current** position on the issue.

3. All members of the group ask questions to clarify the various positions that have been presented.

4. Each member of the group states the rationale (defense) for his or her position.

5. One member of the group states what **appears** to be the emerging consensus.

6. Each member of the group has an opportunity to respond to the stated consensus.

7. One member of the group restates what appears to be the consensus.

8. The consensus stands when there are no further comments made.

9. Steps five through eight are repeated to develop the back-up contingency option.

Additionally, when conflict does occur, group members should make every effort to do the following.[29]

- Listen to each speaker and ensure that only one person speaks at a time.
- Remain respectful of others.
- Be willing to learn.
- Be willing to change.
- Separate the issue from the person.
- Agree to disagree when necessary.
- Maintain a sense of humor.

For more resources on conflict management, see Section VI: Resources.

V. Community Involvement
Keeping the Advisory Committee Going Strong

After an advisory committee is fully formed in an inclusive manner that reflects the needs of the community and is addressing and supporting needed change, it is important to regularly enlist community involvement. The committee must stay current on issues that transit customers are facing and seek out potential solutions that customers suggest. In addition, to anticipate the inevitable turnover of members yet keep the committee going strong, it is important to continually watch for potential members and have a plan for recruiting them.

Posting information online about membership can be an effective and efficient manner to reach a wide audience. This information could include:

- Application to join
- Meeting schedule
- Membership responsibilities
- Past meeting notes or handouts
- Photos from past meetings
- Contact information (mailing address, phone number, TTY/TDD number, email address)

Be sure that documents posted online in PDF are also available in RTF or TXT format. Including photos in your marketing materials that show the diversity of the committee and inclusion of members with disabilities demonstrates a commitment to accessibility that may also help attract new members.[30]

Advisory committees can solicit and include input from the general public through a variety of methods, including conducting a community-wide survey and hosting an open forum.

Through strategic recruitment of new members and involvement of the community, an advisory committee can successfully address and facilitate needed changes as they arise. Although sometimes challenging, the work and service of advisory committees is invaluable. With a diverse membership, orderly meetings and an established reporting structure within the transit agency, advisory committees can serve as catalysts for and supporters of positive changes in advancing accessible transportation. Accessible transportation creates measurable positive change in an area making it possible for more people to get to work, take care of their families and participate in community life. Ultimately, accessible transportation helps create a livable community for all.

Valley Regional Transit's Community Advisory Committee for the State Street Transit and Traffic Operational Plan posted information about membership responsibilities as well as handouts and summaries from meetings online.[31]

VI: Resources

Listed below are other resources and organizations that advisory committees may find helpful.

Easter Seals Project ACTION

The following may be ordered in print or downloaded free of charge through the ESPA website at www.projectaction.org:

ADA Essentials for Transit Board Members: Fundamentals of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Transit Public Policy – This 68-page, spiral-bound resource is suited for not only board members, but bus, rail, and paratransit staff, public officials, community planners, advocates, and anyone seeking basic information on the ADA as it relates to public transportation.

Including People with Disabilities: Communication & Meeting Etiquette – This pocket guide provides information on common courtesies and inclusion. The tips in the guide are useful to anyone who participates in everyday conversations, meetings and/or conference calls that include people who have disabilities.

Including People with Disabilities in Coordinated Plans – This 8-page handout provides ideas and suggestions for increased involvement by people with disabilities in communities' coordination efforts toward accessible transportation. It is designed to support people with disabilities in their participation and for the communities involving them in processes.

Other Organizations

BoardSource – This organization helps nonprofits build strong boards and inspires board service. They supply resources, trainings and other services. www.boardsource.org

Conflict Resolution Network – This Australian organization conducts research, develops, teaches, and implements the theory and practice of conflict resolution throughout a national and international network. The Network's website has free training material, including a 12-skills approach to conflict resolution. www.crnhq.org

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[2] *Building an Effective Advisory Committee,* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. No. 21, April 2008. Retrieved February 15, 2012. http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/232

[3] *Transit Advisory Committee Charge,* Arlington Transit Advisory Committee. Arlington, Virginia. Dec. 1, 2001.

[4] *2010 - 2011 Revision: Bylaws, Lane Transit District Accessible Transportation Committee (ATC).* August 8, 1995 (Revised: August 11, 2005, July 2007, June 2008, June 2009, October 2010).

[5] *Bylaws of Mayor's Advisory Committee for the Disabled,* CityLink's' ADA Committee, Peoria, Illinois. October 13, 2008.

[6] *By-Laws,* RTA Committee on Accessible Transportation, Regional Transportation Authority, Corpus Christi, Texas. Revisions Effective April 15, 2010.

[7] *Building an Effective Advisory Committee.* (See reference 2 above.)

[8] *Building an Effective Advisory Committee.* (See reference 2 above.)

[9] *Building an Effective Advisory Committee.* (See reference 2 above.)

[10] *Transit Advisory Commission,* King County, Washington. Retrieved August 19, 2011. http://www.kingcounty.gov/transportation/kcdot/MetroTransit/AdvisoryGroups/TransitAdvisoryCommission.aspx

[11] From Federal Transit Administration handouts given at the APTA 2011 Annual Meeting FTA Civil Rights Office information session 10-4-2011. For more information on FTA's latest regulations and Circulars go to their website at www.fta.gov.

[12] *Building an Effective Advisory Committee.* (See reference 2 above.)

[13] *Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Advisory Committee: A Model Members' Handbook and Training Module.* Prepared for: Project ACTION Steering Committee, Coachella Valley, Calif. Prepared by: Gail Murray and Linda Aeschliman of Crain & Associates, Inc., Menlo Park, Calif. November 9, 1995.

[14] *Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Advisory Committee.*

[15] *Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Advisory Committee.*

[16] *Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Advisory Committee.*

[17] *Building an Effective Advisory Committee*. (See reference 2 on page 15.)

[18] *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making.* Prepared by Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc. and Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade and Douglas for Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation. September 1996. Retrieved February 15, 2012. http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/cover.htm

[19] *Accessible Information Exchange: Meeting on a Level Playing Field,* U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved August 25, 2011. http://www.ada.gov/business/accessiblemtg.htm

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[21] *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making.* (See reference 18 above.)

[22] *Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision-Making.* (See reference 18 above.)

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[26] *Meeting Agenda.* Accessible Transportation Committee, Lane Transit District. April 19, 2011.

[27] *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument,* Kilmann Diagnostics. Retrieved October 27, 2011. http://kilmanndiagnostics.com/catalog/online-courses/thomas-kilmann-conflict-mode-instrument

[28] *Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Advisory Committee.* (See reference 13 on page 15. Information for this specific section was provided by The Webster Institute, Calif.)

[29] *Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Advisory Committee.* (See reference 13 on page 15. Information for this specific section was provided by The Webster Institute, Calif.)

[30] *Planning Accessible Meetings and Events Minimize Surprises - Plan Ahead,* Ohio State University. Retrieved August 25, 2011. http://ada.osu.edu/resources/accessiblemeetings.html

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Quick Tips for a Successful & Accessible Meeting

- Establish and follow procedural guidelines (e.g., *Robert's Rules of Order).*
- Create and distribute a meeting agenda.
- Provide materials in alternative formats (e.g. plain text, braille, CD), assistive listening devices and sign language interpreters as needed by committee members.
- Ensure the meeting is physically accessible to everyone, including people who use wheelchairs.
- Ensure the meeting is held in a building that is accessible by public transportation and at times that are within the public transportation service availability.
- Ensure the times and locations of meetings are accessible to minority, low-income and limited English-proficient populations (i.e., hold meetings during off-peak periods and at community facilities).
- Post accessible signage to direct participants to the meeting room.
- Ensure the meeting room has enough space to accommodate participants using mobility aids.
- Place microphones at a height that is accessible to people using wheelchairs.
- Ensure that everyone uses the microphone if one is provided.
- Read all of the text on presentation slides aloud.
- Say the count aloud if people raise their hands to vote.
- Provide a nearby relief area for service animals.
- Listen to each speaker and ensure only one person speaks at a time.
- Remain respectful of others.
- Be willing to learn.
- Be willing to change.
- Separate the issue from the person.
- Agree to disagree when necessary.
- Maintain a sense of humor!

Easter Seals Project ACTION's mission is to promote universal access to transportation for people with disabilities under federal law and beyond by partnering with transportation providers, the disability community and others through the provision of training, technical assistance, applied research, outreach and communication.

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