



## Leadership Lab #3: Strategies for Renewed Engagement

April 10th, 2025

### **Engagement looks different for everyone.**

Sometimes engagement may look like verbally participating in every conversation. Sometimes it looks like not speaking a lot during meetings, but networking one-on-one after meetings. Sometimes engagement may look like showing up to meetings, listening intently to everyone, but not speaking yourself. Engagement has different “looks” for different people.

Here are some ways you can help members externalize their engagement:

- Keep track of quieter members, and directly invite their engagement when they have not spoken in a long time. “Hey John, we haven’t heard from you in awhile, what do you think about this agenda item?”
- Anon Box — have a box that council members can submit questions to, for the Chair to review later. This relieves the pressure of public performance.
- Thumbs up system for discussion — “Everyone who agrees, give me a thumbs up. Everyone who may be on the fence, or might not agree, don’t give a signal.”
- Gauge what your council members’ goals are — “What are we not talking about that we should be?”

### **Have a conversation with your members about engagement.**

It is important that you involve your members in conversations about boosting engagement because they will know what will work best for them. You can have conversations with individual members, or facilitate a “council self-evaluation” to get a broader view on council engagement.

Talking points for conversations with individual members:

- “I only have fifteen minutes to talk, but I wanted to check in with you to see how your experience on the council has been like.”  
“How are you feeling about your role on the council so far?”  
“Are there any challenges or roadblocks?”
- “Do you feel supported in your role?”
- “How do you like to be engaged? What does engagement look like for you?”

Council self-evaluations are surveys you can give to your council to a) gauge the health of your council and b) prompt conversation at the council about engagement.

- Are board meetings well-organized, with clear agendas and meaningful discussions?
- Do we receive adequate training opportunities to improve our role?
- Are we sufficiently informed about key issues affecting individuals with disabilities in our state/community?
- What are our greatest strengths as a board?
- What are the biggest challenges we face, and how can we improve?

### **Personal feelings of usefulness is a key component to member engagement.**

If your council members do not feel like they are useful to the council, or feel as if they don’t have a “place,” engagement will decrease. Personal feelings of usefulness needs to be present at all stages of involvement:

1. **BEFORE:** This is about feeling prepared to engage before going into a meeting. In order to feel prepared...
  - Your members need to be fully aware of their responsibilities as a council member. Ensure member responsibilities are clearly outlined on your member application, in your descriptions of membership on your website, at orientation/training, and during council self-evaluations. If this does not occur, “disengagement” can result as a lack of understanding of their role.
  - Your council member orientation needs to align with your member responsibilities. Your member engagement will decrease if your members are not trained to carry out their specific responsibilities.
2. **DURING:** This is about feeling invested in the work they’re doing.
  - Your members need to be able to trust that what they say will be heard and considered, in order to feel comfortable engaging. It is up to you as a leader to model confident engagement, and model respectful interaction among members. As a leader, you are helping to set the tone and culture of the council and this will impact how your members engage.
  - Ongoing team-building exercises for members may be a good idea for further developing a positive, council culture.
  - If you are still seeing disengagement, take some time to double check that your members’ goals are in alignment with the council’s goals. If they are not, are there areas of focus that the council is overlooking?
3. **AFTER:** This is about feeling appreciated for the work they did. Some ideas for appreciation...
  - Acknowledge members’ achievements publicly, whether this be on the Council’s social media or simply announced a meeting.
  - Have another council member call them to thank them for their work.
  - Write a note to them yourself about the meaning and impact of their contributions on the council.

### **Avoid “Death by PowerPoint” through Skilled Meeting Facilitation**

“Death by PowerPoint” is a humorous way to refer to the disengagement that occurs when a meeting is monotonous. You can use the follow tips to make your meetings more engaging:

- Implement an icebreaker at the beginning of meetings
- If you are running a hybrid meeting, have planned moments of engagement for remote members: actively call on them if they’re quiet, have a remote participant kick off the icebreaker, and/or have a remote member share a closing thought/takeaway at the closing of the meeting.
- Evaluate how much of your meeting is one-sided reporting and see if, during these periods, there is opportunities for planned engagement/interaction.
- Some one-sided reporting is unavoidable, but ensure that reports include visuals, audio, graphics, etc to maintain interest.
- Ensure there are enough breaks during the meetings. Consider playing neutral music during breaks.