DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION
GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

ANNUAL REPORT FFY 2026

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The Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (the Council) is part of the Minnesota network of programs funded under P.L. 106-402, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act). The DD Act also funds the Minnesota Disability Law Center (the designated protection and advocacy agency for the state) and the Institute on Community Integration, a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, located at the University of Minnesota.

The Council's business is to provide information, education, and training to increase knowledge, develop skills, and change attitudes that will increase the Independence, Productivity, Self-Determination, Integration, and Inclusion (IPSII) of people with developmental disabilities and their families.

This Annual Report summarizes the results of the 2022-2026 Five-Year State Plan program goals for FFY 2026.

CURRENT COUNCIL MEMBERS (November 2026)
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FEDERAL OUTCOMES (IPSII)

The DD Act charges each state council to promote the development of a consumer and family-centered comprehensive system to assist individuals with developmental disabilities to achieve:

Independence: Personal freedom to make choices and have control over services, supports, and other assistance the individual receives.

Productivity: Meaningful income-producing work or volunteer work that contributes to a household or the community.

Self-Determination: Authority to make decisions, control resources, and develop personal leadership skills.

Integration and **Inclusion**: Full participation in the same community activities as people without disabilities.

The Council measures success in the goals it funds by the degree to which each program contributes to the IPSII outcomes.

RESULTS

In 2026, the Council received $1,152,734.00 from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living. Of that amount, 70% was allocated for grants and contracts to fulfill the goals of the Council's Five-Year State Plan, approved by the federal government.

SELF-ADVOCACY

ACT and Self-Advocates Minnesota (SAM)

During the 2025–2026 grant year, Advocating Change Together (ACT) and the Self-Advocates Minnesota (SAM) network advanced a coordinated statewide strategy to strengthen self-advocacy skills, expand leadership development, and promote human rights for people with developmental disabilities. ACT and SAM trained a total of 139 self-advocates, supported by 38 self-advocates who served as trainers, and continued to increase participation across both urban and rural regions. The Disability Equality Training Series (DETS) and the Empowered Together human rights curriculum were offered in multiple locations, reaching transition-age youth and adults with content focused on disability rights, personal empowerment, communication, and healthy relationships.

Evaluation data consistently demonstrated strong participant satisfaction and measurable skill development. Training evaluations reflected high levels of learning, with knowledge-gained ratings ranging from 4.51 to 4.84 on a five-point scale, along with similarly high assessments of usefulness and trainer quality. IPSII outcomes measuring independence, productivity, self-determination, and inclusion showed strong results across the year, with scores generally ranging from the mid-4.0s to high-4.0s. Participants reported increased confidence, greater involvement in advocacy, and enhanced ability to express their needs and priorities. These results affirm the continued impact of ACT and SAM in strengthening Minnesota's self-advocacy movement and advancing the Council's goals related to autonomy, inclusion, and personal rights.

Supplier:
Advocating Change Together, Inc.
1821 University Avenue, Suite 177
St. Paul, MN 55104
https://www.selfadvocacy.org/

Ambassadors for Respect (A4R)

The Ambassadors for Respect (A4R) program, administered by PeaceMaker Minnesota expanded its statewide bullying-prevention and inclusion efforts during the 2025–2026 school year. Seventeen partner agencies prepared 140 Ambassadors with developmental disabilities—to deliver classroom training to fourth-grade students. Ambassadors conducted 170 classroom sessions in 51 schools, reaching 3,949 students, including at least 577 students with disabilities. Through in-person presentations, hands-on activities,

and personal storytelling, Ambassadors taught students about inclusion, Person First Language, respectful communication, and how to effectively address bullying.

The program demonstrated strong results for Ambassadors and students alike. Ambassadors reported significant growth in independence, productivity, self-determination, and community inclusion, with IPSII scores increasing from pre-program averages of 2.8–3.3 to 4.3 after participation. Satisfaction with the program reached 100 percent, and large majorities reported increased advocacy involvement, improved communication skills, and greater participation in leadership roles. Teachers consistently affirmed that the Ambassadors engaged students effectively, met learning objectives, and should return in future years. Student evaluations reflected high levels of understanding of key concepts, with nearly all students demonstrating knowledge of inclusion, advocacy, and Person First Language.

Supplier:
PeaceMaker Minnesota
2131 Fairview Avenue North
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http://www.peacemakermn.org

CULTURAL OUTREACH

The Autism Sibs Universe Cultural Outreach Project delivered a year-long, culturally grounded disability training initiative for Asian Indian individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in Minnesota. Through multilingual instruction, sensory-responsive practices, and culturally informed supports, the program served 62 unduplicated participants. Two major training series held in February and March 2026 addressed disability rights, service navigation, employment, assistive technology, inclusive education, and legislative advocacy. Participants also received individualized coaching totaling 52 hours to support waiver applications, employment planning, assistive technology setup, and legislative testimony preparation.

Progress toward intended outcomes was substantial. Service access increased as participants were referred to Partners in Policymaking, enrolled in HCBS waivers, obtained new or improved waivers, and accessed additional supports such as CFSS and VRS. Participant satisfaction remained consistently high, with KUQ scores averaging between 4.48 and 4.54, and IPSII scores showing strong gains in independence, productivity, self-determination, and inclusion. Advocacy and leadership outcomes also strengthened,

with individuals with disabilities and family members reporting increased advocacy skills, improved self-expression, and active involvement in advocacy activities and coalition roles. Collectively, these results demonstrate significant advances in knowledge, service access, and civic engagement within the community.

Supplier:
Autism Sibs Universe
14107 54th Ave North
Plymouth, MN 55446
612-440-9133 | info@asu-living.org

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The Council's Leadership Development Goal is to support and promote the development of leadership skills for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, equipping them to serve as advocates, spokespersons, and leaders within the broader disability rights movement.

Each year, the Council provides eight intensive weekend training sessions through the Partners in Policymaking® program, led by national experts, policymakers, and experienced advocates. The curriculum addresses disability history, inclusive education, county and state services, customized employment, housing, community organizing, communication and media skills, parliamentary procedure, state and federal legislative processes, and the disability civil rights movement. Sessions include small-group work, mock legislative hearings, communication workshops, and hands-on practice with advocacy tools—activities intentionally designed to build confidence, self-determination, and effective systems navigation.

Class 43: Program Delivery, Engagement, and Outcomes
Class 43 began the 2025–2026 program year with exceptionally high motivation and readiness for leadership growth with 31 graduates. This cohort represented diverse racial and geographic communities across Minnesota, with 56% identifying as individuals with developmental disabilities and 44% as family members.

Faculty evaluations for Class 43 were exceptionally strong. Across knowledge, usefulness, and overall quality, sessions were rated between 4.4 and 4.9 on a five-point scale. Narrative feedback praised the expertise of presenters, the relevance and accessibility of content, and the practical advocacy tools integrated into each session. IPSII pre- and post-program measures confirmed substantial gains in independence, productivity, inclusion, and self-determination for both self-advocates and family members. ACL outcome data further

demonstrated increased advocacy, stronger ability to identify needs, expanded leadership roles, and high satisfaction with the training experience. Participants frequently emphasized the powerful sense of community built within the cohort, often describing it as a supportive advocacy "family" that strengthened their learning and engagement throughout the year.

Sustained and Long-Term Impact Across Cohorts
Short-term follow-up data from Class 42 illustrate the durability of Partners outcomes. Graduates continued to expand their advocacy involvement, improved communication with decision-makers, and moved quickly into leadership roles on statewide boards and coalitions. IPSII measures remained high, and graduates engaged in hundreds of individual advocacy actions within six months.

Longitudinal evaluation of Classes 39–41 shows that Partners graduates remain active, effective leaders for years after completing the program. Alumni continue participating in advocacy networks, advisory councils, and community organizations statewide, and report ongoing improvements in personal advocacy skills, system navigation, and engagement in policy change. Many describe Partners as foundational to their lifelong advocacy journey.

Supplier:
The Odyssey Group
1730 New Brighton Blvd, Suite 104 - #237
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https://www.theodysseygroup.com/

EMPLOYMENT

During the reporting year, MSS advanced its mission to expand competitive, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities. Nineteen adults and transition-aged students secured new employment, nearly reaching the annual program goal of twenty individuals. Employment outcomes exceeded expectations in both work hours and wages: participants worked an average of twenty-four hours per week, surpassing the twenty-hour benchmark, and earned an average hourly wage of seventeen dollars, well above the minimum goal of ten dollars per hour. Two newly entering the workforce exemplified these outcomes, obtaining positions as a Production Assistant and a Courtesy Clerk, earning fifteen dollars and sixteen dollars fifty cents per hour respectively.

MSS also broadened its engagement with employers. The organization made 313 employer contacts during the grant year, significantly expanding opportunities for job development

and partnerships. Volunteer involvement continued to grow, with more than 50,000 hours of community participation recorded—an increase of nearly 15,000 hours over the previous year. These volunteer experiences strengthened skill development, community inclusion, and pathways toward employment.

The organization also advanced postsecondary inclusion through the Co-Collegiate program. Students participating in these supports demonstrated measurable growth across all IPSII domains—Independence, Productivity, Self-Determination, and Integration/Inclusion. Average scores across each domain increased substantially, reaching 4.60 or higher on a five-point scale. These gains represent meaningful improvements in students' confidence, autonomy, engagement, and capacity to navigate inclusive educational environments.

Supplier:
MSS
900 Ocean Street
St. Paul, MN 55106
https://www.mssmn.org/

TRAINING CONFERENCES

In FFY 2026, the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) supported a comprehensive set of training conferences designed to strengthen independence, productivity, self-determination, integration, and inclusion for people with developmental disabilities. Through a competitive review process, the Council received sixteen applications and approved funding for eleven programs. Collectively, these initiatives reached more than 870 attendees, including people with developmental disabilities, family members, caregivers, professionals, and community allies. Customer satisfaction across all programs remained consistently high, with most knowledge, usefulness, and quality (KUQ) ratings averaging between 4.5 and 5.0 on a five-point scale.

Creative expression and personal storytelling continued to be a strong area of focus. Accord, Living Well Disability Services, and Cow Tipping Press delivered three creative writing programs that reached approximately 30 unduplicated participants with developmental disabilities. Survey results showed significant increases in confidence, communication, and personal expression, with IPSII measures typically scoring between 4.0 and 5.0. Participants consistently reported pride in publishing their work and newfound ability to advocate for themselves through writing.

Advocacy training represented another major area of investment. Fraser's Disability Advocacy in Action course engaged over 95 participants through live and recorded viewing. The Arc Minnesota trained 56 self-advocates and family members who later participated in Disability Day at the Capitol. IPSII outcomes for both programs demonstrated strong gains in self-determination, civic engagement, and the ability to communicate personal priorities. SMRLS's Education Law Advocacy Project, while drawing small live attendance, generated 44 additional online views of its legal rights recordings and provided important bilingual access to special education information.

Health, safety, and family support initiatives also reached substantial audiences. The Autism Society of Minnesota's statewide conference served 267 participants, offering high-quality virtual instruction and extensive accessibility supports. Proof Alliance's caregiver conference served 229 attendees, delivering highly rated programming focused on trauma-responsive care, school advocacy, and caregiver wellness, with KUQ scores averaging 4.8–4.9. Special Olympics Minnesota reached 36 athletes and family members, reporting strong IPSII gains and noting major increases in advocacy confidence across 32 respondents.

Culturally responsive training was strengthened through HealthEQ Solutions' Act Early Family Empowerment Series, which supported families through a four-session virtual program. All KUQ scores ranged from 4.67 to 5.0, and participants emphasized increased understanding of developmental pathways and greater ability to advocate within health and education systems.

Personal safety and boundaries training delivered by the Highland Friendship Club reached its participant group with excellent results. Survey scores averaged 4.65 to 4.8, and participants reported improved communication skills, clearer understanding of consent, and increased confidence in identifying unsafe situations.

The Council's strategy of cosponsoring statewide events—delivered through in-person, virtual, and hybrid formats—proved effective in expanding access and addressing diverse community needs.

CUSTOMER RESEARCH

During FFY 2026, MarketResponse International conducted a survey of Partners in Policymaking graduates to gather experiences and personal stories in preparation for the program's 40th anniversary in May 2027. A total of 145 graduates responded to the survey, including 78 parent advocates, 48 self-advocates, and 14 family advocates. Respondents

represented a wide range of disabilities. Graduates came from multiple class years, with 14 classes represented by three or more respondents.

Graduates' stories highlighted the profound and lasting influence of Partners in Policymaking on their lives and communities. Many recalled the powerful impact of learning disability history for the first time, describing it as an awakening that clarified their purpose as advocates. Parents and self-advocates shared transformative experiences—from gaining confidence to speak in IEP meetings, to overturning service denials, to securing employment or independent living. Others emphasized the importance of the community they found through Partners, describing classmates who supported one another and became lifelong allies. Many graduates described successful efforts to improve accessibility, influence legislation, or take on leadership roles within schools, nonprofits, and state councils. Together, these stories illustrate how the Partners program equips individuals with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to create meaningful change.

Supplier:
MarketResponse International
https://marketresponse.com

PUBLICATIONS, ONLINE LEARNING, AND WEBSITES

Throughout the reporting year, the Council advanced its goal by producing, updating, and distributing a broad portfolio of digital and print resources that support disability advocacy, leadership development, and public education. These resources continued to be widely accessed and highly valued, as confirmed by both customer satisfaction data and an independent benchmarking review.

Publications

The Council maintained and expanded a comprehensive suite of publications addressing disability rights, person-centered practices, historical documentation, emergency planning, and leadership development. Long-standing resources such as *It's My Choice*, *Making Your Case*, the *Partners in Policymaking Handbook*, *InVisibility*, and emergency planning materials continued to be distributed and remain in steady use statewide. Documentary resources—including *The Unfinished Journey* and historical collections such as *Hadamar*—were made available to support teaching, training, and public awareness.

Online Courses

Online courses were significantly revamped during FFY 2026, reflecting the Council's commitment to accuracy, accessibility, and continuous improvement. Updated courses included *Making Your Case*, *Partners in Time*, *Partners in Education*, *Partners in Living* and

Partners in Employment. New user guides, corrected citations, refreshed images, and updated content were incorporated throughout. Spanish-language versions remained available following their earlier release. Course updates are scheduled to continue into FFY 2027. Customer feedback remained highly positive: 90.9 percent of survey respondents reported that the courses were useful or helpful, and satisfaction levels were consistently strong across all demographic groups. A total of 584 individuals enrolled in the online courses during FFY 2026.

Websites

The Council's websites served as core public-facing platforms for education, historical preservation, advocacy, and engagement. Content was updated regularly to highlight major disability-related events, documentaries, public comment periods, and new course releases. Significant site updates included the relaunch of the Disability Justice website, featuring improved navigation, enhanced accessibility, corrected legal references, refreshed images, and expanded content. The updated Treat People Like People website became a major engagement driver in FFY 2026.

Historical resources—including *With an Eye to the Past*, *With an Eye to the Future*, and *Parallels in Time*—were reviewed and enhanced, supporting the Council's ongoing work to preserve and disseminate disability rights history. More than 685 historical videos are now accessible online, with several titles reaching substantial viewership. Mastcom-produced video reels promoted key initiatives and documentaries. Over 2.7 million documents were downloaded during the past year.

Supplier:

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QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

The Council's Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) work in FFY 2026 focused on strengthening user-centric design, enhancing evaluation practices, and applying systematic quality improvement methods across all Council activities. The Council continued to use the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence as its overarching framework for monitoring performance, improving operations, and aligning with federal requirements under the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010.

During FFY 2026, the Council partnered with MH Consulting to conduct the year's user-centric CQI project. The project centered on developing an educational lesson designed to integrate disability history into K–12 social studies classrooms, as well as community-based educational settings. MH Consulting facilitated the design, testing, and revision of the lesson through two phases of focus groups that included individuals with developmental disabilities, family members, and advocates. Participants provided in-depth feedback on content accuracy, accessibility, emotional resonance, clarity, structure, and usability.

Insights from Phase I led to substantial revisions, including the addition of personal story videos, improved visuals and timelines, human-centered language, stronger facilitator guidance, and clearer vocabulary for younger audiences. Phase II evaluations confirmed that these revisions successfully enhanced quality and responsiveness. Participants rated the materials highly and affirmed that the redesigned lesson was ready for public release. The Disability History Learning Lesson was officially launched on August 5, 2026, with announcements reaching more than 12,000 subscribers and followers across GovDelivery and Facebook.

Supplier:

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Alternative Format:

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