



A Guide to People First of Missouri

The Organization:

People First of Missouri (PFMO) is a self-advocacy organization that was formed by, is run by, and exists for people with developmental disabilities in the state of Missouri. PFMO is a non-profit organization that promotes equality for people with disabilities so they can live the life they want in the community. The membership of Statewide PFMO consists of local affiliated chapters which are made up of individuals with disabilities who live in the same area.

Local Chapters:

Local chapters are made up of members who meet on a regular basis, usually every month. They learn, practice, and put self-advocacy into action by working together toward goals they set at their regular meetings. The members elect officers who run the chapter and chapter meetings. The members also elect an advisor to support the chapter and its elected leaders.

Meetings generally follow guidelines called parliamentary procedures. Chapters need to have at least 3 members and meet at least 4 times a year. To be a full member of PFMO, the chapter needs to sign PFMO's Affiliation Agreement and pay annual dues of \$50 per chapter.

Individual People First Members:

A person with a disability who is interested in becoming part of a local chapter should attend a meeting to see what it is like. Then they can join that local chapter or start a new one that would be closer to them. Members decide together what the chapter's mission, goals, and activities are, and where and when it meets.

Advisors:

Advisors are not members of People First, but they support the local chapter and their leaders to be successful. Advisors are people who like to see others learn how to do new things. Advisors can give advice, but they let people learn from trying things themselves. Advisors help members learn how to teach other members how to do new things. Advisors are chosen and approved by the members of the local chapter.

State Meetings:

Missouri has a statewide steering committee made up of 2 members elected by each local chapter. The committee generally meets 4 times a year. It gives input on policy and matters that affect people with disabilities, arranges training, provides targeted support to local chapters, and allows chapter representatives to learn from each other. Chapters are encouraged to send representatives and their advisor to the state steering committee meetings, which are held in hotels and last about 2 days. Since going to meetings four times a year is expensive, a grant from the **Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council** helps PFMO pay for hotel costs and some meals at the meetings. The committee hosts or co-hosts a statewide conference on alternating years.

National Meetings:

The United States has a national self-advocacy organization called "Self Advocates Becoming Empowered" (SABE.) SABE has 9 regions that elect representatives to the organization. Missouri is in Region 4 with Nebraska, Kansas, North Dakota, and South Dakota. The region sends two representatives to SABE's quarterly meetings. For many years, PFMO has had a representative on the SABE board. SABE sponsors a national conference on alternating years.



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Local PF Chapters are a place to learn, connect, and have fun. Chapters support members to:

- make their own decisions
- advocate for themselves
- become leaders
- make friends
- connect with their community
- make a difference in their community
- assist support and service systems to be responsive

STEP 1: Take Responsibility for Organizing a Chapter

Identify a group of people who are interested in starting a chapter and decide who is going to do each of the following things:

- Find a meeting place
- Find someone to serve as an Advisor
- Find out what transportation is available
- Write the first agenda for the organizing meeting
- Email or mail fliers to people who might want to become members or help the group get started
- Decide if there will be snacks at the first meeting, then choose who will bring them

STEP 2: Decide on the rules (By-Laws)

Decide on the rules for how you are going to work together. By-laws are the agreed upon rules that guide how your chapter gets started and how it works. They usually define who has authority and responsibility to do what, and how and when decisions can be made. Generally, by-laws include what officers the chapter wants, how and when they are elected, how long they serve, and defines their duties. They also may describe a number of other things, such as when and how often the chapter meets, chapter committees, if needed, etc.

Your Chapter can get some good ideas for by-laws by looking at other Chapters' by-laws, and may even want to adopt some as your own. It is usually a good idea to find a couple of members to start working on putting together the by-laws with your advisor, and then bring them to the entire group for review and approval.

STEP 3: Write a Mission Statement

Developing a Mission Statement helps the group focus on why the chapter exists and what it stands for. It helps the group define the chapter's goals and activities. It helps members know what they will work on.



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The Mission Statement is developed and approved by the members. The statement can be one that is written by the members, or they can adopt one that another group wrote. When developing the Mission Statement, make sure that everyone in the group understands People First and self-advocacy.

To get started, talk about why people want to meet as a group and write it down. There you go—you are on your way to developing your mission statement.

STEP 4: Define Your Chapter Goals

Decide upon what your chapter wants to do this year. Those are your goals. Your goal statements should include what your chapter wants to accomplish and by when. You also may want to identify members who will be working on each goal. Some chapters have both short term (like 3 months) and long term goals that may go beyond a year. At the beginning of each year, your chapter should review and agree on the goals.

STEP 5: Decide Your Chapter Activities

This can be a tricky step. Many people in the group may come up with fun ideas that don't have anything to do with your Mission Statement or Goals. They may want to only do things like go to ballgames, have parties, or go swimming. These are all fun ideas, but should not be the

primary focus of the activities of your Chapter. Be sure to identify activities that match other goals such as, "self-advocacy training." The activities of your Chapter should always support the goals and mission of the Chapter.

People First is much more than a support or recreation group. It is a civil rights movement—a group that tries to improve the public policies that concern people with disabilities and offers training and experience in self-determination activities for people with disabilities. This does not mean that People First doesn't have fun! We have a lot of fun while making the community a better place to live and making sure we know how to do the things we need to do to take our place in the community.

People First activities are always planned so that members learn something new or learn how to do something, or get some practice in a skill they are building. We work on computers, practice reading and doing math in our activities, and learn to be effective board members of other organizations so we can share our perspective as a person with a disability and impact the ways organizations make decisions.

STEP 6: Develop Team Spirit

A great chapter doesn't happen without hard work. Most people have their own ideas on how to do things. Some people may even be



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unreasonable and want to have their way all the time. Sometimes people quit if they can't get their way. It is a challenge to work with a group of other people in a way that both gets things done and makes everyone feel like a valuable person in the group.

Most chapters have found that they have to work at helping people get over hurt feelings and learn how to contribute to the group. One thing that has helped many groups work well together is when all of the members try to show each person that the group likes them and appreciates hearing their ideas. People are encouraged to come up with their own ideas and share them. Even if the idea is not the one the group chooses to do, everyone appreciates that the member shared their idea.

STEP 7: Learn From Other Chapters

Of course, your group will want to make their own decisions about how it works and what it wants to do. The group can do this by itself, but getting started, it might help if you had an experienced person working with you to assist with making these things happen. Members from People First chapters near you would be glad to help, as well as some advisors. Please contact PFMO by email or phone if your Chapter would like some help.

STEP 8: Develop Connections with Your Local Community

Find ways to reach out to other people with disabilities so that they can learn about their rights and responsibilities, too. Your chapter should be active and interact with others in your community. Work with other civic organizations in your community to make the community a better place for everyone to live. Help by picking up trash on the highway, planting flowers in the park, or serving food at the Ronald McDonald House. Find ways to share ideas with service coordinators, direct care staff, and others who have a powerful effect on the lives of people with disabilities.

Reach out to kids with disabilities in school. Help them get the most out of their education, and help them prepare for their future careers. Keep your chapter up-to-date on legislation that affects people with disabilities. Get together and write letters to make changes in the laws and public policy that affect YOUR life!

STEP 9: Stop Now and Then

Every so often, stop and think over how things are going in your chapter. Talk things over as a group. If some of the members think that something should be changed, have both sides make a presentation to the chapter, then VOTE ON IT!