



CYVYC: Strategies for Advancing Alternatives to Guardianship through Responsive Technical Assistance for Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Background

[The Center on Youth Voice, Youth Choice \(CYVYC\)](#) is a project of the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston (ICI), in partnership with the Center for Public Representation (CPR), Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE), and the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI), with consultation from experts at the Harvard Law School Project on Disability and the Georgia Advocacy Office. CYVYC supported [11 State Teams](#) (Arizona, California, Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, and Wisconsin) across three cohorts in advancing alternatives to guardianship, such as supported decision-making (SDM), for youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD). Each State Team faced distinct legal contexts, challenges, and opportunities. CYVYC provided a robust technical assistance model, including individualized support, quarterly cross-state meetings, and national-level amplification, fostering innovative practices and a strong community of practice. Together, these strategies strengthened state systems, elevated youth voices, and promoted sustainable change to expand alternatives to guardianship across the country.

Implementation

Individualized Meetings with State Teams & State-Wide Action Plans

All 11 State Teams were tasked with developing and implementing action plans to advance state-wide change promoting alternatives to guardianship for youth with IDD, with [Youth Ambassadors](#) leading the work. These action plans incorporated Youth Ambassador projects as part of a broader strategy for systemic reform. To support this, State Team leaders, including youth and organizational co-leaders, received individualized technical assistance from CYVYC staff through monthly virtual meetings during the first year and at least bi-monthly meetings in the second year. CPR led this assistance, offering expertise on educational, legal, and policy strategies to advance decision-making rights. All State Team members, including Youth Ambassadors, were welcome to attend these meetings.

In CYVYC's second year, partners observed that many State Teams' questions focused on supporting youth through the [Youth Ambassador curriculum](#), individual project development, and [showcases](#). Because SABE spearheaded this youth support, a [SABE trainer](#) joined these individualized technical assistance meetings for the third cohort to ensure seamless coordination.

States Teams framed their action plans differently from each other, underscoring the value of individualized technical assistance support. Some State Teams, such as those in California, Georgia, and Indiana, embedded CYVYC into pre-existing reform agendas, while others, such as those in New Jersey, Oregon, and South Carolina created CYVYC-specific plans. CYVYC partners guided State Teams in setting measurable goals that elevated Youth Ambassadors' projects and connected teams working on similar objectives to foster mentorship and collaboration. Action plan goals varied widely. Some States Teams focused on coalition building, while others targeted education on alternatives to guardianship for professionals

like teachers, doctors, and judges. Some worked to implement laws recognizing SDM, while others pursued administrative or judicial strategies. These ambitious goals led to innovative, youth-driven state-level change.

Individualized meetings also allowed CYVYC staff to address state-specific challenges and share national trends. For example, when the [California State Team](#) aimed to integrate SDM into Medicaid person-centered planning, CYVYC connected them with resources from Delaware, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Texas. Similarly, when [New Jersey](#) developed a toolkit for individuals seeking to modify or terminate guardianships without an attorney (“pro se”), CYVYC provided pro se resources from Texas and Nevada for adaptation.

Overall, individualized technical assistance provided tailored strategies, responsive problem-solving, and opportunities for robust discussion. These personalized meetings strengthened state action plans, supported Youth Ambassadors, and advanced sustainable, innovative practices to expand alternatives to guardianship.

Community of Practice Meetings

CYVYC convened quarterly community of practice (CoP) meetings with all State Team leadership, facilitated by CPR. Any State Team member or Youth Ambassador could attend. Designed as a learning community, the CoP supported systems change, innovation, and identification of promising practices while fostering cross-state connections, resource sharing, problem solving, and mentorship. CYVYC staff and partners worked with State Teams to identify discussion topics, set agendas, and respond to emerging needs and trends.

CoP meeting discussion topics included youth leadership and engagement, defining effective youth allyship and mentorship, sustaining State Team efforts, and tracking national trends in advancing SDM, among others. Some meetings focused on timely issues, such as SDM and voting trends before a federal election, methods for collecting outcome data to assess progress in advancing alternatives to guardianship under state action plans, or other topics proposed by State Teams. Subject matter experts regularly joined the meetings to provide insights.



Meetings typically featured a short presentation on a designated topic, often led or co-led by a Youth Ambassador, followed by discussion. As participation expanded with the second cohort, CYVYC introduced breakout rooms for cross-state and cross-cohort dialogue. Youth Ambassadors sometimes met together to share perspectives or were dispersed across groups to enrich discussions. After substantive discussion, breakouts concluded with attendees debriefing as a larger group.

Amplifying and Elevating State Teams’ Work Nationally

CYVYC helped State Teams elevate their work nationally by supporting presentations at major conferences alongside Youth Ambassadors. These opportunities showcased innovative initiatives, fostered collaboration among State Teams, and connected them with national partners and leaders. For example, in the first year, co-leads from Georgia, Vermont, and Wisconsin presented at a plenary session of the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities conference in Washington, DC. For the next three years, CYVYC and State Team co-leads from each consecutive cohort presented at the annual Advancing States’ Home and Community Based Services Conference. State Teams also highlighted their CYVYC work at national forums, including those hosted by TASH, Reinventing Quality, and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services. These platforms expanded visibility and strengthened the CoP’s reach.

Impact

CYVYC's individualized technical assistance supported effective problem-solving and diverse strategies for achieving state-wide change. This approach advanced alternatives to guardianship, including SDM, across states with varying legal and policy landscapes. Six of the 11 State Teams operated in states with laws specifically recognizing SDM, yet all developed and implemented action plans promoting alternatives to guardianship. For example:

- » The [Vermont State Team](#) secured state education department [policy guidance](#) recognizing SDM without legislative change.
- » [Michigan](#) launched SDM education campaigns reaching over 1,000 transition coordinators, educators, students, and advocates statewide.
- » [Georgia](#) created a one-stop SDM website led by youth.
- » [New Jersey](#) changed court rules to make it easier to terminate unnecessary guardianships and access alternatives.

CYVYC's CoP offered a fertile forum for cross-state learning. External evaluations by the HSRI found that State Team leaders benefited greatly from participating. As [Holden Roberts](#), youth co-lead of the South Carolina State Team, shared:

"I appreciated being able to learn and discuss things with other professionals and youth with disabilities from different states. I found it encouraging to see others like myself who were tackling similar barriers, and to be able to support each other and discuss solutions."

CYVYC also amplified State Teams' work nationally. For example, when Derek Heard, a Youth Ambassador with Georgia, shared his SDM journey during a CYVYC webinar, his story resonated deeply, prompting one participant to reconsider pursuing full guardianship for their son. Visit [Voices of Change: Youth Ambassadors Promote Alternatives to Guardianship](#) for additional impactful stories.

Suggestions for Replication

- » **Adopt a multi-faceted approach to technical assistance.** CYVYC combined individualized State Team meetings, cross-state forums, and connections to state and national partners to support State Teams in advancing alternatives to guardianship. Quarterly CoP meetings were important, but not the sole method of collaboration. Frequent linkages outside formal meetings sustained dialogue and strengthened relationships.
- » **Evolve meeting structures.** As participation grew, CYVYC adapted CoP meetings to include breakout rooms, encouraging in-depth cross-cohort discussion and relationship building. Adding SABLE trainers to individualized technical assistance meetings ensured stronger youth support and seamless coordination. Creativity, flexibility, and intentionality in structuring meetings were pivotal to the CoP's success.
- » **Meet teams where they are.** CYVYC used a flexible technical assistance model, allowing State Teams to set agendas and tailor action plans to their state's unique context. While all action plans had to link Youth Ambassadors' projects to state-level reform, teams were encouraged to be creative in their approach. Because CYVYC provided limited direct funding to State Teams, staff also worked with them to address financial barriers and strategized on ways to achieve their goals.
- » **Advance Alternatives through Multiple Strategies.** There is no one-size-fits-all systemic strategy for advancing alternatives to guardianship. CYVYC highlighted the varied approaches State Teams can take, including pursuing legislation, regulatory and court rule changes, and targeted education and outreach. Its technical assistance model intentionally accommodated and supported these different pathways.



This project was supported, in part by grant #90DNM0004, from the US Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC 20201. Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.

What is the Center on Youth Voice, Youth Choice?

At the Center on Youth Voice, Youth Choice, we work with youth with IDD, families, and supporters. We share information about alternatives to guardianship. Youth with IDD lead projects about alternatives to guardianship. We believe that you have the right to make your own decisions about your life!

[Visit the Center on Youth Voice, Youth Choice website](#) to learn more about *alternatives to guardianship* and what these words mean.

[Visit the Center for Public Representation's website](#) to learn more about *supported decision-making*.

Do you have more questions about this fact sheet and guardianship?

Please email the Center on Youth Voice, Youth Choice team at **youthvoice@umb.edu**