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## PURPOSE

People with disabilities often need supports and services to carry out their plans and goals. A microboard is one way to make sure they are able to live full lives and reach their goals. This tip sheet tells what microboards are and shows how they work for people.

## DEFINITIONS

**Microboard:** *A microboard is a small, nonprofit group of people. They serve one person who has a disability. They make sure the person has all needed supports and services. These supports can be unpaid “natural” supports from family and friends, or paid staff can be hired to give support. Widespread use of the microboard model began in Canada with the Vela Microboard Association. Today, there are several state microboard groups and many more single microboards throughout the United States.*

**Focus Person:** *The person served by the microboard is called the “focus person.” The microboard makes sure there are supports and services to help the focus person carry out plans and goals. The microboard can be a direct employer of support staff for the focus person. They can be in charge of hiring, paying, directing, disciplining and firing staff.*

**PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) Method:** *PATH is an intensive, person-centered planning session for a focus person. The session helps build a vision of his or her future. People who might serve on the board and the focus person should*

*attend this session. In the session, the group defines the values that will guide the person. These values will also guide his or her board. PATH sessions work best when led by two trained volunteer PATH facilitators.*

## REASONS TO FORM A MICROBOARD

- Help the focus person to gain more control of life.
- Give the focus person more choice about services.
- Make sure services are a good fit for the focus person.
- Build a wider system of supports for the focus person
- Form a support system to serve the focus person's changing needs and desires.
- Make sure the focus person gets services if the primary caregiver is unable.
- Provide oversight to assure continuity of services throughout the focus person's lifetime.
- Provide connections to real community inclusion.
- Brainstorm and develop plans to support the focus person's hopes and dreams.

## BASIC STEPS TO FORM A MICROBOARD

1. **Learn** basic information about microboards
  - Learn how they work.
  - Learn how much time and energy are needed to keep them going.
2. **Decide** if a microboard is the right choice for the focus person.
3. **Invite** others to serve as board members.
4. **Envision** the microboard with a planning session, such as PATH:
  - What are the long-term goals of the microboard?
  - What values are vital to reaching the goals?
  - What services and supports are needed to reach the goals?
5. **Become** a legal nonprofit group by filing incorporation paperwork with the State of Iowa.

## WHO CAN HELP ME WITH THIS PROCESS?

Online trainings about microboards (not tailored to Iowa requirements):

Illinois Association of Microboards and Cooperatives

<http://www.iambc.org>

217-778-5388

[qualitylifeinIL@gmail.com](mailto:qualitylifeinIL@gmail.com)

## WHAT MAKES A MICROBOARD WORK WELL?

- The board should be diverse. It should include non-family members. Paid staff and others should join board meetings.
- There are enough people on the board to do the work.
- The work is shared fairly among those on the board.
- New people are added to the board as time passes, and/or the focus person's needs change.
- The microboard's funds are used well.
- The microboard handles all paperwork and documentation.
- The microboard works well with the funder(s).

## WHAT MAKES IT HARD TO START A MICROBOARD?

- The focus person and his or her supporters may not want to or be able to spend the time and energy.
- The focus person may have a very small family or social group.
- The focus person and his or her supporters may have to solve other problems first.
- The focus person and his or her supporters may not believe he or she can have control of his or her life.
- The focus person may need to gain more self-confidence.
- The focus person may fear talking to new people.

## WHO SHOULD BE ASKED TO SERVE ON A MICROBOARD?

- The focus person, if he or she chooses
- Family

- Peers who are near the age of the focus person
- Someone with a disability
- People who are not paid to be part of the focus person's life
- People who have been part of the focus person's life, such as teachers, coaches, friends, co-workers, clergy or support people
- People who have worked in business
- People who enjoy the same activities as the focus person
- People with skills in: computers, record-keeping, networking, creativity or finance

## WHAT IS EXPECTED OF BOARD MEMBERS?

- Attend and take part in board meetings.
- Share their time and talents without pay.
- Take the role seriously.
- Be a team player.
- Learn about microboards.
- Learn the focus person's needs and desires.
- Know the microboard's finances.
- Keep good records and legal reports. Filed them with the proper authorities
- Respect the privacy of the focus person. Keep board work private.
- Notice conflicts of interest.
- Judge the microboard's success
- Be a friend to the focus person:
  - Spend time together socially.
  - Take part in community activities together.
  - Introduce the focus person to groups or clubs.
  - Introduce the focus person to others who share interests or skills.
  - Help the focus person add to his or her community.
  - Notice if the focus person is happy with his or her life.

## HOW DOES THE MICROBOARD PROVIDE PAID SERVICES IN IOWA?

A microboard does not have to be funded. But you will need funding through Medicaid or another source to pay staff to provide paid services to the focus person, or to become a

provider.

To become a service provider, you must:

1. Complete an application to become a paid provider of services and supports for Medicaid or Medicaid's home- and community-based waiver program. Application information can be found within the Iowa Medicaid Enterprise Provider Manuals under the heading, "Provider Enrollment." You can find the Provider Manuals online at <http://dhs.iowa.gov/policy-manuals/medicaid-provider>. Or get in touch with Medicaid Provider Services at 1-800-338-7909 (Option 5) or e-mail [IMEProviderServices@dhs.state.ia.us](mailto:IMEProviderServices@dhs.state.ia.us)
2. Learn to manage and carry out the role of a paid provider. See the Iowa Medicaid Enterprise Provider Manuals or contact Medicaid Provider Services to learn more.

## COMMITMENTS

Time: It may take a year or longer for a microboard to be approved as a Medicaid provider of paid services and supports. Then it may take more time to form a system to meet Medicaid waiver requirements.

Financial: Start-up costs will depend on the type of microboard. Costs may include: incorporation fees and background checks. The microboard must have funds to cover operating costs until payments from Iowa Medicaid Enterprise begin. The microboard should have at least 60 days of cash to pay staff during the lag time.

Payment: The amount paid to a microboard for services will depend on which Medicaid services are approved. The amount paid to the microboard will also depend upon how much the person is eligible to receive under Medicaid.

Note: Board members cannot request Medicaid reimbursements for administrative fees for managing the microboard.

## IS LEGAL INCORPORATION NECESSARY?

Yes. A microboard that is not incorporated is not a microboard. Incorporation is a key step to gain the commitment needed from those on the board. Incorporation sets up a formal relationship and formal obligations to be fulfilled. This formality lends credibility to the microboard. Also, incorporation is required should the microboard choose to become a service provider.

## WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ON FILING AS A NONPROFIT?

The technical requirements can be found on the [Iowa Secretary of State website](#). Those listed under the “Who can help me with this process?” section of this webpage may have advice. You may want to consult an attorney.

## MICROBOARD ASSOCIATIONS

[Georgia Microboards Association](#)  
[Illinois Association of Microboards and Cooperatives](#)  
[Tennessee Association of Microboards and Cooperatives, Inc.](#)  
[Texas Microboard Collaboration](#)  
[Vela \(British Columbia, Canada\)](#)  
[Virginia Microboard Association](#)  
[Wisconsin Microboards Association](#)

## SOURCES

- [Forming a Microboard](#), Tennessee Association of Microboards and Cooperatives, Inc. (2018)
- [About Microboards](#), Vela Microboard Association. (2018)
- [Microboards and Microboard Association Design, Development and Implementation”](#) Community Works. David and Faye Wetherow. (2004)

**Disclaimer:** *This tip sheet is for information only. It cannot guarantee funding. Iowa Compass makes regular updates to give current and accurate information. We cannot be held liable for any outdated or incorrect information.*

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