



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF AMERICA**

Guiding Practices for Inclusion

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Introduction

Inclusion is a basic philosophy of the Boys & Girls Club Movement. Understanding this, a number of Clubs have asked for additional tools and resources to more effectively serve youth with disabilities. Through the generous support of the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation and in partnership with Kids Included Together, BGCA is developing resources to assist Clubs in more effectively serving members with disabilities and other special needs.

Guiding Practices for Inclusion, provides recommended practices for Club programming and operations for the inclusion of youth with disabilities and other special needs.

Included in this guide are eight practices and one action plan designed to help you identify and address areas within your Club that can be improved upon to more effectively serve members with disabilities and other special needs.

Please review the following practices with all levels of Club staff; develop action plans to address areas where additional work is needed; and review and update this plan annually.

We hope that you find this tool useful in evaluating your organization's current level of service to youth with disabilities and other special needs. Thanks to the generous support of the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation for making this initiative possible.

Topic: Transitions (TR)

Every member is greeted and welcomed enthusiastically when they enter the Club and at the entrance of each area of the Club.

Practices

- Members with disabilities and other special needs are assured they will receive additional support for all transition activities, particularly greeting, field trips, special events, emergency situations, and movement to and from activities within the building.
- The front desk staff extends welcoming greetings and assures the needed support systems are in place at the start of day. The staff also supports and coordinates the member's transition to his or her family at the end of day.
- Staff members know and understand the preferred communication system and any special considerations for members with disabilities and other special needs. Club staff also makes every attempt to connect with members in the most respectful way.
- Club staff regularly communicates with the family of members particularly at the beginning of Club membership. After membership, Club staff provides ongoing updates (e.g., through a communication journal or log to share ongoing issues, concerns and upcoming changes in program or activities).
- Upon Club registration, parents are invited to a general orientation meeting, as well as an individualized meeting with Club staff to share information about their child including special needs, abilities and interests as well as type and level of possible accommodations their child might require in order to participate in programs and activities.
- Members with disabilities and other special needs are invited to be tour guides and allowed opportunities for leadership.
- Members are assured that their belongings and any adaptive equipment or devices will be safeguarded at all times.
- The Club display and schedule is adapted as necessary to ensure that all members can understand it (for example, photos, pictures or symbols, etc. to accompany written materials).

Topic: Safe and Positive Environment (SPE)

The Club is a safe haven where members feel physically and emotionally secure at all times.

Practices

- Adult supervision is increased when necessary to ensure safety and meaningful participation of *all* members with particular attention to the needs of members with disabilities and other special needs.
- To enhance participation, equipment and tables are accessible to *all* Club members. If not, staff members purchase or create adaptive devices for members with disabilities and other special needs.
- Club staff are trained and made aware of strategies to support positive behaviors and will work with family or outside professionals (with family's consent) when an individual plan is needed to ensure continued Club membership.
- Club staff are trained in general disability awareness, e.g., person first language, wheelchair etiquette, communication strategies and receive specific training regarding lifting, transfers and assisting with personal care issues as needed by individual members, as well as being aware of specific emergency procedures or evacuation plans.

Topic: Fun (FUN)

The Club facility, staff and program offerings create a welcoming, positive environment that allows members to engage in play and be happy and eager to come to the Club.

Practices

- Club staff members are made responsible to plan ahead to ensure that supports are in place so that *all* members can enjoy participation in as many activities as possible, including field trips, age appropriate activities, sleepovers, etc.
- The Club provides areas that offer sensory protection from over stimulation and that support the need for rest.
- Club staff members continuously convey respect for members with disabilities, their differences, and engage and guide them in developing reciprocal relationships with other members.

Topic: Supportive Relationships (SR)

The Club ensures that every young person feels connected to one or more adults and has friendships with peers. Club staff members convey warmth, closeness, caring and guidance in ongoing interactions with members, creating the basis for positive attachment. The Club enables members to establish relationships with peers, build quality friendships and learn how to work through differences in appropriate ways.

Practices

- Club staff members are encouraged to attend Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, transition meetings or outside activities, as well as work with members' families to learn more about individual members and their special needs.
- Club staff members are encouraged to know the appropriate life skills for members including community integration and incorporate those goals with other members.
- Club staff members receive training and develop necessary skills to foster and facilitate friendships between members with disabilities and other members of the Club.
- Club staff members work to develop the friendship skills of both members with and without disabilities and guide members with disabilities in developing reciprocal relationships with other members.

Topic: Opportunities and Expectation (OE)

Club staff and programs consistently communicate the expectation that every child has the potential to excel, be great, be productive and succeed at the Club and in life. The Club encourages, fosters and nourishes the dreams and aspirations of every Club member, then provides opportunities for youth to realize these expectations.

Practices

- All written Club program plans reflect a continued effort to expand opportunities for youth with disabilities. An annual review of progress is established including self reflections by staff, board and Club members.
- Special events that promote American heritage and the democratic process also include the history of the disability rights movement and issues of social justice regarding the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. Leadership opportunities also are offered to members with disabilities and other special needs.
- Club staff members ensure youth with disabilities and other special needs are included in activities to develop skills in independent living or assisted living options as well as community integration.
- Club staff members ensure that professional artists who have disabilities or other special needs are included in the arts programs.
- Club staff members have the skills and commitment to adapt games, sports and fitness activities for all members including those with disabilities and other special needs.
- The Club is responsive to needs for assistive technology and opportunities for improving computer skills of members with disabilities and other special needs, including partnering with other community organizations and identifying outside supportive opportunities.
- Club members learn proper etiquette and manners when relating to individuals with disabilities and Club staff members foster opportunities for facilitating relationships between all members with and without disabilities.
- Opportunities for service learn projects include members with disabilities and other special needs.

Topic: Recognition (REC)

The Club takes every opportunity to recognize and validate the achievements and accomplishments of all Club members. Recognition enables members to set higher expectations. The Club must frequently and consistently acknowledge and affirm the accomplishments of members in formal and informal ways.

Practices

- Club staff members ensure that news media releases and community stories use “person first language,” avoid patronizing stories and reflect best practices in inclusion and empowerment of youth and adults with disabilities.
- Staff regularly recognizes intrinsic motivation of Club members who demonstrate genuine respect and appreciation of other’s differences and those who develop meaningful relationships with members with disabilities.

Topic: Teens (TEEN)

Teens drive the development of different programs and offerings that meet their specific needs and interests. Teens serve as positive role models and leaders at the Club.

Practices

- The Club commits to recruit and maintain the enrollment of teens with disabilities.
- Club programs and activities are available to teens with disabilities and designed to be all-inclusive, regardless of developmental abilities or skill-level.
- Teens with disabilities are invited and encouraged to participate in teen advisory board, as well as community focus groups and as junior staff members.
- Staff members are responsible for making accommodations in job skills training programs to facilitate teens with disabilities in becoming junior staff members.
- Teens with disabilities are invited and supported as needed to function in leadership roles within the Club.

Topic: Overall Club Operations and Support (OP)

The Club engages in practices that positively support its staff, facility, program and partnerships with families and the community.

Practices

- The Club's basic program approach encourages strong adult/youth partnerships with *all* youth.
- The Club's annual goals reflect a commitment to ensure and maintain participation of children and youth with disabilities in *all* Club programs.
- The Club's recruitment plan includes recruitment strategies targeted at schools and includes reaching out to, and increasing membership of children and youth in special education programs.
- The Club's comprehensive strategy for recruiting underserved populations specifically identifies and includes children and youth with disabilities as an underserved population.
- Strategies and measures of outcomes reflect recruitment and maintenance levels of members with disabilities to ensure that the Club is sustaining quality experiences and inclusive programming for *all* members.
- Weekly staff meetings incorporate discussions of current inclusion efforts as well as strategic planning to ensure sustainability and quality.
- Facilities, tables, chairs, bathrooms, computers, etc are suitable and accessible to *all* members.
- Club membership goals address and measure participation levels of children and youth with disabilities at quarterly and annual reviews.
- Quality assessment teams ensure representation of parents or family members of children and youth with disabilities, as well as community leaders who are resources and advocates for inclusion.
- Club staff members visit schools regularly and meet with counselors, principals, resource specialists and special educators.
- Club staff members work with, ask for and use support from schools and/or other community organizations that support inclusive programming.

- Community partners include disability groups and organizations that believe in and support increasing opportunities for community inclusion.
- Community partners that foster inclusion are encouraged to be involved and engaged at the Club.
- Civic organizations and other groups that volunteer are oriented to the Club's philosophy of inclusion and have opportunities to participate in training and learn from Club staff who model respectful ways to include individuals with disabilities.
- The Club is thoughtful and aware of member or family limitations or necessary accommodations when planning family events and/or field trips.
- Club staff members work with parents of children with disabilities to determine a convenient method of on-going communication (e.g. phone calls, e-mail reports or handwritten logs).
- Families of members with disabilities and other special needs, including behavioral challenges, are encouraged to be involved in developing strategies and supports for all children.
- The Club ensures that emergency services are aware of members' or staff needs.

Guiding Practices for Inclusion Club Action Plan

Topic _____

Date _____

Practices to Improve	Improvements and Practices to Be Implemented	Individuals Responsible
Example: front desk staff extends appropriate greeting to members.	Ensure that all youth are greeted, by name, upon entering the Club.	Unit director, front desk staff