

The Partners in Policymaking Program was created by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Development Disabilities in 1987. It is trademarked and currently has active classroom programs in 29 states, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, The Republic of Ireland, Scotland and The United Kingdom.

Partners is a leadership training program designed for adults with disabilities and for parents of children with disabilities. Participants are educated and receive training about best practices in the field of disability and the competencies of influencing and communicating with policymakers. The program teaches leadership skills and the process of developing positive partnerships with elected officials and other individuals who make the policy decisions about services that individuals with disabilities and their families use.

The training is a series of eight weekend sessions provided over seven months and consists of sixteen hours per weekend for a total of 128 hours. The trademarked curriculum allows for some customizing to meet the specific needs of the participants. Instructors are nationally recognized as experts in their field and are recommended by the creators of Partners in Policymaking. The goal for the class is to support a maximum of twenty-five participants, which include individuals with disabilities and family members. Recruitment takes place statewide and diversity is sought in ethnicity, geography, disability, socio-economic status and gender.

Partners is about systems change---creating, working towards and achieving a vision of shared values about people with disabilities. It is based on the belief that the most effective and enduring public policy decisions are made by the people who need and use services in partnership with elected officials and other policymakers. It is about becoming confident in oneself, competent in the knowledge and information received and comfortable in sharing the life experiences and expertise one brings to the program.

The Partners in Policymaking program has been in existence since 1993 in North Dakota. Outcomes extend beyond gain for any one individual. Participants have gone on to become members of public and private bodies and other leadership coalitions and have an impact on these policy-making entities that is positive for many more individuals with disabilities and their families.